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BRIDGES

LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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1920 LITHOGRAPH

WITHDRAWN

DATE MAY 9 1991

Balzekas Museum of Lithuania
Chicago, IL 60600

From the Desk of the Managing Editor

We've closed the books on 1989 and in front of us all is a new book of blank pages to be filled. As we begin the new year, our thoughts are with our brothers and sisters in Lithuania — our nation. But, Lithuania is not just *that* land across the Atlantic, *those* people over yonder who defy the Kremlin, at risk each day, as they flex their perestroika muscles, those people who are calling out for their rightful independence after 50 years of foreign domination, it is also people like you and me.

Nationalism is what you believe it to be for yourself, your consciousness, your identification with your "Lithuanianess."

Nationalism is a treasure, not only in Lithuania, which has experienced a rebirth, a public manifestation of feelings that for years had been kept inside for fear of reprisals or deportation to the frigid wasteland of Siberia, but also for those of us here in the free world. When was the last time that you discussed your heritage at work over coffee and donuts? When was the last time you asked someone if they saw the piece on the network news about Lithuania's quest for independence, demonstrations, or any other topic dealing with Lithuania?

You need not be ashamed to speak out. Lithuania needs you to do that.

It's true that there are striking similarities between the situation in Lithuania today, and that of the turn of the century (ca. 1905), when the thoughts of restoring Lithuania's independence first came into the minds of Lithuania's intelligentsia during Lithuania's Renaissance. Thirteen years later, independence was restored (1918), yet based on current events in Lithuania, I'm sure it won't take that long this time. I'm convinced, that Lithuania is on the road to restored independence. There's no turning back now. Elections are slated for February 24, 1990, in Lithuania — multi-party elections which will end the Communist Party's supremacy in Lithuania.

But, with all the changes occurring in Lithuania today, we here in the free world have the solemn duty to commemorate the 72nd Anniversary of the Restoration of Lithuanian Independence and the 739th year of the Lithuanian nation in a fitting way, remembering that the passing of the day to remember independence — February 16th — must not end our activity, but rather should cement us together in our resolve for continuing activism each in his own way on Lithuania's behalf. The undeniable principle of liberty for all men is the basis for our own freedom, because without the guarantee of freedom for all people, regardless of nationality, we are not truly free.

We live in an interesting time, in a time when Lithuania needs all of our help. It is not easy to suggest what type of commitment is needed. I feel that the signals will come. But we must be atuned to those signals and respond quickly if the need be.

So, as one of our resolutions for 1990, let us commit ourselves to be responsive to Lithuania's needs, to "talk up" Lithuania at every appropriate occasion with our friends and co-workers, and keep well informed about events as they unfold.

Bridges will continue to be your source of timely information.

We request that if you come across any information which you feel would be interesting to *Bridges* readers, send it to our editorial address found below.

We're waiting to hear from you.

Eduardas V. Meilus, Jr.

BRIDGES

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Through the news journal, the publishers hope to re-establish ties between the detached mobile Lithuanian-Americans and their Lithuanian heritage by presenting items on Lithuanian culture, conditions in the homeland, events and personalities in America, and the aspirations of all who subscribe to the goal that Lithuania must and will be an independent free nation again.

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Contributing Editors: Rita Likander, Thomas A. Michalski, Ph.D., and Rev. William Wolkovich-Valkavičius.

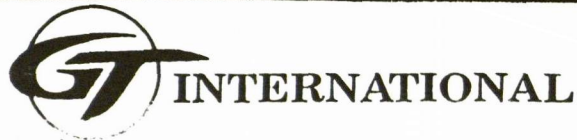
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G.T. INTERNATIONAL wishes to thank everyone who contributed to the great success of our 1989 season. We invite everyone to travel with us in 1990.

