
BRIDGES

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The Lithuanian Armed Forces...NATO's and Lithuania...Forest Brother...A New Cardinal

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

On February 27th, 2001 an "intelligent yet humble" (as described by Father Provincial Donald Petraitis, MIC in his eulogy) Marian father, scholar, author, friend, uncle, and brother passed away. Reverend Vytautas Bagdanavičius, MIC, was 92 years old.

His humility and quiet goodness was felt by all who knew him. He was keenly observant and a listener. In conversation, he focused on only those who were speaking — making them feel that they were important and unique. Rev. Bagdanavičius adhered to the basic tenet derived from Thomas Aquinas' works that man was inherently good. All of his writings and personality reflected these thoughts.

In addition to writing for *Draugas*, a Lithuanian-language daily newspaper based in Chicago, IL, Rev. Bagdanavičius authored about 1,000 written works on theology, ethnicity, and philosophy. Many of his writings centered on what lessons we, humans of this day and age, can absorb and make our own based on what had been and never had seen fruition. The intent to help better the lives of those around him was key to the Reverend's thoughts.

Rev. Vytautas was always very mindful of the legacy he was living. He came from a long line of priests dedicated to Lithuania, her people, and culture — his uncles Bishop Pranciškus Petras Bučys, Rev. Andrius Stasys Bučys, Rev. Andrius Povilaitis, and Rev. Pranciškus Bučys. All of whom made a significant impact on Rev. Bagdanavičius' life. He shared the knowledge of his family's history with his relatives — allowing us all to feel that goodness can be felt throughout the ages and throughout each generation.

Children have a way of recognizing the true soul of a person. Rev. Bagdanavičius opened his heart to children and treated them as vitally important to the future of Lithuania's cultural existence here in America. When his nephew's sons, my husband's and mine, started calling the Reverend "dėdė Kunigaikštis" (uncle the duke) instead of how we all addressed him, "dėdė Kunigėlis" (uncle the priest), we decided not to correct them. He was truly the intelligent yet humble soul who enlightened many through his goodness.

Rasa Ardyš-Juška

Editor

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BRIDGES

- 4** **Lithuanian Armed Forces: Ready for NATO Integration**
Colonel Romas Kilikauskas (USAF/Ret)
Lithuania stands waiting for the call from NATO.
- 10** **The Swedish and Lithuanians Meet for Joint Projects**
Baltic News Service
A partnership helps Lithuania become fully responsible for defending its territory.
- 11** **Lithuania and NATO... A Look at NATO's Impact on Events and Opinions**
A compilation of reports from different sources focusing on changes for Lithuania.
- 17** **Our Forest Brother**
Jeanne Dorr
A long-forgotten hero is finally remembered.
- 23** **Lithuania's New Cardinal**
Sister Ona Mikailaitė
Audrys Juozas Backis inducted as Cardinal.
- DEPARTMENTS. . .**
- 2** **PERSPECTIVES**
- 25** **REFLECTIONS**
The Gift of Imagination
Monsignor Jurgis Šarauskas
- 26** **RECENT NEWS**

A Photographer From the Past

While wandering through the Art Museum at the World Lithuanian Center in Lemont, Illinois, photos from an era long past moved our souls.

According to the literature, "the series of photos were brought to New York by Rev. Msgr. Juozas Anatanavičius from Panevėžys, Lithuania in 1990. The Monsignor met Petras Ažuolas after Mass one Sunday at the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Brooklyn and showed him the photographs he had brought. Mr. Ažuolas immediately recognized the locale and the photographer, Jonas Dvariškis."

According to the Reverend, he had found the negatives in Pakruojis as a sixteen year-old during Stalin's reign of terror after the death of the mother of Jonas Dvariškis. He had rented a room in a boarding house where she previously lived. Her personal effects, including the negatives, were stored in a shed after her death. Antanavičius recognized their importance and hid them until Stalin's death.

Jonas Dvariškis's photos depict many aspects of Lithuanian life, including the cover photo of a Lithuanian soldier. What distinguishes these photos are the emotions that carry through from the faces and gestures of the people. They speak to the viewer — making their lives and conversations known by their expressive presentations.

According to Mary Ažuolas Nemickas and Vidas Nemickas, the present caretakers of the photographs, they are now showing them to the world.

For more information about the collected works in book format, write to Galerija, 4317 S. Wisconsin Ave., Stickney, IL 60402.

On the cover:
A Lithuanian soldier,
circa 1930s, whose photo-
graph was taken by
Jonas Dvariškis.

Colonel Romas Kilikauskas (USAF/Ret)

LITHUANIAN ARMED FORCES: Ready for NATO Integration

In September of this year, Lt. Gen. David S. Weisman, the senior United States military representative to NATO, visited Lithuania for the first time. After inspecting the Lithuanian Armed Forces and meeting with President Valdas Adamkus, he publicly declared, "Lithuania is one of the best prepared candidates for NATO." A month earlier the Danish Land Forces Commander, Maj. Gen. Jan Scharling came to inspect the Lithuanian troops. Before leaving he said, "I am astonished at how much progress the Lithuanian Armed Forces have made in such a short period of time." Those were only two of numerous NATO military and civilian representatives who visited Lithuania during the past year and made highly favorable comments about the Lithuanian Armed Forces and their preparations for integration into NATO.

The NATO General Secretary, Lord George Robertson, and the Secretary of Defense of the United States, William Cohen, also visited Lithuania for the first time this past summer and clearly told the Lithuanian people that the door to NATO will remain open to those who desire such membership and are prepared for it. "Nobody will have veto power in this process!"

These and many other senior NATO officials would not make such comments if they were not convinced that Lithuania is determined to join NATO and is seriously preparing for it. They also understand that Lithuania is not only seek-



ing security guarantees provided by NATO, but is also contributing to the common good of the Alliance by participating in peacekeeping operations. Over 600 Lithuanian soldiers have served in peacekeeping operations in

Bosnia and Kosovo since 1994, and they have participated in numerous joint peacekeeping exercises in Lithuania and various other NATO nations. The Italian Alpine Brigade "Julia" deployed 1,000 troops to Lithuania in 2000 and 800 in 1999 for joint maneuvers with Lithuanian forces. These operations and maneuvers have played an important role in helping Westernize the Lithuanian Armed Forces and make them compatible with NATO strategy, tactics and doctrine.

LITHUANIAN ARMED FORCES STARTED FROM ZERO

It is very important to remember that the creation of the Lithuanian Armed Forces started from zero after the reestablishment of Independence in 1990. There was no shortage of volunteers, but there were no military statutes, no regulations, no uniforms, and certainly no weapons. And despite the neglect of the Lithuanian Armed Forces during the Labor Worker's Party (LDDP) rule (1992-1996), today Lithuanian Armed Forces are rated as the best of the nine NATO candidates in Europe.

The progress made in the period 1996 to 2000 has been nothing short of astonishing. The Sei-

COLONEL ROMAS KILIKAUSKAS (USAF/RET) is the former Lithuanian Defense Vice-Minister.

mas passed legislation gradually raising the defense budget from 0.5 percent of GDP prior to 1996 to two percent of GDP by 2001. Training reforms were initiated to introduce Western standards at the Lithuanian Military Academy in Vilnius, the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy in Kaunas, and the Basic Training Center in Rukla (near Kaunas).

With assistance from the British, Danish, and U.S. training teams, the old soviet style officer and soldier has been transformed into a proud and modern Lithuanian soldier with Western values. A great deal of credit for this transformation goes to Brig. Gen. Jonas Kronkaitis, the present Commander of the Armed Forces, who served 26 years in the United States Army and in 1996 gave up a high paying civilian position to return to his country of birth and help organize and rebuild the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Former U.S. Marine Colonel Algis Garsys of Florida and former U.S. Air Force Colonel Romas Kilikauskas joined him in this important undertaking.

GROWTH OF LITHUANIAN ARMED FORCES

At this time, the Lithuanian land forces consist of about 8,000 soldiers, the Air Force has 850 personnel, and the Navy performs its mission with 570 sailors. Approximately 12,000 men and women of all ages are serving in the National Volunteer Forces known as KASP (Krašto apsaugos savanorių pajėgos). Many officers and NCOs speak English, German or French.

Of the nearly 2,000 Lithuanian officers, more than half have completed various types of training courses in the United States and other NATO nations. In 1999, one Lithuanian cadet graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. This year two Lithuanian cadets graduated from the prestigious U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, and one more from the U.S. Naval Academy. Three Lithuanian cadets are currently studying in these two academies; while another Lithuanian has for the first time been accepted to the West Point Military Academy in New York. Thirteen Lithuanian colonels and lieutenant colonels have completed the prestigious two-year German Command and Staff College in Hamburg. They are now occu-

pying key positions in Lithuania as commanders of the Iron Wolf Brigade, the Volunteer Forces, the Air Force, and the Military Academy. One graduate of Hamburg is a special military advisor to President Valdas Adamkus. It would take a book to name all the officers and soldiers who have graduated from the various military training schools in the West, but suffice it to say that more than 1,200 have completed such training in the U.S., Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Norway, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Canada, and Poland – most of them during the last four years.

