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Gore vs. Bush on NATO...Elections Results in Lithuania...A Visit to a Remote Village

P e r s p e c t i v e s

"What's in it for me?" is not the kind of question you'll hear a Lithuanian asking before voting for a public official.

Most Lithuanian-Americans and Lithuania's people look at the big picture — the one where their country doesn't stand alone, but is a significant partner with the rest of the world.

It's hard not to ask those questions that personally affect one's own life. Lithuanians are used to that. After centuries of oppression and subjugation, you just get used to living with what is dealt. Not a pleasing picture.

So how was it possible for Lithuania to spring up in its newfound independence, and not only organize their own presidential elections, but also trust the one they have elected to guide their country in the right direction?

The opportunity to be self-reliant and earn money through hard work, the early American way, provided Lithuanians with the insight to answer the question, "What's in it for me?" after they answered the question, "What's in it for all of us?"

Since no elected official can give the whole country what they need and want all at the same time, Lithuanians satisfy themselves with the baby steps that are achieved with every new law ratified and with every visible improvement in the quality of their lives. At the same time, they are content to know that their efforts are duly noted by the rest of humanity beyond its borders.

So, where do we as Lithuanian-Americans stand regarding our voting habits in the United States? Basically, about the same. "What's in it for all of us?" seems to be the question which craves an answer from both candidates in the major parties.

As humans who are in partnership with the rest of humanity, we are looking for a president to consider the United States not as an island or a super power above all others or even a role model, but a country willing to grow and prosper in peaceful cooperation with all the nations of the world.

What more can we ask for?

Rasa Ardys-Juška

Editor

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BRIDGES Consultants

REGINA NARUŠIS, President,

Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

JŪRATĖ BUDRYS, Vice President,

Information Services.

RASA ARDYS-JUŠKA, Editor

RAMAS PLIŪRA, Treasurer, Lithuanian-

American Community, Inc., and

Subscriptions Manager.

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Sydney Remembered...

Sydney 2000 is over – but the pleasant memories linger on. Let's salute the 99 Lithuanian athletes who participated in the Olympics. Five and a basketball team returned home with medals:

- Daina Gudzinevičiūtė – gold medal in Women's Trap
- Virgilijus Alekna – gold medal in Discus Throwing
- Diana Žiliūtė – bronze medal in the Women's Road Cycling
- Birutė Šakickienė and Kristina Poplavskaja – bronze medal for Women's Rowing Double Sculls
- The Lithuanian Men's Basketball Team – bronze medal in Men's Basketball.

Read any interesting reviews of Lithuania's performance during the Olympics? Send them along. Turn to page 20 for a commentary from Los Angeles.

On the cover:
"Dekoratyvinis Projektas" (A Decorative Project) by T. Valvadienė depicts a Lithuanian farming couple.

NATO ENLARGEMENT: Gore vs. Bush

The direction we take as a nation will be decided by us on Election Day, November 7th, 2000. One of the major issues, if not the most important of all, is the security of the United States. Due to the technical advances of our age, our world has become small. What affects one part of the world affects us all. What then should be the role of the United States in global affairs in the post-Cold War era?

This past summer, both the Republican and Democratic Parties met and adopted their respective platforms. Excerpts from both are as follows:

2000 Democratic Party Platform (NATO Section)

Enhancing existing alliances

The security and stability of Europe is critical to America's national security interests. We will continue to partner with the European Union to address global limits that could benefit from our combined capabilities. Under a Gore Administration, the U.S. will continue to work with our transatlantic allies to make the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) even stronger, thereby enhancing stability, promoting prosperity, and fostering democracy throughout Europe.

The Democratic Party strongly supported the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary as a milestone in building a stronger NATO and a more democratic and unified Europe.

We look forward to bringing in additional qualified members in the future who share our values and are willing to take on the responsibilities of membership. A Gore Administration

will ensure that the issue of NATO's future enlargement is part of the Alliance's agenda at the next summit in 2002 and that no non-NATO member has a veto over NATO decisions in this regard.

2000 Republican Party Platform Section on NATO

Under the heading

"Principal American Leadership"

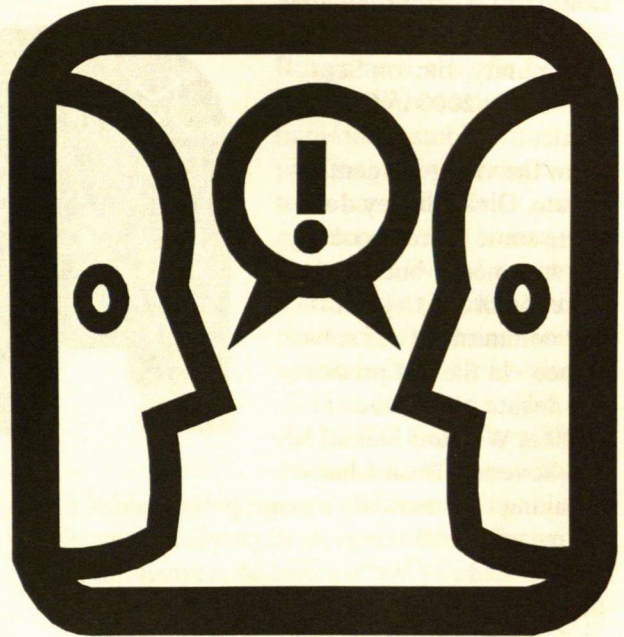
We are proud that America's longstanding commitment to the forward defense of democracy is being rewarded as Europe becomes whole and free. In the new era that resulted, some of America's strongest allies and friends have been the democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. In their recent histories, these nations have shown their commitment to the values shared by members of the Trans-Atlantic community. Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians inspired the world, assaulting the Iron Curtain again and again until finally it crashed down forever.

REGINA NARUŠIS was recently elected as chairperson of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.'s Board of Directors. She will complete her term as president of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. in December 2000.

As the new democracies of Central Europe chose freedom, America was ready to respond. Republicans made the enlargement of NATO part of our Contract with America. Their firm stand before the American people and in the Congress finally succeeded in bringing Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary into the North Atlantic Alliance. Republicans recognize and applaud the tremendous achievements of the people of Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in reclaiming their freedom and rejoining the Trans-Atlantic community of democracies.

It is in America's interest that the new European democracies become fully integrated into the economic, political and security institutions of the Trans-Atlantic community. These countries are today making great progress toward developing the market economies and democratic political systems that are the best way to ensure both their long-term stability and their security. The enlargement of NATO to include other nations with democratic values, pluralistic political systems, and free market economies should continue. Neither geographical nor historical circumstances shall dictate the future of a Europe whole and free. Russia must never be given a veto over enlargement.

The Republican party has long been the advocate of Independence for the people of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, even when others despaired of their emergence from foreign rule. We reaffirm our traditional ties with and strong support for the courageous Ukrainian and Armenian people, who like the people of the Baltic States, have endured both persecution and tyranny to reassert their ancient nationhood. The United States should promote reconciliation and friendship not only between the United States and Russia, but also between Russia and its neighbors.