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Community with a Capital "C"

Asta Banionis, the new full-time director of the Government Affairs in Washington, D.C., informed the Executive Committee of some of the projects accomplished over the previous two months. Asta, who is in regular communication with Dr. Antanas Razma in Chicago, and with Arvydas Barzdukas in Washington, D.C., has met with a number of persons visiting from Lithuania (especially Sajudis, the Reform Movement), has helped them meet with representatives of the American government and of various associations, think tanks, and foundations. Arvydas Juozaitis (a 1976 bronze medal winner in swimming at the Olympics) spoke at a seminar sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, spoke at the CATO Institute. Professor Vaidotas Antanaitis spoke with journal editors at the Environmental Law Institute, which consults in the area of American and international environmental legislation. Professor Antanaitis, one of the founders of Lithuania's Green Movement, also testified at a meeting of U.S. delegates to the Sophia Bulgaria Conference, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Hearing: Sophia CSCE Meeting on the Protection of the Environment and East-West Environmental Cooperation. Asta Banionis is also working on a project proposal to the National Endowment for Democracy with other Lithuanian-American Community members to seek funding for various projects which help support democratic movement in Lithuania.

The position of Director of Government Affairs brings a new era of activity for the Lithuanian-American Community. Asta Banionis is planning on working in other areas besides the political, but there seems to be no doubt that a Lithuanian-American who knows the way Washington works is an advantage to the Lithuanian-American Community and to the projects it is trying to accomplish. The job will include observing the political winds, upcoming legislation, upcoming opportunities for Lithuanian-Americans to be heard or to receive support.

In the July/August issue of *Bridges*, mention was made of an English-language publication about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (on page 3). In reality, there were two publications: one is a brochure which the Executive Committee of the Lithuanian-American Community is happy to distribute, the other is a book *History and Commemoration in the Baltic, The Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939-1989*. The Executive Committee is happy to send this publication to requestors, but must try to recover the costs of publishing the book (a \$5 donation is requested).

The book *Amžino Išalo Žemėje* (Forever Frozen Land) was edited and published in Lithuania. It chronicles the remembrances of various people from their childhoods spent with their families exiled from Lithuania to Siberia and about the hardships suffered. Now, according to the president of the **Cultural Council, Dalia Kučėnas**, Vyturis Publishing House in Lithuania is planning on a translation of this monumental work. Meanwhile, the president of the Educational Council, Regina Kucas related at a recent meeting of the Executive Committee, that excerpts have been translated into English for use in Lithuanian Saturday Schools here in the United States, and that questions and answers have been prepared for teachers. It was felt that the children could learn much from reading about the hard life other children have led, and that one assignment might even involve writing to local newspapers about this book.

It is planned that a forthcoming brochure about Lithuania will be published with about a 20,000 publication run. The brochure will update and replace one published by the World Lithuanian Community several years ago.

A visitor to the Lithuanian-American Community's Executive Committee meeting in November, was Dr. Juozas Laukaitis, a pneumatologist in private practice from the Washington, D.C. area. Dr. Laukaitis, and several other physicians have been conferring about setting up a private non-profit foundation (or similar organization) which would attempt to offer practical aid and assistance to Lithuania in the area of medicine. This would involve getting donations from American drug companies in the United States, going to Lithuania or inviting Lithuania's physicians here to learn how to administer the medications, and other similar projects. The Executive Committee expressed support for this undertaking and will await further word on its development.

In his recent newsletter to Lithuanian-American Community regions and chapters, **Executive Committee Secretary, Pranas Joga** reminded Lithuanian-American Community members about the various videotapes available for purchase or rental by the Educational Council and the Cultural Council. These include videotapes for children and for adults. Some involve Lithuanian language plots and conversations, other are videotapes of concerts by guests from Lithuania (the "Ratilio" and University of Vilnius student folk ensembles). For more information about available videotapes, please contact: **Mrs. Regina Kučas or Mrs. Dalia Kučėnas at the Execu-**

tive Community headquarters: Lithuanian-American Community, Inc., 2713 West 71st Street, Chicago, IL 60629, (312) 436-0197.

(News items summarized by Ramūnė Kubilius of the Lithuanian-American Community's Executive Committee).




Lithuanian children take part in demonstration in Vilnius yesterday. Sign reads "Free Lithuania."