Currently about 250 are being sent abroad for training each year. It is important to keep in mind that all this training is being provided free of cost. One can only imagine the value of this assistance when you consider that one year at a U.S. military academy costs \$76,000 per cadet. The U.S. alone contributes approximately one million dollars per year for training under the "International Education and Training Program" (IMET).

Two years ago Gen. Kronkaitis campaigned intensely and successfully to establish a centralized basic training center in a former soviet army caserne in Rukla near Kaunas. Construction work to renew the old dilapidated facilities began two years ago. This new Training Regiment is now composed of three battalions with the fourth expected to be established in the coming year. This modern training facility provides draftees with 11 weeks of basic military training in accordance with NATO standards. A team of British military experts actually trained 105 Lithuanian military instructors who are now training additional Lithuanian instructors and providing basic training to the draftees. Rukla now consists of four modern 4-story casernes, two training buildings, two mess halls, a medical clinic, and a large training area.

At this time the Regiment is capable of accommodating 800 draftees at one time, but capacity will soon rise to 2,500. NATO visitors who have been at Rukla acknowledge that this is the best military training center in all of Central Europe. The parents of the soldiers have become frequent visitors at this center and are extremely pleased with the way their children are trained

and treated. The old soviet habits of physically abusing or harassing and hazing lower rank soldiers are a thing of the past in Lithuania. An officer or NCO who does not show respect for lower ranking soldiers has no future in the Lithuanian Armed Forces today.

MILITARY TRAINING REFORMS

Almost a year ago the Minister of National Defense, Česlovas Stankevičius appointed a Reform Commission to prepare military reform recommendations at the Military Academy in Vilnius where 500 cadets spend four years preparing themselves for a commission in the Armed Forces. Members of this Commission consisted of a Lithuanian academician from the Vilnius Semi-Conductor Institute, several senior Lithuanian officers, a U.S. Air Force colonel who is a graduate of the Air Force Academy, and a British lieutenant colonel who is a graduate of Sandhurst Military College. The author had the privilege to serve as head of this Commission and to submit a large package of reform recommendations to the Minister in February 2000. Some of the recommended reforms began to be implemented immediately.

Colonel Algis Vaičeliūnas, a graduate of the German Command and Staff College, was appointed the new Academy commander, and he immediately began work on a new Western academic curriculum as well as the improvement of living and training conditions of the cadets.

Work on the renovation of new cadet living quarters started during the summer [of 2000] and has already been completed. Instead of being crowded, ten to a room without any closets and tables for studying, they are now [accommodations] for four to a room. Plans call for each room to be equipped with a computer. For the first time in Lithuania's history the Academy doors were opened to women.

There were 62 applicants this past spring of which nine were accepted and eight made it past the most difficult basic training phase. Also this year, the cadets received new uniforms, which gives them the prestige and recognition that they richly deserve. English language training will be intensified so that each cadet will reach a 3-3 level of competency upon graduation and can

immediately be considered for assignment to a NATO post.

BACKBONE OF THE ARMY

The non-commissioned officer (sergeant) is viewed in all NATO countries as the backbone of the army. This is how it will be soon in Lithuania. The General S. Raštikis NCO Academy in Kaunas is being completely renovated and modernized. It will reopen in 2001 and will provide three levels of NCO training (basic, mid, and senior level). The training is designed to professionalize the NCO and raise his prestige to the level that is customary in most Western armies. In line with this, Gen. Kronkaitis recently appointed a Command Sergeant Major who has an office in the General Staff and whose primary function is to represent the enlisted personnel of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. He will soon have an opportunity to visit other NATO sergeant majors and learn from them the functions of this office.

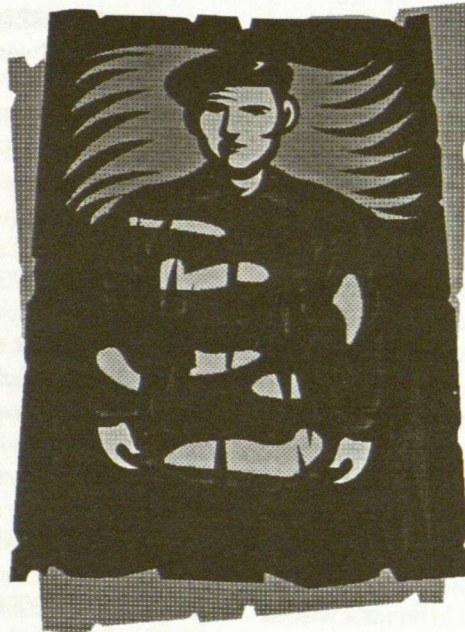
As of early 2000 a Training and Doctrine Command was established in Lithuania, which is responsible for coordinating all military training, for publishing training manuals, for organizing English language training, and for ensuring that all training in the Armed Forces is conducted in conformance with Western doctrine and concepts. There are currently ten modern English language-training centers in the Lithuanian Armed Forces, which were donated by the United States. Each year approximately 600 personnel [attend] language courses at various levels. The Training and Doctrine Command is the most important institution for establishing training standards throughout all of the units and ensuring that they are observed.

This is only a short overview of the Lithuanian military training system and quality of life improvements being made in the Armed Forces today. According to the current military reform plan the highest priority issue is the well being of the officers and soldiers. Only a professionally trained, highly motivated and respected soldier can best accomplish his primary mission: standing ready to defend his Homeland and its people as well as being prepared to contribute to the common defense needs of the North Atlantic Al-

liance – NATO.

WEAPONS, AMMUNITION AND EQUIPMENT

The days when all types of weapons were non-existent or in short supply in Lithuania are over. Now the military is using weapons and equipment totally compatible with NATO standards – one of the most important requirements for NATO membership. Earlier the Lithuanian Armed Forces were compelled to purchase much of what they needed with funds from the national budget. However, during the past two years Lithuania received large shipments of weapons, ammunition, and equipment free of charge from various NATO and non-NATO Scandinavian countries. For the sake of brevity, here are only a few more important examples of the type of assistance Lithuania has received in the past two years:



nia man the Center.

- a. In September 2000, Sweden donated the L-70 Air Defense System consisting of anti-aircraft artillery guns, radars, trucks, and other related equipment. The convoy of trucks and weapons extended for about one kilometer when it was unloaded at the Port of Klaipėda and moved to the newly established Air Defense Battalion near Šiauliai.
- b. In June 2000, Lithuania celebrated the opening of the Regional Air Defense Coordination Center in Karmelava, near Kaunas. This center was built by Lithuania, but all the modern electronic equipment valued at \$10 million was donated and installed by the United States. Norway donated relay equipment and a modern training facility, which were erected by Lithuania. This Center is a joint Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian air space monitoring site which provides real-time air space pictures to all three countries. Officers and NCOs from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania man the Center.
- c. In August 2000, Vice-Minister of Defense Romas Kilikauskas and Commander of the Iron Wolf Brigade, Colonel Jonas Zukas, were invited to Germany for the official rollout ceremony of the first of about 150 M-113 totally recon-ditioned armored personnel carriers provided to Lithuania by Germany. It is estimated that each of these vehicles is valued at approximately \$250,000. The German Ministry of Defense hosted an impressive ceremony in the Oranienburg Vehicle Plant, which was attended by over 100 senior military and civilian German government officials. The only Lithuanian newspaper journalist posted in Berlin and invited to cover this event turned out to be “too busy” to attend. Fortunately, the German press provided excellent coverage of this important symbol of military cooperation. The first ten personnel carriers were delivered [to] Klaipėda [in October 2000], and it is anticipated that all of them will be in Lithuania by the end of 2001. The German government turned over these vehicles for a symbolic price and even paid for sea transport to Klaipėda.
- d. In Nov 1999, Germany donated to the Lithuanian Navy the mine hunter "Suduvis". This Limburg Class vessel was totally recon-ditioned at a cost of \$1.1 million before it was delivered to Klaipėda and turned over to a 42-man Lithuanian crew, which was trained to operate this vessel in Germany free of charge. In late 2000, a second Limburg Class mine hunter was turned over to the Lithuanian Navy. A German officer was posted permanently in Klaipėda to assist with any problems that our crews may experience. The value of this vessel is estimated to be ap-

proximately \$15 million.