Both parties support further NATO enlargement and make it clear that Russia, a non-NATO member, will not be given a veto over NATO enlargement. **The Democratic Party Platform goes one step further by committing itself to bringing the issue of NATO enlargement before the Alliance in 2002. The Republican Party Platform makes no such commitment.**

What are then the two major candidates saying to us on the campaign trail?

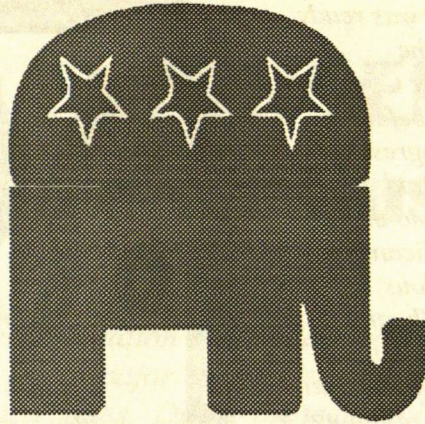
Governor George W. Bush on the occasion of the Vilnius Conference on May 18, 2000 in his letter to the President of the Republic of Lithuania reiterated the principles that were subsequently contained in the Republican Party Platform and emphasized that the security of the United States is inseparable from the security of Europe and a strong NATO is the foundation of peace. In his letter to the President of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc., Regina F. Narušis, dated August 11, 2000, now after the convention, Governor Bush again reiterated the Republican Platform principles and again by letter reiterated the same at the last

Board of Director's meeting of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. on September 30, 2000 in Connecticut.

In the vice-presidential debate, Dick Chaney did make some more encouraging statements, but they were too broad to gleam any commitments of substance. In the last presidential debate on October 11, 2000 at Winston-Salem, N. C., Governor Bush when speaking of America's foreign policy said, "We can't be all things to all people in the world," and that he "worried about over committing our military around the world."

Gore 2000 Lieberman Foreign Policy Agenda on NATO Enlargement and the Unification of Europe says: "The First Will Not Be the Last. NATO enlargement is erasing the divisions of the Cold War and promoting the unification of Europe. Al Gore believes that NATO's door must remain open to all of Europe's new democracies that are willing and able to take on the responsibilities of membership. The first new members will not be the last. While ensuring that NATO's high standards are met through the Membership Action Plan (MAP), he will work to continue the enlargement process at the next NATO Summit in 2002. No non-NATO country will have a veto over NATO enlargement."

Ambassador Nicholas Ray, speaking on behalf of Vice President Gore, at the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. Board of Director's meeting on September 30, 2000 in Connecticut reiterated that "Al Gore strongly supports the further expansion of NATO and will work to continue the enlargement process at the next NATO Summit in 2002 and that Al Gore acknowledges and supports Lithuania's efforts and accomplishments in meeting NATO requirements." Amb. Ray further stated that Al Gore is looking for ways together with the



Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. to work toward the integration of Lithuania into NATO.

At the second presidential debate on October 11, 2000 at Winston-Salem, N. C., Vice President Gore went even further by saying, "We have a fundamental choice to make. Are we going to step up to the plate as a nation, the way we did after World War II?" and sketched an America that

would be far more willing to intervene militarily around the world when genocide and other matters of conscience were involved.

So how do these two presidential candidates differ? Gov. Bush and Vice President Gore both support NATO expansion. Vice President Gore has committed to urge the further enlargement at the next NATO Summit in 2002. Gov. Bush has not. Both have said Russia will not have a veto over the enlargement process. Support of NATO expansion is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough. A political decision has to be made by the United States when the next round of enlargement should occur. Vice President Gore says he will urge the further enlargement in 2002. Bush has not made that decision as of this date.

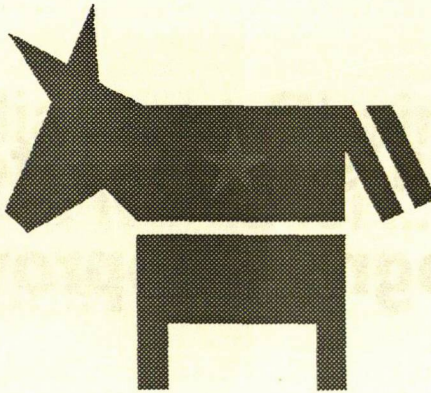
While on the campaign trail, candidates often make promises they later do not fulfill. Thus, we come to the question of credibility and post performance.

Gov. Bush espouses the concept, "Europe, whole and free;" however, not all of his foreign policy advisors have supported this concept in the past. Brent Scowcroft and Condoleezza Rice advised President Bush. President Bush wavered before recognizing the three Baltic countries and Ukraine and was hampered by the "Russia first" mentality. **Gov. Bush has made it quite clear he supports NATO enlargement and that Russia will not have veto power over the enlargement of NATO,**

but will the Governor commit to NATO enlargement in 2002? We await his response.

Vice President Gore espouses the concept of "forward engagement". It was the Clinton Administration that negotiated and signed the U.S. Baltic Charter that gave Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia a clear prospect for membership in European and Trans-Atlantic institutions and contributed to stability in Northeastern Europe. It was the same Administration that launched the Partnership for Peace that promoted reform in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, on October 10, 2000, at a 19-nation NATO alliance annual meeting of fellow defense ministers in Birmingham, England, Defense Secretary William Cohen said that in the future NATO will have to share responsibility for the security of Europe with the European Union, which is a major shift in US. defense policy. It is the United States involvement in Europe that keeps the peace. Any shift in that regard has to be viewed with alarm and does raise the question of credibility in the concepts espoused by Vice President Gore.

America's involvement and military presence in Europe is essential to preserving the balance of power. United States has successfully done so through NATO. Europe should be an equal partner with the United States within NATO. Any other defense organization would only cause divisiveness and threatens peace. In order to conclude the Cold War and eliminate the remaining ambiguities that can only lead to "tacit conditions for hostility", NATO must be expanded at the next Summit in 2002. Any postponement of those countries that have applied for membership, located in the gray unprotected zone between NATO and Russia, will only be viewed by Russia's new leadership as an invitation to continue the con-



flict. A signal must be sent to the new government of Russia now, that the free world will not tolerate any imperialist ambitions or aspirations of regaining control over its formerly occupied lands. That message must be delivered now by committing to NATO expansion in 2002 and taking action in 2002 by inviting all nine aspirants to join at the NATO Summit in 2002. Such action will only bene-

fit Russia by allowing it to focus on building a democratic, productive, and trustworthy nation.

Lithuania applied for NATO membership on January 6, 1994. It has been a good neighbor to all its neighbors, including Russia. It has no border disputes. It has, through the Membership Action Plan (MAP), prepared for accession. Its neighbor, Poland, a NATO member, supports and urges the admission of Lithuania. Lithuania has made the most progress in preparing for membership.* Lithuania should be invited to join in 2002.

Do vote on November 7th. Your vote counts. Both candidates still have time before the election to make their positions clear and firm and decisive. Let's hope they do. ◆

**Independent Task Force Report, U.S. Policy Toward Northeastern Europe, Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, 1999.*

Lithuania's NATO Integration Program Approved

The Lithuanian government approved of the Lithuanian National NATO Integration Program on Oct. 11th. This 2000-2001 program will help make the joint efforts of Lithuania and NATO more active in Lithuania's preparations for the membership in the Alliance.