THE WASHINGTON POST
THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 1990

Vytautas Kernagis

Folksinger, Vytautas Kernagis has been plying his trade for about twenty years. Over the years, he has changed musical styles from a Bob Dylan of sorts, to more pop rock-type music. He has also acquired a band. "Dainos teatras" (Song Theater) toured North America in November, performing in Toronto, Ontario; London, Ontario; Chicago, and other cities. Kernagis and his musically-inclined group each play several instruments: piano, guitar, violin. The seven-member band entertained the audience with its sole female member of the band working around a theme: "Miss Stagnation," and again — Ilona Balsyte with her alternate role as a nurse in an insane asylum.

Outside of Lithuania, Vytautas Kernagis has per-



Tautos Himnas

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Iš praeilės tavo sūnūs
Te stiprybę semia.

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Vien takais dorybės,
Tegul dirba tavo naudai
Ir žmonių gerylei!

Tegul saulė Lietuvos
Tamsumus prašalina.
Ir įviesa ir tiesa
Mūs žingsnius telydi!

Tegul meilė Lietuvos
Dega mūsų širdyse,
Vardan tos Lietuvos
Vienybė tezydi.

V. Kudrka

formed solo in Australia, West Germany, and North America. With his group, he has put out three record albums, the latest of which is called "Povo Link..." (Towards the Peacock), and participated in the cycle of rock concerts in Lithuania called "Rokmarsas." The group could not go wrong for its three concerts in Chicago, since it played the highly popular "oldies," songs we heard half a dozen years or more, before the days of reform. "Colorado Vabalas" (Insect of Colorado). Jamaica and other vacation spots, which the songwriter surely never thought he'd see, a song about nothingness. Light-hearted, though the songs may seem, they too reflect the Lithuania of today. The other members of the group: Marijus Snaras, Andrius Kulikauskas, Gintaras Tilvytis, Mindaugas Gabrys, Edvinas Dargis, Kestutis Gascevičius. **RK**



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, INC.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

2713 West 71st Street • Chicago, IL 60629 • (312) 436-0197

**The People of Lithuania are moving quickly toward independence
and they need all of us to help.**

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The EDUCATIONAL COUNCIL which:

operates 27 Lithuanian language schools and numerous adult education classes around the United States
publishes textbooks, distributes educational video and audio tapes and sponsors competitions

The newly established GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS OFFICE:

the two-member staff represents our interests with government agencies and national organizations based in WASHINGTON, D.C.

the Lithuanian Reform movement, "Sąjūdis" relies on the office as its direct link to the United States

The National Executive Committee's supervised GIFT FOR LITHUANIAN-DOVANA LIETUVAI Fund which:

financed the publication of the A. Šapokas history in Lithuania

purchased much-needed technology to further democratic movements in Lithuania and many other worthwhile projects

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14 nights Vilnius, 2 West Berlin

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11 nights Vilnius, 1 Helsinki

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All other tours include admission to the Festival programs, three meals daily, breakfast, dinners and sightseeing in West Berlin and Helsinki, transfers and personal assistance from a BALTIC TOURS escort throughout the tour.

For more information and brochures, please contact:

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Secretary Brazauskas' "Vision" of the Future by Dr. Algirdas Budreckis

Vaunted as a liberal reformer and national communist, a frequent speaker at *Sajudis*' rallies, Algirdas Brazauskas is caught "between a rock and a hard place." The 56-year-old, stocky First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) is, at times, swayed by the intense outbursts of Lithuanian nationalistic demands. On the other hand, he has been warned on several occasions by Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev to keep a lid on nationalist sentiments in the Lithuanian SSR. On November 15, 1989, Brazauskas and other Lithuanian communist leaders were summoned to Moscow by the CPSU Politburo in an apparent effort to quiet the restive Baltic republic.

Of course, the Lithuanian Communist Party, which Brazauskas "heads" is a fiction, and has always been one. Since its inception in 1918, it has been a branch of the Soviet Russian Communist Party (CPSU). Brazauskas is a political hack very much as any Russian regional or raion party secretary. He knows this and will never come out against his Kremlin masters. Indicative of this subservience to the CPSU were his recent utterances in an interview with *Pravda*, the organ of the CPSU.