- e. In 1999, the United States donated to Lithuania 40,000 M-14 rifles and several million rounds of ammunition. All the rifles and ammunition were delivered to Klaipėda free of charge. At current prices this package is worth approximately \$40 million. However, instead of expressing gratitude to Gen. Kronkaitis for negotiating this donation package, some of the left-wing Lithuanian politicians and journalists called him an idiot (*nemokša*). Apparently, some still believe it would be wiser to spend taxpayer funds purchasing Kalashnikovs from Moscow. It was interesting to note that the so-called weapons specialists who criticized the M-14 had actually never seen one. The M-14 is a highly accurate weapon still in use by the U.S. Marine Corps. Many in Lithuania will be converted to sniper rifles.
- f. In 2000, the German government donated 2,000 brand new MG-3 machine guns and ammunition. These are highly rated NATO caliber weapons, which will be used by the ground forces and the volunteers.
- g. Denmark will soon turn over to Lithuania an entire battalion of 105 mm artillery guns and will provide the necessary training in handling these weapons.
- h. Two years ago a Lithuanian Military Engineer Battalion and Engineer School was established in Kaunas with the assistance of Denmark. The Engineer Battalion and school are now fully operational and are providing training for officers and soldiers from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.
- i. A new Military Cartographic Center will be opened in Kaunas in 2001. The facility will be equipped with state-of-the-art map-making equipment manufactured in Germany and paid for by the United States – a total of \$3 million. This Center will produce military and civilian maps and will meet all the needs of Lithuanian Armed Forces.

- j. Two of ten Lithuanian ground forces battalions have been fully equipped with modern “Harris Corp.” (New York) secure radio equipment fully compatible with NATO requirements. Eight remaining battalions are currently only partially equipped but expect to be fully equipped within the next two years. All of this equipment was funded under the U.S. “Foreign Military Financing” authorized by the U.S. Congress. Lithuania's share was \$3.6 million in 2000, but it is expected to reach \$6.5 million in 2001. In addition, military hand-held radios will soon be assembled in Lithuania by a joint Polish-Lithuanian venture.

PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

It is clear to most observers that Lithuania is preparing to defend itself and at the same time [is creating] a military force capable of integrating into NATO. Both of these requirements are vital to Lithuania.

Lithuanian officers and soldiers have been involved in peacekeeping operations for about six years with over 600 personnel. Western military experts have assessed their contribution to peacekeeping very favorably. Even Lithuanian journalists who have made careers of reporting only negative information about Lithuania's Armed Force have recently become more objective in assessing [the Force's] contribution to national security. A good example is a recent article in “Lietuvos Aidas,” which had the following to say about Lithuanian officers:

“The word “soldier” has been associated with soviet-era officers and their low culture; curse words served as their official military language. Now it is different: after ten years of Independence, Lithuanian officers are considered the nation's elite. They are graduates of foreign military academies and are every bit equal to their Western counterparts. They attend lessons in etiquette and dance, they speak fluent English, they are dedicated to the defense of Lithuania, they believe in God, and they are role models to the younger soldiers. According to today's soldier, you are not a man if you have not served in the army.”

NOT EVERYBODY IS PLEASED WITH PROGRESS

Not everybody is supportive or happy with the progress of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. There are those left-wing forces that use every opportunity to denigrate and even ridicule the accomplishments within the national defense structure. Some claim it is too expensive for Lithuania to maintain an army, others claim neutrality is a better option, and yet others are still stuck to old soviet mentality and believe that Lithuanian Armed Forces should be modeled according to old soviet army standards. Some believe there is no need to prepare for NATO membership because Lithuania will never be accepted.

All of these critics would be well served to remember the words of Lord Robertson and other senior NATO nation officials who have clearly stated: **The doors to NATO will be open to those who desire membership and are prepared for it!** Those who believe that the military defense budget is too high should take time out to reflect on the following statistics: in 1999, national defense cost each Lithuanian citizen a total of \$30. In the same year, the per capita expenditure for alcohol in Lithuania was \$180!

The average expenditure on defense for all 19 NATO members in 1999 was 2.5 percent of the Gross National Product (GDP). In the same year, Lithuania spent 1.1 percent; in 2000, Lithuania spent approximately 1.5 percent of the GDP; and in 2001, the budget has been approved for 1.95 percent of GDP. This is indeed a small price to pay for those who cherish freedom and independence!

Lithuania is too small to be able to provide for its own national defense, and without NATO it will forever remain part of Russia's "near abroad." When Lithuania is a full member of NATO, any potential aggressor will have to reflect on Article 5 of the NATO Charter before contemplating any action that could lead to a conflict. It reads as follows:

"The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North American shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-

defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."

This is why it is so important for Lithuania to enter NATO as soon as possible. NATO will provide the security and stability that is needed for us to live in peace and develop an economy that will raise the standard of living comparable to that of the rest of Western World. During the first year in NATO, foreign investments in Poland doubled. Why? Because investors tend to invest their capital in secure and stable democratic nations.

First, second, and third generation Lithuanian Americans can play an important role in helping our country achieve NATO membership. We need to urge our local, state, and federal government officials to support Lithuania's entry into NATO during the next expansion round scheduled for early 2002. We should all take the time to write letters to newspapers, magazines, and to members of Congress and State representatives urging them to support our cause. Our people suffered for over 50 years under brutal soviet rule, and we must do whatever we can so that the events of June 1940 are never repeated. We must also emphatically make the point that by including Lithuania in NATO the United States will acquire a strong friend and ally who will help maintain security and stability in Europe.

UPDATE ON HASTERT

Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dennis J. Hastert met with Pres. Adamkus, Parliamentary Chairman Arturas Paulauskas, Prime Minister Rolandas Paksas and key ministers on March 23rd in Vilnius.

In Hastert's speech to the Seimas (parliament), he said, "I pledge to you that if Lithuania invests the resources necessary to meet the requirements of NATO membership, I will do all in my power to bring Lithuania into the alliance in 2002. I intend to work side-by-side with Pres. Bush, Vice Pres. Cheney, and Secretaries Powell and Rumsfeld to make this a reality." ♦

The Swedish and Lithuanians Meet for Joint Projects

VILNIUS, Mar 16, BNS - The commander of the Lithuanian military, Brigadier general Jonas Kronkaitis, absorbed Sweden's military experience during his trip to Sweden in mid-March. Swedish Armed Forces Chief general Johan Hederstedt had invited him to visit the headquarters of the Swedish armed forces where Kronkaitis briefed high officers in the Swedish military on restructuring the Lithuanian military and the creation of the new infrastructure.

Kronkaitis told BNS that the Swedish chiefs of staff praised Lithuania's national defense concept, which draws on Swedish expertise.

The commanders of both national militaries met with Swedish defense minister Bjorn von Sydow during the visit. Kronkaitis took the opportunity to thank the Swedish defense minister for supplying military and material aid, which allowed the Lithuanian defense system to spend more on training of soldiers, improvement of their welfare, and the creation of infrastructure.

Plans for further cooperation until 2004 were discussed. Sweden has been an active supporter of Lithuania and the other Baltic states over the last few years. Sweden is currently reducing its armed forces from more than 20 brigades down to just eight, and is transferring its new surplus of military supplies to the Baltic States. The Lithuanian Armed Forces headquarters estimates Lithuania received aid worth more than three million USD in the year 2000. Swedish military aid this year is set to come to something like 2.5 million USD. About 120 transport vehicles laden with military equipment and technology have arrived in Lithuania from Sweden since November 2000.

The Lithuanian Air Force is still making an inventory of equipment from one air defense battalion it got from Sweden last fall, and the first shipments of varied equipment for the creation of a military medical battalion are arriving in Kaunas, Lithuania.

The Lithuanian military's Military Medical Service is carrying out a joint project with Sweden called BALTMED for training medical technicians and supplying medical equipment and medicine.

Lithuania's Military Supply Department has received 250 company field kitchen units with the same number still to be shipped.

Kronkaitis said Sweden will also donate all equipment for one infantry battalion, the staff of one engineering company and one headquarters command company this year. If Lithuania wishes, Sweden is prepared to send the complete equipment for a second infantry battalion, from personal hygiene devices to anti-tank weapons.

Kronkaitis presented the commander of the Royal Swedish Military Forces an invitation to visit Lithuania as soon as both countries can agree on an appropriate date.

Torsten Lind, the vice-admiral of the Swedish naval fleet, visited Lithuania during the week of March 13th to inspect Lithuanian naval forces. Lind remarked during his visit that Sweden is helping the three Baltic States to restore their military structures and wants to continue cooperation in this area. While visiting the headquarters of Lithuania's naval forces, Lind said the Lithuanian fleet has a defensive posture and is capable of accepting full responsibility for defending the country's territorial seas. ◆

Lithuania and NATO...

A Look at NATO's Impact on Events and Opinions

Senator Jesse Helms' Views

Reported by Tadas Somma

In his speech on January 11, 2001, before the American Enterprise Institute, Senator Jesse Helms announced his agenda for the upcoming Session of Congress. He specified four major goals, which are: NATO membership for the Baltic States, freedom for Cuba, support for continued independence of Taiwan, and an ABM Defense System for the U.S.