The Foreign Ministry reported that Linas Linkevičius, Ambassador - Head of the Mission of the Republic of Lithuania to NATO, presented the National NATO Integration Program to Klaus-Peter Klaiber, the NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs.

The first consultations of Lithuania with NATO Senior Committee of Political Affairs devoted to the discussion of goals and tasks of the program are planned for the end of October - beginning of November in Brussels, NATO headquarters.

The National NATO Integration Program is a plan of practical measures, which Lithuania is implementing in preparing for NATO membership. The Program is divided into chapters concerned with political-economic, defense and military, resources, security of classified information, and legal issues. The detailed contents of the Program cannot be publicly announced; although general summaries were given to the press.

In the political part of the program for 2000-2001, Lithuania pledges itself to continue to participate actively in the process of the

Membership Action Plan. This part stipulates that Lithuania is ready to take on membership obligations and that Lithuania seeks to be invited to join the Alliance in the NATO summit of 2002.

The political part also states that Lithuania maintains and strengthens good relations with all the neighboring countries and countries of the Baltic Sea region. Lithuania is to continue keeping the strategic partnership with Poland and mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia.

The military and resources parts say that Lithuania remains pledged to increase defense expenses step by step up to two percent of the GDP. The security part stipulates that the formation of the legal fundamentals needed for the assurance of effective functioning of the security of classified information was concluded in the year 2000.

The Lithuanian parliament, while strengthening the legal basis of the Lithuanian National Defense system as well as seeking its approximation to the NATO international agreements, adopted several important laws, as the legal part emphasizes.

In preparing the Program for 2000-2001, the Lithuanian government took into consideration the remarks and suggestions laid down in the NATO Progress Report for 1999-2000 Program. ♦

THE BALTIC NEWS SERVICE provided this article via The Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians.

Rasa Ardys-Juška

A New Parliament Chairman... A New Prime Minister... A New Future

By October 10th it was clear that Lithuanian ex-president Algirdas Brazauskas and his leftist Social Democratic coalition would be left out in the cold when the Liberal Union and the New Union (Social Liberals) formed a coalition. The coalition were able to gather, at last count, a total of 67 seats in the 141-member parliament to the Social Democratic 51 seats.

The president, Valdas Adamkus, said that he would officially nominate the candidate – Rolandas Paksas – for the prime minister's post and ask the parliament's approval by the end of October.

The leader of the New Union - Social Liberals, Arturas Paulauskas, was unofficially chosen to be the next Chairman of the Seimas (Parliament); while, Česlovas Juršėnas still placed hopes that he would be chosen at the end of October. According to the Seimas Statute, the parliamentary chairman is elected by secret ballot in the first sitting after the general polls. The candidate who collects more than half of the votes of the MPs is considered elected.

On Oct. 19th the newly elected lawmakers to the Lithuanian Seimas solemnly swore an oath of allegiance to the state. The chairman of the Constitutional Court, Vladas Pavilionis, administered the oath to 139 available MPs.

The *Respublika* daily newspaper quoted Brazauskas as saying that the positions of the biggest vote getter and the leader of the New Union, Artūras Paulauskas, differed because "the Liberals and the Social Liberals want to be in power, whereas we want to do work."

In the ex-president's words, the Social Liber-

als and Liberals are not "bad people" but lack experience.

As for future aspirations, Brazauskas said he was not yet thinking about the presidential elections to be held in two and a half years, vowing to "remain a pensioner like he used to be" for now.

The two dominant parties, the Liberal Union and the New Union (Social Liberals), they signed an agreement to form the "New Policy Union" coalition in a meeting on Oct. 12th. The coalition agreement was not only signed by the two parties, but also by the Modern Christian Democrats and the Center Union. These four parties formed a tentative bloc called the New Policy Union before the elections.

After the negotiations, the New Union and the Lithuanian Liberal Union agreed that the forming of the government would be based on the following principle: if the minister represents the New Union, the head of the corresponding Parliamentary committee would be the Lithuanian Liberal Union representative and vice versa.

According to the agreement, participation of coalition partners in governmental institutions will be determined proportionally by mandates won in the general election and an enclosure to be drafted later, said the Liberal Union's vice-chairman Artūras Zuokas. The pact also calls for respect for values and programs of the coalition partners, their collectiveness and sharing of information about state affairs.

Zuokas told *BNS* that the enclosure, which will regulate allocation of ministerial posts, was still a subject of negotiations. He added that the

RASA ARDYS-JUŠKA is the editor of BRIDGES. The article is a compilation of news from The Baltic News Service.

Liberal Union was planned to receive seven portfolios, including heads of ministries of economy, finance, defense and transportation. The Social Liberals should control six ministries: the Foreign Ministry, the Science and Education Ministry, the Environment Ministry, the Social Care and Labor Ministry, the Health Ministry and the Interior Ministry, which will take over the functions of the Ministry of Public Administration Reforms and Local Authorities.

He added that the other two coalition partners, the Modern Christian Democrats and the Centrists, would receive at least two offices of vice-minister each. Their fields of responsibility will be determined according to the candidates' suitability to the prime minister and their professional skills.

The Peasants' party, with four members in the parliament, declared that it would support the bloc of Social Liberals and Liberals. This consequently brought the number of Seimas seats to a total of 67. This will enable the block to adopt important decisions.

President Valdas Adamkus approved the initiative of the "New Policy" to form the government. The president appoints and dismisses the prime minister under the approval of the parliament.

The "New Policy's" general platform was outlined before the elections and plans to continue to apply it toward its future goals. Some key points include:

- The parliament and the government should take all necessary actions to prepare Lithuania for joining NATO by 2003. It maintains that Lithuania's entry in NATO will not only reinforce security of the state but also create better conditions to seek more safety and security in Europe.
- Touching upon the promotion of being a good neighbor, the left-wing bloc stresses that relations with Nordic countries should use the opportunities provided in regional cooperation. Cooperation with Baltic and Nordic countries, Poland and other Central European states would help accelerate Lithuania's readiness to join the EU, NATO and the Western European Union (WEU.)
- The New Union lays an emphasis on the ne-

cessity of Lithuanian economic integration with foreign countries. "We should more actively utilize the potential of Lithuania's economic and trade missions abroad to engage in activities aimed at boosting exports and attracting investment because the greater part of our country's private companies do not have the capacity to represent their interests in foreign countries," reads the program.

- The New Union backs tax reforms foremost: value-added tax (VAT) cuts on housing, foodstuffs, technology equipment, exports and children's goods. The union proposes to increase fiscal deficit to three percent of the gross domestic product (GDP,) although no changes in monetary policy have been planned. In the future, monetary policy may be changed by harmonizing it with the European Union and gradually giving up the currency board arrangement.
- The left-wing ideologists believe that the state of the poorest part of the society could be remedied by reduction of taxes and other economic measures.
- The New Union hopes that social insurance payments could be distributed equally between employees and employers rather than being raised. The compound pension system should embrace state social insurance and private pension funds. The Union further suggests using two thirds of the Privatization Fund for the establishment of pension funds.