The September 9, 1989 issue of *Pravda* carried an interview with the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the LCP. The correspondents asked: "It is said that the future begins today. What kind of future do you see for Lithuania?"

A. Brazauskas answered: "It is always difficult to speak concretely about the future. Therefore, I would like to paint the most general points. In addressing the question of the future, some people raise demands that are not thought out. They literally do not think that the USSR, one of the most powerful states, is the guarantor of peace and stability. Their position is not acceptable to us. We are for a realistic view, for an evaluation of the concrete situation. Therefore, we look at Lithuania's future with responsibility."

Taking the "realistic" and "concrete stance," Secretary Brazauskas continued: "Greater sovereignty for the separate republics cannot be detached from other changes that are taking place and will take place in the country (*strona* - the USSR, A.B.). This is an unfinished act, an uninterrupted process, whereby, the entire Soviet federation will change in essence. At the same time, the best conditions will be created for Lithuania to develop autonomously and with life, to raise her economy and culture..."

Talking about the current situation, the First Secretary stated: "Today, we live under real conditions of pluralism, where, with great drive and emotion, various societal platforms are being formed. At the same time, the various groups and movements are striving to make an impact on the minds and hearts of the people, so that they would join one or the other side, so that they would make proper evaluations."

So, the Soviet Union, as the guarantor of stability, economic and cultural progress for Lithuania is only possible in the context of the Soviet "federation." And yet, pluralistic conditions are creating various social programs. Poor Algirdas Brazauskas has to steer a middle course to keep the First Secretary's seat and local popularity. The official organ of the Soviet Communist Party apparently agrees with his views, or they never would have appeared in print.



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Readers Respond

To The Editor:

As much as anyone, I'm elated over the political (and economic) changes taking place in/relative to Lithuania. I look forward to a truly free, completely independent Lithuania during my lifetime.

Unfortunately, my optimism is tempered — not by what is happening in Lithuania and the Soviet Union, but, instead, by the attitudes and actions of some Lithuanians in the "free world."

The pages of *Bridges* tell us about "free" Lithuanians, who, instead of uniting over positive issues, are creating unnecessary friction, while foolishly expending valuable energy to foster arguments over exactly what constitutes a 100%, genuine, honest-to-goodness "Lithuanian."

I can't help but recall, most vividly, an article in *Bridges*, several months ago, about a "congress" in Australia, during which, it seems to me, all potentially useful goals and issues got buried over disagreements on use of the Lithuanian language during formal activities at the "congress."

Instead of spending time and effort deciding who is more "genuine," we should be "locking onto" easily established commonalities, so that, as a world wide group, those of Lithuanian birth (or descent) can join together as a great, visible body, to express support for a truly free Lithuania.

Let's, first of all, "break the ice" by being honest with ourselves. As "free" Lithuanians, we're really only one of two kinds of people: We're Lithuanian-Americans, or Lithuanian-Australians, or Lithuanian-Canadians, etc.; or conversely, we're people who have failed to appreciate/express gratitude to the nations

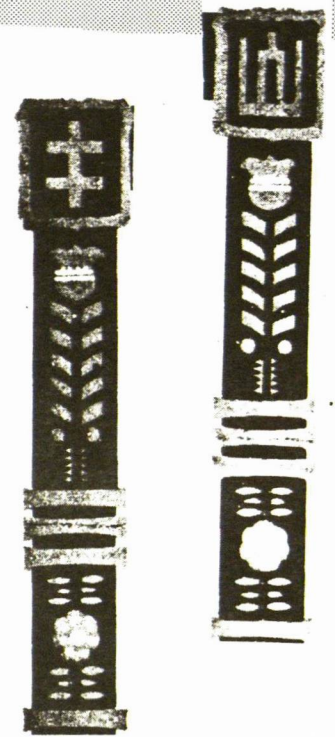
who accepted us and let us be "free," so we insist on trying to be something we can't/shouldn't honestly be.

Thus, as "honest" residents (and citizens) of the various nations of the "free" world, we're all different in many ways — yet we share a common heritage. The common heritage, now expressed in probably a thousand different ways, is what unites "free" Lithuanians.