Senator Helms has always been a supporter of Captive Nations and of freedom for peoples everywhere, mainly because it is in the interest of this country. However, he had opponents who preferred appeasement as a way to reduce the arms race, or those who opposed him for purely partisan reasons. This now has changed, since for the first time in his Congressional career his party controls both Houses of Congress and the White House. In view of the stature of Senator Helms in matters of foreign policy among his peers, we now have an opportunity to pass NATO membership for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and to remove those countries from the Russian sphere of influence of her "near abroad".

It is an opportunity and not a sure thing! We still need to win over some members of Congress and to educate others. I am sure that LAC members and others of Baltic descent can come up with many good arguments in addition to those listed on the LAC web site and that many can express them very eloquently.

I would, therefore, urge everyone to write a letter of support to Senator Helms, to send letters to members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Washington, DC 20510-6225) and to write their own Senators and Representatives. In addi-

tion, please pray for Senator Helms, who is getting up in years and is not in the best of health.

The following excerpt is from Senator Helms' speech entitled "Towards a Compassionate Conservative Foreign Policy".

"Perhaps the greatest moral challenge we face at the dawn of a new century is to right the wrongs perpetrated in the last century at Yalta, when the West abandoned the nations of Central and Eastern Europe to Stalin and a life of servitude behind the Iron Curtain.

We began the process of righting that wrong in 1998, when the Senate voted to admit Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into the NATO alliance. I consider it one of my proudest moments as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to have helped usher in those three nations' admission to NATO, and thus to have helped them secure their rightful place in the community of Western democracies.

But the admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic has not yet fully erased the scars of Yalta. During the Cold War, I was one of a group of Senators who fought to defend the independence of what came to be known as the "Captive Nations" (the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) — and who worked to make sure that the United States never recognized their illegal annexation by the Soviet Union.

With the collapse of Communism, those nations finally achieved their rightful independence from Russian occupation and domination. Yet Russia still looms menacingly over these countries. In looking at the current Russian government, one

gets the distinct impression that the Russian leadership considers Baltic independence to be a temporary phenomenon. That is an impression that the Russians cannot be allowed to long entertain.

Just as we never recognized the Soviet annexation of the Baltic States, we must not repeat the mistakes of the 1940s today by acknowledging a Russian sphere of influence in what Russian leaders ominously call the "near abroad." These nations' independence will never be fully secure until they are safe from the threat of Russian domination and are fully integrated into the community of Western democracies.

I intend to work with the Bush Administration to ensure that the Baltic States are invited to join their neighbors Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic as members of the NATO alliance. This is vital not only for their security, but for ours as well. If we want good relations with Russia, we must show Russia's leaders an open path to good relations, while at the same time closing off their avenues to destructive behavior. That means taking the next step in the process of NATO expansion, by issuing invitations to the Baltic nations when NATO's leaders meet for the next alliance summit planned for 2002." ♦

Senator Richard J. Durbin Speaks to Lithuanians

From a letter on Lithuania's Independence Day commemoration delivered to the U.S. Senate on February 15th, 2001, read by Congressman John Shimkus.

Lithuania has now become a vibrant democracy. It has established a free-market economy and the rule of law.

Lithuania wants to be fully integrated into Europe, and is seeking membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

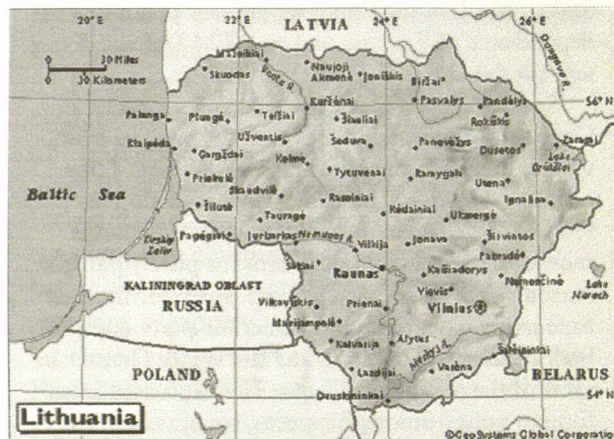
The United States always refused to recognize the Soviet domination of the Baltic States. The U.S. position was that it would only recognize a free and independent Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

What we celebrate this year is what we must help preserve next year and the year after that. We must carry on that principle today by being sure that Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are admitted into NATO as an unequivocal statement that we will never again tolerate domination of the Baltic States.

I support admitting the Baltic States into NATO, and I hope my colleagues here in the Senate will support their entry also in the next round of NATO expansion.

That debate we will save for another day, but I am sure all my colleagues can agree on the importance of Lithuania's contribution to freedom and independence for the former Soviet Republics and will join me in congratulating Lithuania on its National Day.

I am honored that my mother was born in the



tiny Lithuanian village of Jurbarkas many years ago; that she came to this country proud of her heritage, but determined to be an American citizen. My late brother, Bill, and I visited Lithuania a few years ago and found that we have cousins in Jurbarkas that we had not known we had. For our family, the Iron Curtain literally cut off the Lithuanian branch from their American cousins. This Senator, the son of that proud Lithuanian mother, now serves in this great body and takes pride in being able to rise and salute the Lithuanian people on their independence." ♦

A Joint NATO Appeal Proposed

Baltic News Service

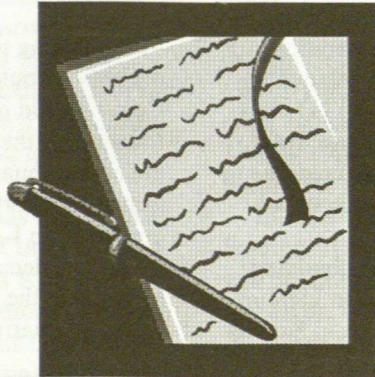
Lithuania's president Valdas Adamkus proposed to leaders from all nine candidate countries for NATO membership to make a joint appeal to the new U.S. administration declaring their resolve to continue down the path towards NATO membership.

Adamkus made the proposal March 15th to Latvian president Vaira Vike-Freiberga, who originally proposed the Baltic States make such an appeal during her current state visit in Vilnius.

Adamkus liked the idea, but said he felt an appeal by all nine candidates would carry more weight and would be more likely heard than one by the three Baltic

States, presidential spokeswoman Violeta Gaižauskaitė told BNS. She said the Latvian president agreed to Adamkus' proposal. They plan to draft the appeal via diplomatic channels with the other nine candidate states.

This would be the second joint statement by all



nine candidates. The first, the "Vilnius statement", was approved by the foreign ministers of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Macedonia at a conference in Vilnius in May 2000. That appeal called on NATO country leaders to make a decision on further expansion in the Alliance in 2002.

The Latvian president said, during her state visit to Lithuania, that it would be a mistake to invite just Lithuania to join NATO in the next wave of expansion. That Latvian position doesn't coincide with Lithuania's idea that an invitation for NATO membership for even

one Baltic State at the 2002 summit meeting would be a great victory for all three. Lithuania is considered one of the top candidates for membership and is expecting to get an invitation to join the Alliance from the next summit meeting. ♦

Poland Supports Lithuanian NATO Membership

Baltic News Service

Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek has reiterated Poland's support to Lithuanian European Union (EU) and NATO membership aspirations. Poland is also prepared to share with Lithuania its experience in adapting its national laws to the EU standards.

Both countries' integration into West European structures were discussed in a meeting between the Polish Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Lithuanian Seimas (parliament), Arturas Paulauskas, in Warsaw on March 15th.

Poland was admitted to NATO in 1999, while Lithuania is expecting an invitation to NATO at its summit meeting to be held in 2002. Both countries are conducting EU membership negotiations at present.

Paulauskas also met with the Polish Foreign Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski. Bartoszewski underscored the special character of Polish-Lithuanian cooperation. "We shall obviously support you in your NATO membership aspirations and in other international affairs. Our Lithuanian partners must know: we are determined to cooperate", Bartoszewski.

Paulauskas continued his visit in Poland on March 16th with a meeting with the Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski. ♦

New NATO Center Planned in Vilnius

Baltic News Service

Vilnius has plans to establish a new NATO Center before the spring session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly meets in the city at the end of May.

The center is to serve a number of functions, including coordinating action during preparations for Lithuanian entry to NATO, providing detailed information on NATO, and organizing NATO meeting and conference events. A press release from the Vilnius municipality said the center could be in operation as long as it takes for Lithuania to become a full NATO member.

Plans call for locating the center in a building currently housing the public organization Lietuvos Sajūdis in central Vilnius. Under the plan, Sajūdis

would release a portion of the building for establishing the NATO Center, but would remain a tenant. Sajūdis was the alliance of political forces that overthrew Soviet rule in Lithuania during elections in 1990.