Brazauskas had warned that this "New Policy Union" are fledglings and lack experience. Their platform is standard and does not differ too far from Brazauskas' party's platform. At the same time, what both Brazauskas and the New Union's Paulauskas and Paksas don't openly discuss is their illustrious past with the Communist Party of old. As we often say, "Time will tell". And this new government needs not only time to get their feet wet, but also time to produce real people-oriented results. ♦

Jeanne Dorr

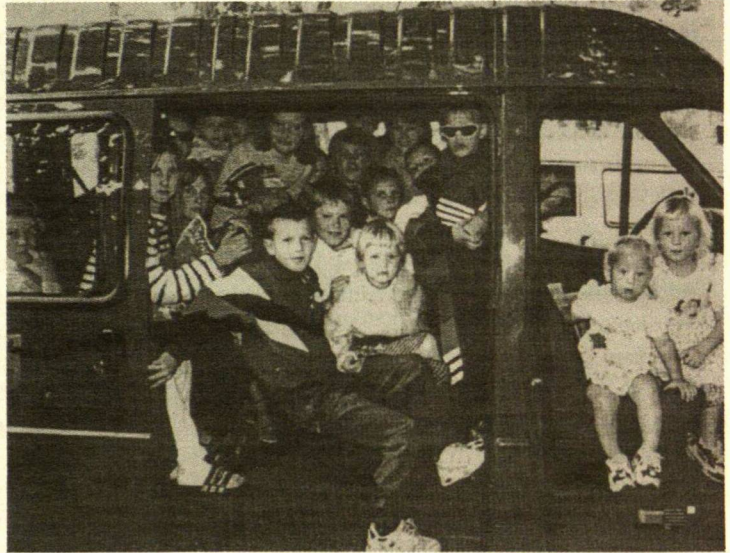
A Day in Asminta

Asminta probably doesn't ring a bell with you. Actually, I never heard of the place until I went there. But Asminta wasn't my main concern. I had bigger problems: how I was going to tell my husband that my Orphan Care work wasn't finished when he arrived in Lithuania and that he would have to come along on this trip with me.

I usually leave for Lithuania a month before him and we have an understanding that my work will be completed. Upon his arrival we will be free to spend the time relaxing and visiting friends. But not only was Asminta not finished, neither was Mrs. Landsbergis; she needed me for yet one more day. I would have to put her on the back burner and worry about Countryside Children's Charity Day, which was scheduled to be held in Asminta – wherever it was.

When Regina Svoba of Countryside Children's Fund told me she set the date for August 1, I couldn't believe it. She knew I wanted to be done and on my way to the Baltic Sea by July 26. To make a long story short, my husband was so tired of feeding the cats, walking the dog, and living alone for a month that he readily agreed to go with us to Asminta, although I still didn't know where it was.

First, let me explain how a charity day works. The fund selects areas from all over Lithuania to visit. Because there are so many small villages in desperate straits, they only go to each place one time. They try to visit a new place at least once a month. So much planning goes into this operation. The local mayor is called; he contacts



Taking a ride on a van for the first time.

Photo: Vytautas Ylevičius

the local social worker. In turn, the social worker sends the fund a list of the neediest families in the area and pertinent information about them. We have to know how many people are in the family, their ages, and general circumstances.

The volunteers at the fund then go to a local storage area where all the charity packages that have been sent to Countryside Children's Fund are stored. In this case, most of the packages came from the United States. The volunteers sort through box after box until they find just the right size clothing for the family members. Many times it is guesswork because the age really doesn't tell you much about a person. If the people in the storage area are lucky, they may find some boots, shoes or even stuffed animals. They put together a huge plastic bag for each family. All this takes a tremendous amount of

JEANNE DORR is a member of the Board of Directors of Lithuanian Orphan Care, a branch of the Human Services Council of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. She is also a social studies teacher in New Jersey.

time because they work outside in all kinds of weather. There just isn't enough room inside to pack and unpack all these boxes. When the bags are packed and labeled, they are loaded onto a truck or van. These are truly dedicated people who care about strangers they will never meet.

As Regina and I were sitting at her kitchen table going over the schedule, I learned that Asminta was in the Prienai area. This made me quite happy, as this was where my grandmother was born. I still have family and good friends there, but I never heard of Asminta. Meanwhile, I could hear my husband and Regina's husband, the editor of *Valstiečių newspaper*, disagreeing on everything from politics to what day of the week it was. Mind you, one does not speak English and the other does not speak Lithuanian. In reality, they are very good friends.

We continued to work, but something was bothering me. Why were there so many families on this list? We usually meet with between fifteen and twenty families; not twenty-six. Regina explained that there was an unusually high unemployment rate in this area. Once again, I was starting to get a nervous stomach about what we would encounter the next day.

The day dawned bright and early. It was one of the very few days it didn't rain. We drove to the newspaper office and met the two vans we would be taking on our trip to Asminta. One van was filled to the brim with packages. The second van didn't leave much breathing space. The driver, Regina, Bernardas Šaknys, a correspondent for the paper, Vytautas Ylevičius, a professional photographer, Česlovas Stonys, an actor, my husband, and I crowded into the second van. We were sandwiched anyplace there wasn't a box. To be honest, I felt like a contortionist. One foot was on a box, while the other foot was stuck between two bags. This was going to be a very long trip.

During the journey, I learned Mr. Ylevičius had published a beautiful book of black and white photographs depicting Lithuania's nature. Mr. Stonys was even a bigger surprise.

He used his free time and his own money to transport children back and forth to prisons to visit their parents. Because of personal situations in his own life, he felt everyone was entitled to a second chance. The children couldn't wait to visit their parents, and it gave the parents a reason to straighten out their lives.

It was a very lively group and all was going well. But when things are going too well you know they just can't last. Sure enough, I had to go to the bathroom. My husband shot me one of those "can't you wait looks." I ignored him as I usually do in this situation. The driver said there was no problem as we were traveling parallel to the forest. No, that just wouldn't do – I was more comfortable in an outhouse. Again, I got that look of exactly how comfortable can one be in an outhouse. But I was insistent on this point and wasn't going to budge.

A few miles down the road was a sign showing a rest area. I still couldn't see the outhouse from the road. The journalist, being a true gentleman, accompanied me through the woods. Actually, because we have traveled together so many times, he knows I can't find my way out of a paper bag, let alone Lithuania's woods. The outhouse was nothing to write home about, but it least it was there. A few minutes later we were on the road again.

Since we weren't quite sure where we were



Asminta mother and children.

Photo: Vytautas Ylevičius

going, a local resident offered to meet us and show us the way. The man got so excited when we reached his house that he flew out and left the door wide open as he jumped in his car. He seemed to have trouble starting the car, but eventually we were off. As we were following him over a very narrow bridge he came to a dead stop. When he stepped out of his car, his face was beet red. He ran out of gas! Now all the men got out and started pushing him across the bridge. The photographer was having a field day photographing everyone's expressions as they were huffing, puffing and pushing. So much for my first impressions of Asminta.