Let's focus on commonalities, on substantive issues and on attainable goals. Only in that way, will we make any contribution towards helping achieve a free Lithuania. Petty bickering won't solve anything.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph (Joe) Arlauskas
Gloucester, VA



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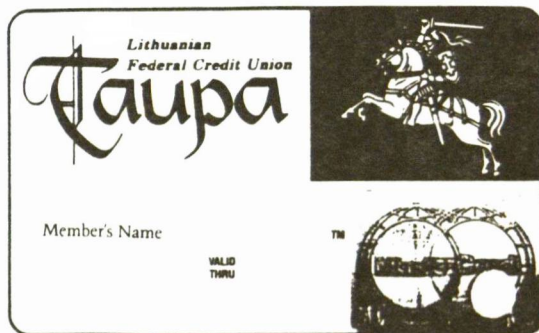
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Sixth Lithuanian Symposium On Science And Creativity: An Eyewitness Report by Ramunė Kubilius

Thanksgiving weekend, 1989, was marked by the gathering of over 1000 registrants (including over 100 from Lithuania) for the Sixth Lithuanian Symposium on Science and Creativity. The Symposium, which took place at the Lithuanian World Center in Lemont, Illinois, also featured a few events at the Lithuanian Youth Center in Chicago. The symposia attract "renowned Lithuanian scientists and artists from all over the world to present scholarly papers on their scientific/professional achievements and reinforce their ties with the Lithuanian community." (Preface of the program of the Fifth Symposium, held in 1985).

Many attendees were also participants: as artists, lecturers, moderators of sessions, or behind-the-scenes assistants. The Symposium began with a social get-together at the Lithuanian Youth Center, Wednesday evening, November 23, 1989, and ended with closing ceremonies also at the Youth Center, during which Sajudis (Reform Movement) president, Professor Vytautas Landsbergis offered some insights into efforts which the emigre population should direct to help Lithuania. During the intervening days, Symposium attendees attended art fairs, lectures, a literary evening, a banquet and much more. *Chicago Tribune*, on November 24, described the gathering in an article entitled "Lithuanians open push for freedom." (The article mostly focused on joint resolutions made by four major Lithuanian immigrant groups.)

The academic portion of the program featured plenary sessions (two each day, Thursday-Saturday) and lectures in the basic areas of science, technology, architecture; humanities and social sciences; medicine and dentistry; law and commerce; art and music. The smaller sessions drew interested parties which may have ranged from under a dozen, to a standing room crowd in the classrooms, which barely held the three or so dozen interested parties, who were interested in listening to a particular lecture or roundtable discussion. Almost all of the sessions were conducted in Lithuanian, which presented a challenge to the Lithuanians from the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere, who had completed their higher education outside of Lithuania. They had to translate their professional vocabulary into Lithuanian.

Among the lecturers was Reverend William Wolkovich-Valkavičius, a contributing editor of *Bridges*. Like a few other participants, Reverend Wolkovich-Valkavicius participated in more than one session and even moderated one. In the Archives session entitled "In Quest of the Sources of Modern Lithuanian History," he spoke on "State and Church Archives in the U.S.," making us aware of the wealth of information kept by American Catholic parishes, as well as the information available in public libraries and special collections such as the Immigration History Research Center in Philadelphia. In the Ethnic Studies III session, which he also moderated, Reverend Wolkovich-Valkavicius spoke on "The Selection of Names Given to the Lithuanian Parishes in the U.S.A.." If anyone is interested in knowing what the most popular selections for Lithuanian parish names in this country were, this was the session to attend. St. Casimir, St. George, Our Lady Gate of Dawn (Ausros Vartai), Saints Peter and Paul were the most popular for the 140 parishes.