According to the use agreement, the Vilnius municipality would supply facilities and the NATO Center would only have to pay for utilities. The founders of the NATO Center would be Sajūdis, the new Lithuanian NGO the Trans-Atlantic Integration Support Group, and the Lithuanian youth organization LATA.

A final decision on establishing the center is to be made at the end of March at a meeting of the center's initiative group. ♦

Lithuanian American Groups Pledge to Support NATO Aims

Baltic News Service

A group of Lithuanian organizations signed a statement taking on an obligation to seek that the Baltic country is invited to join NATO in 2002. The largest organizations of U.S. Lithuanians signed the first-ever statement of this sort during a meeting with the newly appointed Lithuanian Ambassador Vygaudas Usackas in Washington on March 11, the 10th anniversary of the country's independence.

"Today we pledge ourselves to pool our efforts and urge the U.S. administration and other NATO allies to invite Lithuania to join the ranks of NATO in 2002," read the resolution signed by leaders of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc., the Lithuanian American Council, Inc., the Knights of Lithuania, the Lithuanian American Democratic League, and the Lithuanian American Republican Federation.

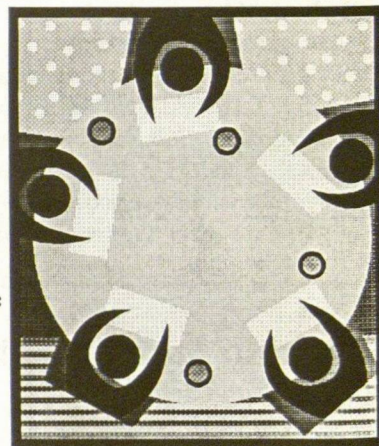
The document described membership in the 19-member organization as the best and most efficient measure to ensure Lithuania's security. The signatories of the document noted that about one million people of Lithuanian descent living in the U.S.

could unite their efforts and become an influential group and call upon the U.S. administration asking to support

Lithuania's NATO aims, the Lithuanian embassy to the U.S. said in a press release.

Usackas applauded the obligation undertaken by these organizations to work towards ensuring Lithuania's security. He noted that the occasion of the signing also gave it special meaning.

The new ambassador urged the organizations to continue their active cooperation with the U.S. Polish community and seek allies among other ethnic groups originating from Central and Eastern European countries. The head of the Lithuanian parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, Alvydas Medalinskis, and Foreign Vice-Minister Giedrius Čekuolis were also present at the meeting in Washington. ♦



Lithuanian MPs Approve Government NATO Integration Policy

Baltic News Service

Lithuania's Seimas's (parliament) committees on National Security and Defense, Foreign Affairs, and the NATO Commission approved the actions of the government in NATO membership preparation in a joint sitting on March 19th. It was the first joint sitting of two committees and one commission since the present term's Seimas started its work.

Lithuanian Defense Minister Linas Linkevičius, Foreign Minister Antanas Valionis, Commander of the Lithuanian Army Brig Gen Jonas Kronkaitis, and Chief Lithuanian NATO Integration Coordinator, Deputy Foreign Minister Giedrius Čekuolis introduced to the MPs the implementation process of the NATO membership action plan.

Lithuanian defense and foreign ministers are to participate in the North Atlantic Council sitting on March 29th in Brussels in which Lithuanian progress in the preparation for the Alliance member-

ship will be examined and future tasks will be indicated.

After the meeting of the government representatives in Brussels, one more sitting of the committees on National Security and Defense, Foreign Affairs, and the NATO Commission will be held. This meeting would discuss additional acts of law needed for the NATO integration.

In the words of Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Alvydas Medalinskas, the Seimas will possibly propose to adopt a ruling similar to that on the draft laws related to the EU integration. By this ruling, the Seimas approved many laws needed for EU integration.

"Today it is not enough to declare the willingness to enter NATO, we must also do everything in order to adopt all the needed legal documents regulating our way to NATO", Medalinskas told BNS. ♦

Lithuania Sends Replacements in Kosovo's NATO-led Mission

Baltic News Service

Lithuanian peacekeepers who served in Kosovo for the past six months will return home on March 23rd and 28th, with new units scheduled to head for the war-torn province on March 22nd, the Defense Ministry reported on March 20th.

The ceremony of seeing off the new 30-member group of the Duchess Birutė Battalion took place in the southern city of Alytus on March 20th. Officials of the Lithuanian Defense Ministry and the armed forces attended the festivities.

Troops of the Alytus-based division who will serve as a part of the joint Lithuanian-Polish battalion, LITPOLBAT, will be the fourth Lithuanian dispatch since the Baltic country joined the NATO-

led mission in 1999.

The Lithuanian unit participating in the Polish-Ukrainian POLUKRBAT group will be deployed close to the Macedonian border, some 100 kilometers from the country's capital Skopje and about 40 kilometers from Pristina, the capital of Kosovo.

Over the past several weeks, Macedonian armed forces have been trying to disperse armed groups of Albanian rebels trying to set up their bases in the country's territory. The zone where Lithuanian troops serve on the Macedonian border is calm, however, incidents could break out anytime. ♦

New House Concurrent Resolution Submitted

Congressman John Shimkus (20th District, IL) submitted the following resolution.

Recommending the integration of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Whereas the Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are undergoing a historic process of democratic and free market transformation after emerging from decades of brutal Soviet occupation;

Whereas each of these Baltic countries has conducted peaceful transfers of political power in Lithuania since 1990 and in Latvia and Estonia since 1991;

Whereas each of these Baltic countries has been exemplary and consistent in its respect for human rights and civil liberties; Whereas the governments of these Baltic countries have made consistent progress toward establishing civilian control of their militaries through active participation in the Partnership for Peace program and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) peace support operations;

Whereas Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are participating in the NATO-led multinational military force in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina;

Whereas Lithuania is consistently increasing its defense budget allocation and recently adopted a law providing that allocations for defense will be at least 2 percent of its GDP by 2001;

Whereas Latvia and Estonia are also consistently increasing their defense budget allocations in accordance with NATO requirements; Whereas each of these Baltic countries has clearly demonstrated its ability to operate with the military forces of NATO nations and under NATO standards;

Whereas former Secretary of Defense Perry stipulated five generalized standards for entrance into NATO: support for democracy, including toleration of ethnic diversity and respect for human rights; building a free market economy; civilian control of the military; promotion of good neighborly relations; and development of military inter-operability with NATO; and

Whereas each of these Baltic countries has satisfied these standards for entrance into NATO: Now, therefore, be it resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate 1 concurring), That it is the sense of Congress that;

- (1) Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are to be commended for their progress toward political and economic liberty and meeting the guidelines for prospective members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) set out in chapter 5 of the September 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement;
- (2) Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia would make an outstanding contribution toward furthering the goals of NATO should they become members;
- (3) extension of full NATO membership to these Baltic countries would contribute to stability, freedom, and peace in the Baltic region and Europe as a whole; and
- (4) with complete satisfaction of NATO guidelines and criteria for membership, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia should be invited to become full members of NATO. ♦

Jeanne Dorr

Our Forest Brother



For every hero's name written in a country's history books there are thousands of names we will never read about or ever see in print. They are no less brave than their counterparts; it is just the way circumstances happened that one person's name would be in the books while another's is almost forgotten. For a country with such a small population, Lithuania probably has more of these unsung heroes per capita than most nations. Yes, I am writing about the partisans or forest brothers who so bravely clung to the idea of a free Lithuania when it seemed like an impossible dream. Not only the men should be honored but also the women who were so important to this mission: women who risked their lives passing information, providing food, and hiding the forest brothers.

Probably one of the saddest realities was the Lithuanians who worked against their own people. This had to be like a knife in the hearts of the forest brothers. Please take a journey with me to meet one of the partisans. This is not a sad or depressing article, but rather one that I hope will show the strength and courage of one man and the thousands like him. My other hope is that it will close some of the gaps in Lithuanian history that those of us who descended from the early wave of immigrants might have.

I am very fortunate to have as one of my closest friends in Lithuania the editor of *Valstiečių* newspaper. Jonas Svoba always keeps the *Bridges* readers in mind when one of his correspondents inter-

views an interesting person. For that reason I am privileged to be able to pass these interviews on to you. He doesn't hesitate to share his information with me and arrange the interviews for me. I use the term "arrange" rather loosely because in this case there wasn't any way to arrange a meeting.

As usual, it was cold and raining the morning Regina Svoba, her son Gediminas, and I set out from Vilnius to meet Henrikas Klimašauskas. I was dressed in my usual fashionable outfit of jeans, blouse, sweatshirt, jacket, and wool socks. I guess I should have picked up a clue when Regina reached into a bag and pulled out woolen scarves for both our heads. I thought to myself that she was getting a little carried away; it was after all, the middle of July.