But nature truly blessed this area with beauty. The trees and lakes were magnificent. We finally arrived at the school. Despite the poverty, the natural beauty was overwhelming. There were tall trees and a beautiful pond. The parents, teachers, and students planted flowers near the building. Everyone brings seeds or flowers from their own garden, and it becomes a community project. The families were waiting for us, and I immediately noticed that there were many fathers in the group. Ordinarily this would be a good sign. It means the families are intact and that the men are not alcoholics. Alcoholics rarely come to these gatherings, because in a small village everyone talks and they don't want to be embarrassed. However, it did mean that the men had no work. That basically was the crux of the matter.

We were led into the hall of the school which was nicely decorated with paper streamers as there had been a wedding there a few days earlier. The others in the party moved toward the front where chairs were arranged in back of a table. When I first started attending charity days I decided to sit with the people in the audience. This works best for them and for me. I don't set myself apart from them, and before long their shyness starts to disappear.

A woman sitting next to me was holding a beautiful blond child who was about three years old. I started to talk to the little boy and we soon became fast friends. The mother, Zita, joined in the conversation, and I learned she had five older children. Her husband was a good man, but he couldn't find a job. The only money coming in

was what he earned delivering newspapers to the stores. The only problem was the paper was only published twice a week. Zita praised her family to the highest and felt that some way they would be able to weather this streak of bad luck. But she was grateful for the newspaper job; at least they had a little something while her neighbors had nothing.

When Zita learned my grandmother was born not far from Asminta, the conversation became quite lively. Eventually the person in back of me chimed in as well as the person on my left. Before long we were in full swing. But the entire time they were asking me questions, I was learning about them. Yes, sometimes there were short tempers and sharp words at home. Despair and lack of hope will do that to people. So will worry about the upcoming winter months. But I wasn't a stranger; I was one of them because my grandmother lived there almost a hundred years ago. They knew I would understand and not judge them harshly. I wasn't there to judge them at all. My job is to help. It's very easy to be an armchair critic in a centrally heated house, a refrigerator filled with food, and modern conveniences from here to eternity.

Soon our informal chats ended, and it was time for the formal meeting. Regina spoke about Lithuanian Orphan Care and the generosity of the American donors. She told the audience how the doors to her office were always opened to them with any kinds of problems they might have, even if they only needed someone to listen to them. I spoke briefly, very briefly, from my place in the audience. I told the people of Asminta that their problems were ours, and that nothing as large as an ocean would separate us from them.

Mr. Stonys asked the parents to stay inside but to send their children outdoors. He was going to do a performance on child abuse that had graphic scenes. Although on the surface the situation seemed to be good here, no one really knows what goes on behind closed doors in anyone's house. The bottom line was – there was no work, and no work means no money. Many times our work has taken us to severe situations of spousal and child abuse because of unemployment.

At this point a local reporter asked me for an interview, and we stepped outside so as not to interrupt Mr. Stonys. I could see the children beside themselves with joy as two boxes of used toys were brought out of the van. But as always, there was no greed, no pushing, or no grabbing. Each child was overjoyed with what they were given, be it a small doll or a miniature stuffed animal. In fact, they were so elated that they started a mad dash back into the school to show their parents the treasures they received.

Now arose the problem of how to keep them outside. One of the drivers suggested giving them a short ride in the newspaper vans. Not one child had ever ridden in a van. In fact, some came to the meeting in horse drawn wagons. I could see all this from the corner of my eye where the reporter and I were sitting on a wall. There were shouts of joy as the bigger ones held the little ones on their laps. This would definitely take several trips so that no one would be left out from this wonderful experience. As the children passed the wall where we were sitting, the drivers blew their horns at us in greeting. The children waved frantically with both hands, and I think their smiles were enough to fuel the van.

I still chuckle to myself when I relive the next scene. The vans returned after about five minutes, and as the children began to spill out, I couldn't help thinking of the little circus clowns who used to tumble out of the small cars. Their joy was without end. Readers, I wish you could have been there. It was worth a thousand written words.

At this point, the program ended, and the parents came out with a determined look. I was so sorry I missed the program; as one father told me, it was a wakeup call. No matter what happened in the future or how bad it would get, they must never take it out on their families.

The families were now receiving their bags of clothing, and there were several boxes of shoes and boots for them to look through. Probably the family that left the most lasting impression on me was the largest.

These young parents had nine children, seven boys and two girls. Of course, all the children couldn't fit in their twenty-year old car. So only

the youngest came. I have to be honest, the mother was only thirty-four years old but she looked ten years older. The father told me he had been a truck driver, but with so many factories bankrupt and closed, there was nothing to be delivered. Every day he went to a central location where workers could be hired by the day, but he rarely got a job. He came home and faced another long, disappointing day.

He could not consider relocating because jobs were tight all over the Lithuania. At least here he could grow his own food and chop his wood for winter heat. The parents told me how the children helped with the work and with caring for each other. They had no television but the entire family loved to sing. To put the icing on the cake, all the older children who attended school were excellent students. The children were beautiful and so well behaved. As I looked at the mother holding her youngest so close to her heart, all I could think about was the painting of the Madonna and her Child. Both parents believed their lives would not get better but they had strong hopes that their children would succeed. There was no bitterness, only a lack of hope.

I noticed another woman and a young girl struggling with their bag. They couldn't seem to move it toward the road. As I approached them I could see the mother was suffering with each step. I asked them if I could help, and she nodded her head. She seemed to be embarrassed about her lack of physical strength. She was rather young but suffered from arthritis. I saw that her hands were that of a much older person.

I dragged the bag to the road as she told me her story. Again, her husband was out of work. He was a good man and a caring father, but he was ashamed to come to the hall. It hurt him to know that he couldn't support his family or buy better medicine for his wife. But they needed the charity, and so she and her daughter swallowed their pride and came to the school. Eventually her husband arrived to pick her up in the horse drawn wagon. He had to sell his old car to provide for his family.

Another family was a young couple with four charming children. The same story was told again; neither father nor mother could find a job.

As the smallest child was raising her arms so that I would pick her up, her parents asked me to relay their thanks to all the people they would never meet who were helping them directly and indirectly in this time of great need. They marveled at the goodness of strangers who take the time and effort to worry about them and their problems. The only gift they could give in return was their prayers. As I bent to put the little one down, she smacked a big wet kiss on my cheek. What greater gift could anyone ever receive from a child!

Rūta and her husband told me how they are raising their five children on approximately \$75 a month. It isn't easy, but with the charity bags the money would last just a little longer.

They all had one thing in common – they loved Asminta. The families were so proud of their small school. As little as they had, they still worked in the garden of the school. When the interior needed painting, they pooled their money. Some could give only 25 cents toward the cost of the paint and they willingly gave it. But more importantly, they gave their time and painted the rooms one at a time as they had the money and materials.

Every Friday night the young people came to the school where they spent a few hours singing, dancing, and enjoying themselves. It didn't matter that they had so little because everyone was in the same situation.

As these proud people came to say thank you and goodbye, each and every one took a piece of my heart home with them. My memories of Asminta will forever remain with me, and God willing, I hope to return there again.