One plenary session, which was particularly interesting was the session entitled "Scientific Collaboration During the Current Reconstruction Period." It tied in nicely with another plenary session entitled "University of Vytautas the Great: Concept and Challenges," and even with agreements between President George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev on the increased exchange of college students described in *Time*, December 11, 1989, p. 38). Lithuania's students want to study abroad; there is agreement that the monopoly of the University of Vilnius should end for the good of higher education in Lithuania. Various Lithuanian-American and Lithuanian professors presented some interesting viewpoints as to which students should go to universities in Europe (the humanities, it was recommended), which to avoid for the United States (law schools are already overflowing). The University of Vytautas the Great already had 178 enrolled students for the Fall session, even though operating in borrowed quarters, without a library, and an uncertain future. 41 Lithuanian academicians from American and other universities will make up half of the faculty senate while the other half will be

composed of scholars from Lithuania. The scholars agreed to run for faculty senate positions only if they also agreed to donate a portion of their sabbatical leaves to teaching at the University. Professor Zundé from Georgia Institute of Technology described some of the agreements for visiting students from Lithuania. They would have to include daily living expenses, a place to live, trip expenses, free medical insurance, office space, and so on. Professor Zundé also expressed a willingness to begin compiling a list of electronic mail, "e mail," addresses of Lithuanian-descent academicians around the world.

There were many interesting art and other exhibits to attend — The Lithuanian Art Institute Collection, Spiritual Folk Sculptures, Coins, Medals and Bank Notes of Lithuania, and many more.

In all, the Symposium proved to be interesting and educational to those who presented papers and to those who attended the various sessions. The program committee tallied the number of papers presented: more than 250 papers in 77 sessions. No one could attend all of the sessions, but could certainly "dip" into different waters each day.


"George M. Malacinski — Scientist Par Excellence" by Reverend William Wolkovich-Valkavičius

As a historian-researcher, I am constantly coming upon eminent people from Lithuanian roots, scarcely known to the Lithuanian public. Regrettably, they have escaped notice of our Lithuanian encyclopedias, and are not on the invitation list to world meetings, such as the quadrennial Symposium in Chicago of 1989. In some instances, one need hardly look farther than one's own backyard for such a person of stature. George M. Malacinski is one such figure.

The grandson of Lithuanian immigrants to St. George Lithuanian Parish, Norwood, Massachusetts, Dr. Malacinski has distinguished himself in the field of space biology. In recent times, he arranged a world conference in Japan among experts in his field, including Alfonsas Merkys of Lithuania. The two scientists struck up a friendship, especially in view of Malacinski's ethnic background. Merkys invited Malacinski to give several lectures in Lithuania just this past spring. The two experts are now collaborating on a book. In the opinion of the American-born biologist, Malacinski, it is Merkys who is the world's premier specialist, having grown seeds from seeds in outer space.

Malacinski's credentials are too numerous to catalogue here. Let a brief summary suffice. For his undergraduate studies at Boston University, he majored in biology, with a minor in chemistry. He moved on to Indiana University, where he earned his doctorate in 1966, majoring in bacteriology, with secondary studies in biochemistry and genetics. He further pursued a postdoctoral program at the University of Washington, 1966 to 1968. Malacinski is presently Professor of Biology at Indiana University, Program Director for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Undergraduate Initiative; and is Director for the Indiana University Axoloti Colony.

From 1984 to 1989, scientist Malacinski edited a four-volume series, *Primers in Development Biology*, published by the McGraw Hill. He has also edited or co-edited five other books of science. His extensive research grants and experiences would make any scholar envious. Perhaps most impressively of all, the prolific Dr. Malacinski has written or co-authored over 100 articles in scientific journals from 1970 to the present. He is surely one of the many people of Lithuanian background of whom readers can all be quite proud.



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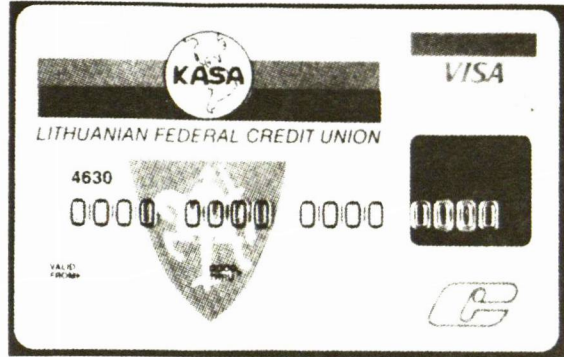
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A Long Time Ago

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Aunt Vera was my favorite relative. She was short, with a mischievous gleam in her eyes and a sharp tongue to put fools in their place. She had stayed behind in Lithuania while most of the family Akelaitis, including my mother Anna, had emigrated from Mariampolie to America at the turn of the century.