As we left Vilnius and drove through the beautiful countryside, the three of us agreed how much we were looking forward to this visit. I had no way to know that this would be a visit filled with tears, humor, and so many other emotions. The houses grew further and further apart when we finally stopped at a farmhouse. This was the house of Regina's cousin, and she proceeded to explain to me that his wife would be happy to lend me her knee-high rubber boots. Apparently, it is impossible to drive a car to Mr. Klimašauskas' house. Of course, none of this was explained to me before we left Vilnius. So here I was with a perfect stranger offering me her boots. The only problem was her foot was about three sizes bigger than mine. Now I had to borrow two pairs of woolen socks added to

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the pair I was already wearing. Believe me, there's nothing like meeting a person for the first time and walking out wearing her socks and boots. By this time the wind was bringing down everything in its path, and the rain was pelting everything in sight. As we approached the car I figured it was time to bring out the headscarf. This was no time to make a fashion statement.

We drove a few more miles, and Gediminas decided this was as far as we could go. We exited the car carrying bags holding cameras, tape recorders, notebooks, extra batteries, and whatever else I felt I couldn't live without at that particular moment. In the other hand were an umbrella and a purse. And so our trek began along a very narrow path that ran through the forest. I was supposed to be in the middle but ended up bringing up the rear of the single line. Why? Because the boots seemed to have stretched another few sizes. Despite the three pairs of socks, I was walking like King Kong crushing a paper city. Gediminas kept running back and taking the bags from me, but it still wasn't much help; in fact, it was difficult to balance myself.

After what seemed like an endless walk, the trees disappeared, and we were walking through a marsh with high grass on all sides. It probably wasn't a marsh before we had a few weeks of torrential rain, but at least it wasn't dark here. Meanwhile, hundreds of tiny frogs were hopping all over the place, and on top of everything else the boots were getting stuck in the mud. As I bent down to pull up one of the slipping socks, what did my eyes encounter in my boot? A tiny pair of bulging eyes was looking up at me in complete horror. One of the little frogs landed in my oversize boots. This immediately sent me into a panic. There was nothing to hold on to so I couldn't take the boot off and empty my visitor back into the marsh. I started to yell at the top of my lungs as Gediminas came flying back to help me. I really wasn't amused by his laughter when he saw the problem. Holding on to him, I managed to pull the boot off and the grateful frog disappeared, but he wasn't as grateful as I was.

At this point I was thinking that Gediminas was probably kicking himself for wasting a vacation day for this journey. But he is fascinated by history, and he really wanted to meet Mr. Klimašauskas. I think the real reason was that he probably didn't trust his mother and me to find this place on our own. After I calmed down we proceeded on our journey. We left the marsh and were

back in the forest. I honestly felt we had walked at least five miles when my two companions burst out laughing. We had walked only about a half-mile. As we approached our destination they told me to look ahead – we could see the house. But I didn't see any house. All I saw was a storage shed and a lean-to with a roof.

At this moment a gentleman emerged from the tiny "house" and opened his arms to welcome us. He had no idea who we were or why we were there; he was just happy to have visitors. Our host asked us if we saw the Lithuanian basketball player, Sabonis, in his yard. I looked all over and tried to figure out why an international basketball player would be standing in the middle of nowhere. How could I miss someone the size of Sabonis? Mr. Klimašauskas started to laugh and urged us to take a look at his scarecrow. Apparently he started to build it and just couldn't stop himself. This scarecrow had to be seen from miles away; hence the name Sabonis. At that moment I knew this would be no ordinary interview.

He ushered us inside and told us to sit down. Sit down? There was a small couch and a tiny table, but the house was filled with boards, saws, and other tools. Regina and I managed to pull some boards together, while Gediminas sat on the floor. I explained to our host that I would like to talk to him about his experiences, and he was more than happy to comply. But being a good Lithuanian host, he offered us some fresh milk he had bought in town and some berries from an empty plastic soda bottle. Then he started his story.

Henrikas Klimašauskas' tale began even before he was born, and it was those circumstances that would shape his life. In 1927 his parents received land for farming, but his father was not a very good farmer. For two years they worked the land to no avail. They needed money for improvements; so his parents decided to go to Argentina to work. They sold everything they owned to buy the tickets and rented the land to a neighbor for three years. But when his parents tried to cross the Lithuanian border, his mother was turned back; she was too pregnant and was not allowed to leave. His father took the trip on his own where he found work on a plantation. His mother returned to her family and shortly after Henrikas was born. The situation was very difficult in Lithuania, and the family had nothing.

Henrikas' father never earned what he thought

he could in Argentina. A few years later he fell ill and could not work. He wrote home asking his wife for money so that he could return. She tried to borrow from everyone she knew, but everyone was in the same situation. Eventually, war broke out, and they lost contact forever. Henrikas' father would never lay eyes on the son he longed to see. That part of their life was finished before it ever started.

The young man attended Vindeikių School and eventually started high school. But he was ingrained with a love for Lithuania. Meeting with partisans was as natural as eating. Both his mother's brothers were partisans, and since they lived in the woods, their house was a natural meeting place. The house was actually a shell because the Reds had burned it to the ground.

When he was fifteen, he was attending a concert at school and helping with the event. The door opened and two KGB agents entered the room. They stared long and hard at him, and then they left. Shortly after they returned with guns and told him to come with them. It was February, and there was snow on the ground and a howling wind. For a fleeting moment he didn't know if he should try to run or go with them. He decided against running and was taken to a building in the center of town for questioning. He was absolutely terrified because he was carrying messages and announcements printed by a clandestine group of partisans. He pretended to be sick and asked to use the outhouse. They sent a man outside with him. When he entered the outhouse he began shredding everything into miniscule pieces and burying it in the muck. He was still trying to figure out what they wanted.

When they returned inside he was asked if he knew a certain man. Henrikas didn't know how to answer because he had no idea how much they knew, if anything. He stated he was asked to get a gun from this man, but the man refused to give it to him. Who gave him the note about the gun? He replied that the partisans had given him the note. Why did he go? He said he was scared to death of



Regina Svoba, Henrikas Klimašauskas and Gediminas Svoba.

Photo: Jeanne Dorr

them. After all, they pointed a gun at him. Why didn't he report them to the KGB? Again, he replied he was terrified of them. After all, everyone knew how dangerous these partisans were.

At this point, he had to make a quick decision, a decision that might be the difference between life and death. Keep in mind that he was only fifteen years old. He decided to act as though he was slow and mentally challenged. He believes this is why is alive today. When they asked for a description of the men who pointed the gun at him, he simply shrugged his shoulders; it was too dark to see them and he was too scared they would shoot him. He told the agents he even heard rumors that the partisans would burn people's house if they didn't cooperate.

It was now 2 AM, and the questions continued. Who was the "Green Devil" and where was he? At this point he knew exactly what they were after. He told them he heard of the Green Devil but didn't know anything about this partisan leader. Where was his mother's brother? Everyone knew where his uncle was. He was going around the countryside repairing roofs.

Henrikas was promised that if he told the truth he could return to school. Instead, he was taken to the town of Ukmergė. It was a long, hard journey, and he was terrified. They took him out early in the morning so that people would not see anything. Two soldiers were on each side of the wagon. When they saw a man walking, they pushed him to

the bottom of the horse wagon. Upon arrival, he was put in a holding cell. He was so scared he was unable to eat.

At this point, Mr. Klimašauskas broke down and cried bitterly for the pain he caused his mother. He couldn't seem to stop sobbing. Fifty-five years later the pain was still with him. He apologized profusely, but the tears would not stop. Neither would they stop for the three of us.

When they finally released him he was on his own. It would have been a long walk, about thirty kilometers, but a kind-hearted woman took him about twenty kilometers in her hay wagon. To this day, he remembers her kindness.

While he was in Ukmerge the authorities were busy in Henrikas' village. They rounded up four partisans, stripped them, shot them, and left them in the schoolyard so that young people would see what could happen. One of the first sights Mr. Klimašauskas saw on his return home was the body of his beloved uncle in the schoolyard. He could do nothing but hold back his tears and keep on walking. When he entered his house, it was empty. In fact, his mother did not return for a week. When she opened the door she was black and blue and so badly beaten that she could scarcely stand. The authorities demanded information from her and did not receive it. This was their way of showing their displeasure.

He learned later that his cousin, Paul, also a partisan, had been in the house ill with a high fever. A friend took him home to nurse him just before the authorities came for his mother. It was nothing short of a minor miracle. Had Paul been in the house, he would have been killed. Before they took his mother, they wrecked the house and stole what they could carry. His cousin had an old jacket with partisan symbols with the tricolors sewn on it. Written on the colors were the words "God and Country." The jacket was turned inside out and apparently the intruders didn't feel it was worth their while. Had they checked the pockets, they would have found Paul's gun and that would have meant certain death. When Paul returned, he and Henrikas decided there was only one path they could follow, and that path would tie them permanently to the partisans.