I would like to thank Regina Svoba for all she is doing to help the forgotten and neglected areas of Lithuania. I owe a debt of gratitude to Bernice Mikatavage and the Knights of Lithuania, Council 144 of Minersville, Pa. Whenever I have called Bernice for help, she has never refused, and the Knights have been more than generous. The

family with nine children will have a Merry Christmas because of her efforts to locate help for them, and the children will have warm clothing for the winter. To the people of Asminta, who despite the fact that they are suffering economically, still have hope that their children will have a better life. Thank you for not losing faith and hope.

Sincere thanks to you, the *Bridges* readers, who are so instrumental in making Lithuanian Orphan Care the successful program it has become. The cost to sponsor a child is \$150 a year, but ANY donation is gratefully appreciated.

Please send your tax-deductible checks to:

Lithuanian Orphan Care
2711 W. 71st St.
Chicago, IL. 60629

*"We sometimes feel that what we do is just a drop in the ocean,
But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop."*

— Mother Teresa

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. ◆



The children of Asminta.

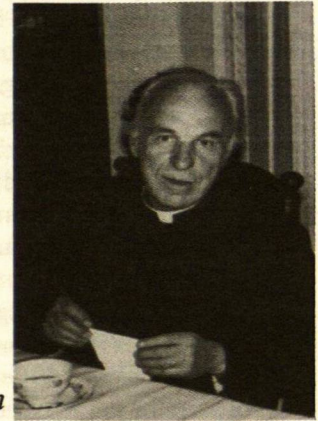
Photo: Jeanne Dorr

Rev. Stasys Yla

AS STUTTHOF AWAITED...

Rev. Stasys Yla, a Roman Catholic priest, was one of the most prolific contemporary Lithuanian writers with interests including education, psychology, theology, philosophy, and history. He also served as chaplain of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception at Putnam, Connecticut. Rev. Yla died in 1983 while finishing the proofs of his final book, a biographical and critical study of M. K. Čiurlionis. He is buried at the cemetery on the Immaculate Conception grounds in Putnam.

The following is the prologue to *A Priest in Stutthof*, published in 1971. This was a translation (by Nola M. Zobarskas) of Yla's first book published in the United States in which he recounted his personal experiences in the concentration camp. According to Rev. Valdemaras Cukuras, "with deep insight [Yla] reveals man's determination to survive and rise above the cruelty and depravity of fellow human beings". The original memoirs, *Žmonės ir Žvėrys* (Men and Beasts), were written in the Lithuanian language and published in 1951, one year after he had emigrated to the U.S.*



Rev. Yla in 1978.

If one takes for granted the supposition that our childhood impressions help to determine what we do later on in life, then I should have become an engineer or a soldier instead of a priest. My earliest recollections are connected with the activities of my father, who was a farmer with sixty-five acres of land to till, and who also enjoyed the reputation of being the best mechanic in the county. I remember seeing clocks, pistols, a gramophone, and a barometer among the things he was called upon to repair. He owned a small collection of books which he had bound himself and which he loved to read whenever he had a free moment. The book he treasured above all the others was an 1816 translation of the New Testament by Bishop Prince Giedraitis. It was a very rare edition and difficult to obtain.

I was five years old when the Russian armies began large-scale maneuvers throughout Lithuania in 1913. Soldiers swarmed across our fields and our homesteads. An automobile rumbled through

our village. An observation balloon was seen hovering against the sky. My two little brothers and I spent a long time puzzling over this strange airborne object and finally concluded that it must have come to bear our father's soul to heaven. He had died earlier that year, at the age of forty, leaving my mother with three half-grown children and three little ones to bring up.

My mother added my father's burdens to her own: she became a farmer as well as a housewife and teacher. Although she found able helpers in my two sisters and my older brother, it was on her capable hands, her loving heart, and her valiant soul that the welfare of our family primarily depended. There was nothing she would not do for us, and no task seemed too difficult for her to undertake.

Following the outbreak of World War I just a year later, our little village was turned into something of an army thoroughfare because of its location near the highway, which linked St. Petersburg

with Kaunas, Warsaw, and Vienna. Over this highway marched countless throngs of Russian soldiers, at first pushing their way towards the West and then retreating, with the Germans dogging their heels. On one occasion, several Red Army detachments invaded and practically took over our village. This happened in 1918, before newly independent Lithuania had been able to muster an effective army of its own. We children had never seen any soldiers quite so ragged, tired, and disreputable looking as those particular Russians. They plagued us for what seemed an eternity, pillaging and making utter nuisances of themselves, until the Lithuanian troops finally arrived and drove them out.

When I was old enough to leave our farm so that I could attend the district gymnasium in town, I found myself near the front lines of yet another war. Lithuanians and Poles were the contending parties this time. I recall seeing caravans of wounded soldiers being transported to the district hospital. Among them were scores of upper-form gymnasium students who had enlisted as volunteers. Fortunately, this war did not last very long, and life gradually returned to normal.

In the spring of my second year in school I joined a Catholic Youth Association known as *Ateitis* (The Future), and during the summer that followed I was suddenly struck with the idea of becoming a priest. I dismissed it then almost at once; but when I turned seventeen, I began to give it serious consideration and eventually made up my mind to enter the seminary.

The time passed quickly, and as my years at the seminary drew to a close, I had to begin thinking about the future. At first, I was strongly attracted to the Jesuit order because of its reputation for scholarship; but, having at last decided in favor of the greater freedom accorded to a secular priest, I was ordained as such in 1932. I also continued to study on an advanced level, paying my way by teaching and doing editorial work.

I was already proficient in German, and during the summer of 1934 I was able to go to Grenoble to study French. I went abroad again the following spring, having received a six-month travel and study grant from the Theology and Philosophy departments of the University of Vytautas the Great.

My area of specialization, Pastoral Theology, had recently undergone a drastic revision. The old Roman system had been replaced by the Austro-

Germanic system, which placed more emphasis on the psychological, pedagogical, and sociological duties of the clergy. Since I was appointed to lecture Pastoral Theology at the University, I was awarded a grant for the specific purpose of examining what Catholics in other European countries were doing along these new lines. There was much to learn, and I found myself going abroad many summers thereafter, in order to attend study sessions and seminars, and to discuss various aspects of Pastoral Theology with specialists in the field.

During the academic year I lectured at the University and engaged in various literary and community activities. I published my first two books and collaborated with six lay professors in establishing a daily newspaper called *The Twentieth Century*. My next publication, which was entitled *War and Peace*, came off the presses in 1940; but by then the Russians had occupied Lithuania, and they suppressed the book before it could be bound.

I had yet another book to my credit, one which I had published in 1937 under the pseudonym of "Daulius" and in which I had exposed the Communist underground movement in Lithuania. Because of its nature, this book had aroused the interest of Nazi Germany as well as of the United States. In fact, the American Consul somehow managed to find out that I was its author and sought my permission to have the book translated into English. I refused to grant it, although I did allow him to make a précis of the contents.