Aunt Vera had witnessed Lithuania's struggles against Russia and Poland in 1918 and 1919. It was sometimes said that she herself had participated in these patriotic wars of liberation. Certainly she might have, given her quick temperament ("*kaip sidabras*") and keen interest in political matters. By the time Aunt Vera had come to America in the early 20's, Lithuania had established itself as a respected member of the family of nations after more than a century of Czarist Russian misrule.

Aunt Vera married Simonas Karpavičius, who anglicized his name to Sam Kasper. We kids always got a big kick out of calling him "Uncle Sam." He was a quiet, good-natured man, with a shy smile, who worked as a gardener on the large estates that graced the shores of Long Island Sound in the earlier decades of this century.

Aunt Vera and Uncle Sam settled in Great Neck, Long Island, at that time a country village in Nassau County some 20-30 miles from where we lived in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. But, with the motorcar still enough of a rarity to elicit derisive calls of "Get a horse!" from smart-alecky kids, the trip to Great Neck was a tiring expedition. First we had to take two trolleys (one of them the Grand Street Line) to the end of their runs, then the Long Island Railroad, and finally, a local bus and a long hike to the Kasper household at number 33 North Road. So, when we journeyed to the Kaspers, it was a visit of days rather than hours.

Great Neck brings to mind many things, like smoky evenings in the dim light of kerosene lamps, and chilly runs at night to a smelly outhouse with its Sears and Roebuck catalogue. It took years before electricity and indoor plumbing brought the 20th century to Great Neck, part of the legacy of President Roosevelt's "New Deal." The lack of what we today regard as basic necessities, made a visit to North Road an exciting experience, an adventure like stepping into the past of rural America. And Aunt Vera's French toast, made in the morning on a wood-burning stove, was the best I ever tasted.

The house on North Road was split, in what we today would call a duplex arrangement. A Russian family occupied the other half, but the politics of the old world interposed an impenetrable social barrier. We might see one another, but each side would pretend the other wasn't there. In the back, Aunt Vera's plot of ground was like a truck garden ("*garne*"),

where she cultivated lots of ripened-on-the-vine tomatoes, lettuce, onions, potatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and other produce grown in the good earth of Great Neck.

From time to time, Uncle Sam would take us onto the spacious grounds of the estate he worked on, usually keeping to the wooded areas which abounded in shady walks and running streams. Once I recall glimpsing the imposing outlines of a baronial mansion at the top of a long, grassy knoll sloping gently to the waters of the Sound. I was then a mystery fan, and thought what a perfect setting for a society murder.

A Lesson In Civics

Aunt Vera was a staunch Democrat, as were most of the Lithuanian-Americans of that day, and never missed a chance to vote. One year, she exercised her voting rights and political skills in a family-related affair. It seems that a Mr. Matusevicius, the local Lithuanian radio announcer, sponsored a contest to the memory of Darius and Girenas, the ill-fated Lithuanian aviators who crashed in 1933, on their transatlantic flight from New York to Kaunas just a few hundred miles short of their destination.

Children were invited to recite on the air, Lithuanian verses honoring the aviators, and listeners were asked to vote for their number one choice, who would receive a special prize. Somehow, my family inveigled me into entering the contest. When Aunt Vera heard me on the air, she was delighted. Not only did she vote for me, but she went one big step further. She canvassed the Lithuanian colony in Great Neck so successfully, that I won by a large margin. While puzzled by the heavy regional preference for my oratorical skills, Matusevicius saw no reason not to declare me the winner. It took a long time and considerable pestering before he finally awarded me the prize, a five-dollar gold piece, but that's another story.