At this point I asked Henrikas why he felt the partisans would be successful in freeing Lithuania. His answer was one that startled me. They sincerely believed that America would come to their

aid and help them.

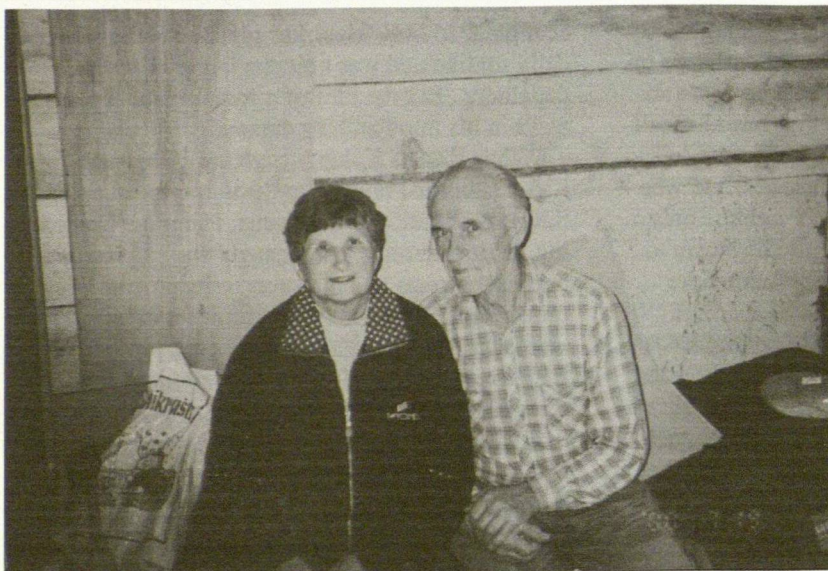
After his mother returned home, they decided that Henrikas should return to school since he was almost finished with his education. He returned, but education was not a priority for him. He began urging other students to join the partisans.

He explained that everyone had a code name, and about twelve people made a group. Several groups banded together making a larger operation. The "Green Devil" was one of the highest, and the KGB wanted him any way they could get him.

Henrikas really wasn't sure who was in charge of this group, but he knew they were sent to find guns. He chuckled as he spoke about one incident. A group was meeting at his house, and the young men were fired up with patriotism, each dreaming in his own way how he would single-handedly save Lithuania. What they didn't know was that one of the boys left a note for his father telling him that he was part of the group. The father immediately took the note to the police. He obviously did not want his son involved in any way with these young people. But another minor miracle took place. A woman from town came banging on the door telling the young men to leave – in fact, run. The police were on their way. The partisans grabbed all the guns and took off.

Then one day the order came down from the "Green Devil" to a guardsman. Henrikas was to be given a special task. He was handed two grenades and a gun. His challenge was to kill an officer, Vladas Stankevičius from Mušininkų, whom the Lithuanians considered to be a turncoat. The partisans believed Stankevičius was responsible for the deaths of many Lithuanian people.

At this point Henrikas was fifteen years old and had very little idea what to do with the gun or the grenades. When he was first given the assignment he was excited, but as he thought about it he realized he really did not have any training for what they were asking him to do. He was getting worried because he didn't know where Stankevičius lived in the village or even what he looked like. He was scared because he was so young and inexperienced, and yet this was the reason he was selected for this mission. A grown man would be stopped and searched going through this area; there was no way a man could get through with grenades and a gun. The police would pay very little attention to a young boy, especially one who didn't look like he knew much of anything. He was given two weeks



Jeanne Dorr and Henrikas Klimašauskas

Photo: Jeanne Dorr

guards, and the door opened easily as he pushed it open. With his heart in his throat, he began to wander through the house. As he approached a closed door he heard voices. He drew his gun and gently pushed open the door. But the scene in front of him threw off his concentration. Stankevičius was standing in front of a mirror adjusting his hat. What Henrikas didn't plan on was Stankevičius' wife sitting on the bed with a baby in her arms.

According to Henrikas, he momentarily froze. As he tells it now, it was no more than a two-second lapse. But it was enough

to get the job done.

After much soul searching he said good-bye to his mother. Once again he broke down and cried during the interview. He didn't tell his mother where he was going, but he honestly felt these would be his last days on earth. He told me he could almost feel the pain he would cause his mother when she heard of his death.

He stopped along the way to help his uncle cut hay. While they were working, Henrikas began asking his uncle about Stankevičius. What did he look like? Where did he live? Now he knew he had to find a house near the church. He started his walk to Mušininkų, and as he approached, the village guards seemed to be everywhere. He laid flat in a cemetery and tried to plan his next move. He knew he would be stopped, but he also knew he couldn't turn back. He saw a cow in a nearby field and pretended to be moving the cow from place to place, all the while hoping the owner of the cow wouldn't show up.

Then he met a former classmate who was drawing water from a well. He started to smile as he described her as tall, blonde, and beautiful. He asked her about Stankevičius, and she pointed to his house. In fact, she saw him come home not long ago. The young people said their good-byes, and Henrikas left to complete his mission.

He was quite shocked to see that there were no

time for the wife to jump off the bed with the baby and grab his arm. The gun went off and the bullet shattered the mirror. Henrikas had no idea who or what he hit. In the next instant he realized he could shoot the woman, but when he looked at the baby he couldn't do it. Stankevičius grabbed him, and a second shot was fired; this time hitting the ceiling. Stankevičius hit him in the neck and took him to a commander.

On the way he asked Henrikas who sent him. Henrikas replied, "A dog ate me." To this day he has no idea why he said these words since they meant nothing to him then or now. Stankevičius beat him and wanted to shoot him. The date was May 9, the day before the Germans surrendered Berlin. According to Henrikas, the Soviets were drunk from celebrating the victory. The commander asked him why he would do something so ridiculous when the war was ending. The officer told the soldiers to stop hitting Henrikas and to let him wash up. He was then put in a holding cell.

For three days Henrikas had no food, and no one knew where he was. There was a tiny window where he was able to look out. Much to his amazement he spotted a woman who was one of many people sent by the partisans to look for him. He was able to make eye contact with her. She began to bring him food, and this caused the commanding officer some concern. He stationed more soldiers

with automatics outside the cell, day and night. There was to be no opportunity for the partisans to try and rescue Henrikas.

Once again Stankevičius took him from his cell and beat him. He kept yelling at Henrikas to tell him who gave him the gun and grenades, and who ordered him to be shot. Henrikas is sure the only reason the beating stopped is because he began to scream at the top of his lungs. The commander didn't want people walking outside to hear him screaming. Henrikas dropped to the ground as though he was dead. The last thing the authorities needed was a fifteen year-old hero and martyr.

He was brought inside where he was barraged with questions concerning who helped him in the village. He explained that he stopped a strange girl along the road and asked where Stankevičius lived. The short, dark haired girl was not very attractive, but she led him right to Stankevičius' door. Henrikas said they went crazy trying to figure out who the person might be.

He was transferred to the KGB building in Vilnius where he suffered terribly at the hands of his tormentors. He remembered with fondness one of his cellmates, a Ukrainian soldier, who tried to escape twice from the Soviet army. The soldier vowed to Henrikas that he would either be successful on the third attempt or he would kill himself, but he would never serve in the Soviet army.

Henrikas was given a ten-year sentence, the most he could receive at that time for what he did. He did not receive the death sentence because of his age. He was sent to "Komiautnomine Respublika", a part of Russia that was deep in the tundra. In the meantime, his mother was sent to Siberia. Henrikas was released after serving nine and a half years and moved to Siberia to be with his mother. To him it was the only logical move since they only had each other. When he went to register with the local authorities, they told him to forget about ever seeing Lithuania again. This would be his home forever. While he was in Siberia, he met and married a young Lithuanian woman whose family had also been exiled.

When Khrushchev came to power, some people were permitted to return to their homes, and Henrikas' family was among them. He was a construction worker, but life in Lithuania was very difficult for those people who were considered at one time to have been "enemies of the state." They couldn't get jobs, and it was almost impossible to find a de-

cent place to live. Henrikas plodded along with his daily routine and was now the father of three daughters. But the idea of a free Lithuania was always in his mind and his dreams.

When Romas Kalanta, a young Lithuanian from Kaunas, burned himself to death to protest against Soviet occupation in Lithuania, Henrikas' smoldering patriotism once again caught fire. He began to organize groups and plan acts of terrorism. This time he was sentenced to, as he put it in his own words, an insane asylum for political protesters. Experimental drugs were frequently used on the prisoners, and the living conditions were worse than his prison days. But Henrikas had a skill that was very much in demand. He could do almost anything with wood, and so he had very few drugs used on him. Instead, his services as a carpenter were very much needed. He was released around the time of Lithuanian independence in 1991.