Unfortunately, this particular book gave my friends and me a great deal of trouble during the Russian occupation. At first, the Russian authorities suspected my colleague Professor Dielininkaitis to have been the author and immediately ordered his arrest. On the very same day they also arrested Dr. Skrupskelis, the editor of our *Twentieth Century*. Shortly afterwards, I learned that more arrests were in the offing and that my name was included on the list. When I conveyed this information to the Bishop of Kaunas, he advised me to get out of the country at once.

There were only two avenues of escape from Russian-dominated Lithuania: Sweden and Germany. But in order to reach Sweden one needed to charter a boat; and even if one could have organized a group large enough to do so at such short notice, there was still no guarantee that one would be able to make the crossing, because the Russians kept the Baltic Sea heavily patrolled.

Germany seemed far more accessible. I made a brief foray in the direction of the German-Lithuanian border, just to investigate the possibilities; but when I returned to Kaunas and learned that the Soviets were already on my trail, I wasted no more time. Stopping only long enough to say good-bye to my mother, I crossed over into Germany on July 17th, 1940.

After spending some ten days in a refugee camp, I managed to make my way to Berlin, where I found living quarters near the Anhalterbahnhof and obtained permission from Bishop Preysing and from the Ministry of Culture to celebrate Mass in St. Lutgerus Church. Although some of the other refugees were planning to go on to Spain or to the United States, I wanted to stay as close to home as possible and to minister to the spiritual welfare of those Lithuanians who had also decided to remain in Germany. I tried to return to Lithuania as soon as I learned that the Russians had been driven out, but my request was denied. The Gestapo had issued strict orders prohibiting refugee clergymen from returning to their native lands.

By contrast, the German clergy seemed to be comparatively free to do as they wished, and since we found ourselves stranded in Germany, so to speak, we began to follow their example. We organized get-togethers, we established a weekend kindergarten and a young people's club, and we even set up a modest library. We prepared our children for Communion and had them confirmed by the Bishop of Berlin himself. Although we experienced no visible interference from the Gestapo, we soon learned that they were observing our activities very closely.

There were other indications that all was not well. During a conference of Spiritual Advisors to Catholic Youth, I listened as one of the speakers, a Monsignor Volk, warned us that every priest in Germany should prepare himself for the eventuality of being locked up in a concentration camp at a moment's notice.

"Have your bags packed," he told us. "Only make sure that you leave someone behind to take your place."

Unfortunately, the Monsignor's words had no lasting effect on me at the time. The idea of a concentration camp seemed so remote, and I was much more impressed to learn that the German clergy had been successful in keeping some of their young people out of the clutches of the *Hitlerjugend*.

The case was quite different in German-occupied Lithuania, where there was no more religious freedom than there had been under the Russian rule. Church activities had been drastically curtailed. Catholic organizations and Catholic publications had been outlawed. Young men who had attended Mass were often seized as they left the churches and shipped off to Germany to work in slave labor gangs. Yet, for some reason, those of us who had come to Germany as refugees were still allowed to live in comparative safety; and I took advantage of what I believed to be the prestige of my office in order to alleviate the hardships of my less fortunate countrymen.

For example, I approached the Gestapo in Koenigsberg and in Tilsit for the purpose of seeing whether I could not obtain the release of a number of Lithuanians, including three priests, from Soldau Concentration Camp. I actually began negotiations with a certain Dr. Scholz of the Tilsit Gestapo, but nothing came of them. I was not even allowed inside Soldau, although I did manage to talk with a group of inmates who had been assigned to farm labor details outside the prison walls.

Another time, the Lithuanian Association in Berlin sent me to investigate how certain Lithuanian forced labor gangs in Thuringia and Saxony were being treated. The condition of the Thuringian group, especially of those men who worked in the vicinity of Chemnitz and Leipzig, was deplorable. They lived in overcrowded filthy barracks, which lacked even the most primitive hygienic facilities. I conducted religious services for them, to which I also invited the Argentinian Consul Barranti, whose wife happened to be Lithuanian. This, however, turned out to be a mistake. The public Mass and the Argentinian Consul's presence aroused the wrath of the Nazis so much so that the Supervisor of Labor at Chemnitz took me to task for having meddled in something that was none of my business. There might have been further repercussions, at least according to a certain Lithuanian journalist in Berlin who cautioned me that the Gestapo was after my hide. But nothing happened during the next few days, and after that I obtained a two-week permit to visit Lithuania because my mother had fallen seriously ill. (She died four months later.)

As soon as my colleagues at the University learned that I had come back, they exerted their influence and managed to obtain permission for me

to remain in Lithuania and to resume my lectures and pastoral duties. I instituted a series of culture-oriented religious services, which attracted many of the actors, opera singers, ballet dancers, and art students in Kaunas. I also became advisor to a group of young writers who were preparing a program of religious themes for the Lithuanian National Theatre. On Sundays, I delivered rather forceful sermons from the pulpit of St. Michael's Church in Kaunas. Lulled by the comparative freedom I had enjoyed in Germany, I had no qualms about saying exactly what I felt. The Rector of the Seminary once tactfully suggested that I refrain from preaching for a while, but I paid no attention to him. I should have listened, because it turned out that the police were taking down all of my sermons in shorthand.

Around this time the Germans began to meet with serious reversals along the Eastern Front; and, in order to implement their diminishing manpower, they decided to incorporate all able-bodied Lithuanians into an S.S. Legion. But they did not succeed. Our government refused to sanction such an act, and our young men scattered throughout the land to avoid conscription. Infuriated, the Germans retaliated by first of all shutting down the University; we lived in daily fear of what other reprisals might follow.

On March 15th, 1943, the Rector of the Seminary told me to get out of Kaunas for a few days, but again I paid no attention to his advice. For one thing, I had nowhere else to go; and, for another, I could not see why the Germans would want to arrest me, especially since I had no political affiliations whatsoever.

The following morning I said Mass and went about my business as usual. When I came home in the afternoon, I tried to telephone one of my colleagues, but was told by his wife that he was out. I waited and then decided to try him again, but at that very moment my doorbell sounded and I hurried to answer it. Outside the door stood two German police officers accompanied by my S.S. acquaintance from Tilsit, Dr. Scholz. As the policemen fell to ransacking my apartment, Dr. Scholz apologized for the search and ordered me to pack.

"You're going to Germany at once."

"But I just returned from Germany," I exclaimed. "Why do I have to go back there?"

"You'll find out when you get to headquarters," Scholz replied.

Just then the telephone rang. The wife of the colleague I had been trying to contact was calling back to inform me that he still had not returned.

"Bid him good-bye for me," I told her. "I'm being sent heaven only knows where."

After the house search had been completed, I was hustled into a waiting police van and taken to Gestapo Headquarters. Just as the van pulled up outside the building, I spotted Dr. Kučas, the director of our Fourth Gymnasium. He was apparently being brought in, too.

Nor were we the only ones to be arrested that day. Twenty-nine Lithuanians had been picked up altogether; among them were army officers, educators, high-ranking public and civil officials, and even a few students. We spent the night crowded together in the cellar of the Gestapo building, and the following morning we were put aboard a bus with strict orders not to make trouble. Perhaps to insure our good conduct, police guards occupied the front and back seats of the bus, while two cars filled with armed S.S.-men – one car in front of the bus and the other directly behind it – accompanied us all the way out of Lithuania.