And so, I earned a bit of instant and profitable notoriety, due to Aunt Vera's faith in the democratic power of the ballot.

Country Trees and City Streets

The Kaspers had one son, Stan, with whom I developed a warm friendship, which went well beyond the cousin stage. Most summers, I spent a few weeks at Great Neck, a welcome break in the long, sometimes boring, summer months in the city where there were few recreational facilities at that time for youngsters. Stan would take me into the woods for long hikes and, under his tutelage, I gradually became aware of the many things nature had to offer us, like being able to see and hear different birds, watch

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squirrels at their mating games, and swing on branches of friendly trees. Often we would pass farms, their fences enclosing cows and horses. I wondered at first about the big, round chips lying on the ground around the cows. Stan enlightened me on their origin and added that the chips made good fuel for outdoor cooking. I thought to myself that this was one country pleasure I could do without. Once, our peaceful excursion was rudely interrupted by a hostile band of Russian kids from North Road, but when we presented a united front of two, the would-be attackers (about 3 or 4) decided it wasn't worth the trouble, fortunately for us.

Stan and I would sleep late, Aunt Vera being a firm believer in letting young people enjoy their leisure hours. She would know when we had awakened, because Stan and I would be engaged in one of our "horse wars." The rules were strict, but simple. We could flail and kick each other with our legs, while lying on our backs, but had to keep our hands and arms immobile on pain of losing the "war."

In the afternoons, we often walked several miles to King's Point on the Sound, where the Chrysler family had ceded half their beach area to the town's residents (the U.S. Coast Guard is located there today). Stan was a fine swimmer, and, on one memorable occasion, egged on by his example, I finally learned, to my great satisfaction, that water did in fact hold up one's weight. On the long walk home, we would chant the endless verses of "We're a hundred miles from home, a hundred miles from home, we walk a mile and rest a while, we're ninety-nine miles from home," etc.

The favor of my stay at Great Neck would be returned when Stan visited me in Brooklyn. Because there was only one movie house a long distance from North Road, Stan would indulge himself in an orgy of movie-going in the city. Some days he even saw several shows, this at a time when programs included two feature-length films, a newsreel, coming attractions, and maybe even a two-reel comedy. Stan had to be escorted to and from the movies, however, because he claimed he would get lost otherwise (I wouldn't accompany him to all the shows). "All city streets look alike to me," he used to say. "At home, every tree is different, and I always know where I am." I looked at him with skepticism, because the trees in Great Neck looked pretty much the same to me, while every city block had its own unique personality.

The Melody Lingers On

The Kaspers and Great Neck were an important part of my growing up. From them, I learned that the world was bigger than Brooklyn, that country people lived different lives at a different pace than city folk, and that nature, God's handiwork, was infinitely more complex and exciting than man's.

I remember that sometimes, on late Saturday evenings in the summer, Lithuanian neighbors would

gather in the house at 33 North Road, and more often than not break out into song. One of the men had a tenor voice, rare among Lithuanians, and, as dusk came on, he would lead the others in the sad-sweet ballads of the Lithuanian peasant as Aunt Vera passed around amber-colored "viritas."

Sometimes I wonder what has happened to North Road. Have high-rise apartments, silicon valleys, or supermarkets replaced the country homes, woods, and farms? And if one listens, would one still hear the tenor plaint of a Lithuanian voice on a late summer eve singing "*Subatos Vakarelj*," "Once, on a Saturday night?"

It was recently announced that the **Lithuanian Song Festival**, scheduled to take place on July 1, 1990, at the University of Illinois Pavillion in Chicago, has been postponed to an as-yet unannounced date. Among the reasons given by the organizing committee of the Seventh Lithuanian Song Festival — the Song and Dance Festival in Lithuania is scheduled to take place one week later. Many choirs and tourists from abroad are planning to participate and attend, and in the spirit of unity, the festival scheduled for Chicago has been postponed. It is hoped that this move will appease those who have been worried about the competition for emigre attention when a potential audience must choose between an event featuring Lithuanian-American (or Canadian, Australian as the case may be) talent and visiting talent from Lithuania, now that the way has been made clear.

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