Because there had been no trial and absolutely no interrogation, we assumed that we would probably be set free as soon as we reached Germany. I spent most of the journey thinking about what I would do when I returned to Berlin. I had every intention of resuming my charitable activities among the Lithuanian labor [groups], and I wondered whether [if] they hadn't already received the ten thousand prayer books which I had secretly prepared and arranged to be printed in Kaunas.

In this manner the hours slipped by. Towards evening we crossed the border and found ourselves in Tilsit. But as soon as we climbed out of the bus, we realized that all our plans had been nothing more than idle delusions. Before us loomed another prison; although we did not know it yet, we were destined to see little else for a long, long time.

*Postscript: Rev. Yla was incarcerated in Stutthof from 1943 to March 1945, when he escaped at the approach of the Soviet forces. From 1945 to 1950, he was a member of the Vatican Mission for Lithuanians in Germany and Austria, serving as adviser on pastoral matters, Catholic Action, and as director of the press section. He came to the United States in 1950. * ◆*

*Reference: *Encyclopedia Lituanica*, VOL. VI, p.274-276.

C u r r e n t E v e n t s

Rewinding to the Sidney Olympics

Let's recap with the opinions of sportswriters on the Sidney 2000 Olympics with this following letter from Marija Danguolė Navickas and excerpts from the *Los Angeles Times* article compilation entitled, "It's Almost a Nightmare for U.S. Men".

"Right after the 1988 Olympics, when the Soviet basketball team beat the U.S. for the gold medal. I called the Los Angeles Times sports desk and asked to speak to a sportswriter. When one answered the phone, I mentioned the fact that the Soviet team was spearheaded by four Lithuanian players and that there was a good human interest story in that. He curtly answered, "I don't do politics" and hung up on me. He didn't even give me a chance to tell him about Frank Lubin and the Southern California connection to Lithuanian basketball.

Imagine my surprise, when I opened your Olympics 2000 section after the close semifinal game between the US and Lithuania, and there, twelve years later, was the wonderful article by Randy Harvey - Frank Lubin, politics and all! It was a great tribute to the team and to the history of basketball in Lithuania.

I never did get that other sportswriter's name. Too bad he missed his chance!"

"Lithuania's valiant effort proves that the rest of the world is no longer intimidated by NBA stars."

- Randy Harvey

SYDNEY, Australia — I had a dream last night.

The Dream Team lost. The U.S. men's basketball team was leading by two points in the Olympic semifinals, time was running out, Lithuania's Sarunas Jasikevicius shot a three-pointer with Antonio McDyess charging at him, the ball went in, and a delirious crowd of 14,653 at the Super-Dome, many wearing their tie-dyed Grateful Dead T-shirts, charged onto the floor and carried the winners off on their shoulders.

THE DREAM TEAM LOST!

I said it was a dream. Here's what really happened Friday night: The U.S. men's basketball team was leading by two points, time was running out, Lithuania's Jasikevicius shot a three-pointer with McDyess charging at him, it was an air ball.

The dream team won. 85-83.

But the Lithuanian kids almost won, and that counts for something, except in their locker room, where they had sat and talked about it at halftime and decided that they could win, that they were *going* to win.

I don't know where they got that idea. Maybe it was in their capital city, Vilnius, a decade or so ago, watching their fathers and their uncles and their older brothers take to the streets and stare down Soviet tanks.

They turned them back, winning independence for their Baltic republic after 52 years of Soviet oppression.

After seeing something like that, you think these Lithuanian kids were going to be intimidated by Vince Carter, Kevin Garnett, Alonzo Mourning and Jason Kidd?

Well, maybe — a little.

They had lost to the Americans by nine points a few nights before in a preliminary game, and, U.S. Coach Rudy Tomjanovich said, the score could have been closer.

But the difference was that nobody thought the Dream Team was ever in jeopardy that night, not even the Lithuanians.

"I think we had maybe two players who believed in that first game," said Donnie Nelson, a scout, consultant, advisor, assistant coach, head cheerleader — whatever you want to call him — for the Lithuanians ever since they gained their independence.

"Tonight we had nine or 10 players who believed."

Nelson also came back [from his trip to Lithuania] with an appreciation for Lithuania, its people, its culture and its history. He has even picked up some of the language over the years.

One of the things he learned was the story of Frank Lubin, the former UCLA star from Glendale who played for the United States in the first gold-medal basketball team in the 1936 Olympics, then went to his ancestral home in Lithuania and taught his people the game.

"They learned it so well that they would send their club teams down to Moscow and beat the teams from the Red Army and Spartak and everyone in the country would celebrate," Nelson said.

"That was the only way they had to strike back against one of the darkest forces in history."

Nelson didn't want to say that the Lithuanians took the United States to school in the game of international basketball, but that's what they did.

Nelson helped devise the game plan, so you can imagine how he felt when the Lithuanians came within a shot of winning the game.

Or maybe you can't.

There were too many mixed emotions for him during the second or so that Jasinevicius' final shot was in the air — mixed between seeing his mission completed that he still believes is far and away No. 1 in basketball, his country, lose.

The shot fell short. But, at least for one night, men's basketball in the Olympics was fun again. ♦

Reflections

Sr. Margarita Bareikaitė

A DAY FOR ALL SAINTS

On November first, we are celebrating All Saints Day.

Since the fourth century, we have always had a lively devotion to saints. In the eighth century, Pope Gregory III dedicated a chapel in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome to – all the saints that ever were in our midst and helping with our daily struggles after they were with the Lord. Since then we commemorate all saints on this day.

Saints are as diverse as their backgrounds might be. They have certain traits in common; traits that tell us something about our own spiritual journeys.

To abandon devotion to the saints is to divorce ourselves from a deep source of spiritual enrichment. For they are part of our community of faith. For nearly 2,000 years, Christians have honored and prayed to saints because they see in them God's grace at work in special ways. Saints also imbue some unique quality, which we hope to understand and ascertain in a small way.

You may ask what all saints have in common. All saints had sin. Peter denied Christ, Paul helped to kill Stephen, etc. The big dif-



ference between saints and the rest of us is that saints understand one thing well – that sin results from our imperfect relationship with God. Most saints knew how to turn suffering to sanctity, because they recalled and followed the example of Jesus.

Christians understand that their relationships with those who died in the faith were not ended but transformed. We venerate the saints, but do not worship them. They do not have power independent of the power of God. The ven-

eration of saints has historical and scriptural roots. We belong to a faith community that exists in this world and the next. We have heavenly friends and helpers, including our Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Just as we rely on the love of our friends in this world, so we should rely on these wonderful saints too in the next. Their love is God's love, for "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). To paraphrase the words of Vatican II: As Christian communion between people on their earthly pilgrimages brings us closer to Christ, so our community with the saints joins us to Christ.



SR. MARGARITA BAREIKAITĖ belongs to the Lithuanian order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Putnam, CT. She is also the Chairperson of the Religious Affairs Council for the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

**Attention!
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