I can't tell you what I felt meeting Henrikas Klimašauskas. I think I experienced every possible emotion. He was not a bitter person or a man filled with hatred for all he suffered. He was able to find humor in many of his experiences. Henrikas wrote a book about the years he spent in the mental hospital. He lives five days a week in the woods, without water or electricity, trying to fulfill the dream his parents had of working the land. On Fridays, he boards a bus and goes to Kaunas to spend the weekend with his wife. He takes great pride in his four grandchildren. But Henrikas has a dream and a mission: he must restore his land the way his parents would have done it.

Would he have changed anything in his life if he could? With his wonderful grin he told me he would have done it all again, but this time he would have been more careful.

Thank you to Regina and Jonas Svoba for always thinking of the *Bridges* readers when they meet an interesting person. I also have to thank the woman who loaned me her boots – I'd probably still be trying to pull my feet out of the mud without them. But to Henrikas Klimašauskas and the thousands of men, women and children who suffered and died for an independent Lithuania, may we never become so complacent as to forget their heroic deeds. May we always keep them in our thoughts and prayers. ♦

Sr. Ona Mikailaitė

Lithuania's New Cardinal

Pope John II named Archbishop Audrys Juozas Bačkis of Vilnius one of 44 new cardinals on January 21st of this year. He is the second cardinal that the Holy Father has given to Lithuania: the first being Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevičius, elevated in 1988, who faithfully served the Lithuanian Catholic Church until his death last year.

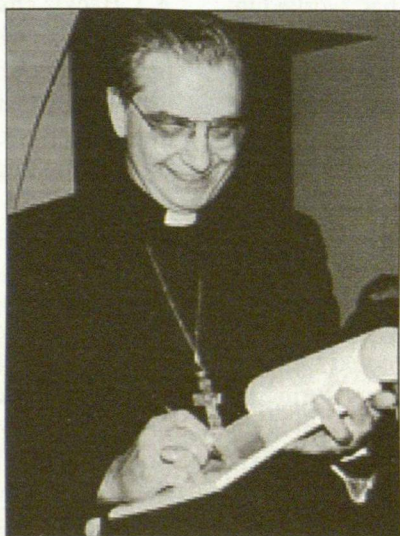
Lithuania's new cardinal, born in Kaunas in 1937, turned 64 on February 1, 2001. On February 21st, he received his red biretta and cloak at a special Consistory in Rome when all 44 new cardinals were solemnly inducted into the Sacred College of Cardinals.

Announcing his list of new cardinals at the beginning of the Church's third millennium, the pope said, "May the Lord grant us the inexhaustible strength of his Spirit, who is capable of ever new surprises... The new cardinals come from various parts of the world. Their ranks well reflect the universality of the Church with the great variety of her ministries."

The new cardinals come from 22 countries: twelve are heads of Congregations in the Roman Curia, nine are residents of various sees in Latin America, three are from the United States. Our Lithuanian Cardinal is one of the younger ones on the list.

When Pope John Paul II visited Lithuania in 1993, as he visited the various Lithuanian shrines, he was accompanied everywhere by the two most prominent members of the Lithuanian

hierarchy: Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevičius and Archbishop Audrys J. Bačkis. The pope gave all his addresses in Lithuanian and Archbishop, now Cardinal Bačkis helped him read part of the texts. At that time Archbishop Bačkis was chairman of the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference and head of the committee to prepare for the pope's visit.



Cardinal Audrys Bačkis has a very broad international background and is fluent in several languages including his native Lithuanian. He spent the first year of his life in Lithuania, but grew up in Paris where his parents and older brother Richard moved in 1938 when his father, Dr. Stasys Bačkis was appointed by the Lithuanian government to work in the Lithuanian embassy. After WW II, Dr. Bačkis remained in Paris as chargé d'affaires for Lithuania, making known her plight as an occupied and oppressed country. Mrs. Ona Bačkis, who had been a

teacher in Lithuania, taught her boys their native language while they learned French in school.

In 1957 Audrys discovered his vocation to the priesthood and entered the Seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris. His Lithuanian roots, along with some persuasion from his father, won out, and he transferred to the Lithuanian College of St. Casimir in Rome where he completed his seminary training. Ordained on March 18, 1961 – this year he celebrates the 40th anniversary of his ordination – he continued his study of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome, he

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received his doctorate in Canon Law from the Lateran University. At the same time he was attending the Pontifical Diplomatic Academy.

From 1964 to 1973 he worked in various Vatican embassies: in the Philippines, in Costa Rica, and also Turkey and Nigeria. In 1973 he was appointed to the Vatican Secretariat of State, becoming undersecretary in 1979 and vice-minister for international relations. He was especially concerned with international organizations and issues pertaining to peace and disarmament. In 1988 Pope John Paul consecrated him Archbishop and appointed him apostolic pronuncio to the Netherlands.

While traveling all over the world, Cardinal Audrys Bačkis often visited the United States and was well known to the Lithuanian-American community. As a young priest he had worked in the Lithuanian youth camps at Dainava in Michigan during the summer. When his parents moved to Washington, D.C. where his father began working as *chargé d'affaires* for Lithuania in 1960, he often crossed the Atlantic to visit his parents. He was always interested in and concerned with all things Lithuanian. In 1964 he had translated and published the French translation of the Lithuanian prayer book written in Siberia. As a high-ranking Vatican diplomat, he was well informed about the persecuted Lithuanian Church under the Soviet regime. During his Vatican years, he was in close contact with Pope John Paul II and developed a cordial personal relationship with him.

In December of 1991, the Pope gave Lithuania a Christmas present: he established a second ecclesiastical province for the Lithuanian Catholic Church with the archdiocese of Vilnius as its center and appointed Archbishop Bačkis as metropolitan with two subsidiary dioceses of Panevėžys and Kaišiadorys.

The first ecclesiastical province centered in the archdiocese of Kaunas had been established by Pope Pius XI in 1926 with Blessed George Matulaitis, then Archbishop, playing a leading role in its foundation. In 1988, Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevičius headed the Kaunas archdiocese and upon his retirement, Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius assumed leadership. In 1991 the dioceses of Telšiai and Vilkaviškis became sub-

sidary to the archdiocese of Kaunas, under which the newly formed diocese of Šiauliai also belongs. Cardinal Audrys Bačkis will head the newly reorganized Lithuanian Catholic Church with its twelve bishops and seven dioceses.

During his ten years as archbishop metropolitan of Vilnius, Cardinal Bačkis has accomplished a great deal under very difficult circumstances. He has recovered much of Church property and buildings confiscated by the Soviets. He has re-established the former Vilnius Seminary and built a new building to house it. The present St. Joseph's Seminary has 63 seminarians with a faculty drawn from Europe and the United States, including several women. An Institute for Religious Studies has also been founded to give laymen and women the chance to study theology. A.J. Bačkis chaired the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference, which authorized and approved the publication of the new Lithuanian Bible. For his achievements in education, the University of Vilnius gave Bačkis an honorary doctorate in 1997. In 1999 the Pope appointed him a member of the committee that organized the Synod of European Bishops. Last year, Bačkis was awarded the Order of Gediminas by the Lithuanian government.

Cardinal Bačkis will now be a member of the College of Cardinals who assist and advise the pope in governing the Catholic Church. He will be the leading churchman in Lithuania and is addressed as "Your Eminence". One of his chief privileges will be to elect the 264th successor to the present pope.

Cardinal Bačkis has not spared any effort to renew and strengthen the Lithuanian Church. On many occasions he has emphasized that the Church is open to all and cares about each individual. He shows this in word and deed. He ate his Christmas dinner with the poor of Vilnius who came for a meal at the soup kitchen called Bethany, operated by the archdiocese of Vilnius. About six hundred people are fed here every day. At Christmas he noticed the discouraged faces and said, "It really makes me sad to see a person lose hope. We have to keep hoping that things will get better – if not in this life, then in the next." ♦

Monsignor Jurgis Šarauskas

The Gift of Imagination

It is a difficult assignment that Jesus gives us – “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.” The only way to apply that principle is by putting oneself in the other person’s place. How can we do that?

First, we start with imagination.

That is the capacity we all have. The ability to think, not so much in words, but in pictures. Through the power of imagination, a little boy can see himself as a great sports hero; a little girl can see herself as a beautiful bride. With children, imagination is a magic toy that enables them to go anywhere, to be anybody, to do anything. With the passing of time, we outgrow childish imaginings – but we will never outgrow our need for imagination. It is one of God’s best gifts. It allows us to see things as they could be.

Look at Jesus. Have you ever noticed the part imagination played in his life? He pictured himself in the place of others so clearly that their needs became his needs. What happened to them, happened to him. “I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink” – a vivid use of imagination.

Do you remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus? The rich man, who was probably a decent chap, had no imagination. He saw and walked by Lazarus every day, but he never felt what Lazarus felt. He never put himself in Lazarus’ place. The rich man went to hell for lack of an imagination.

We cannot be genuinely Christian without an imagination!

Imagination, hope, seeing, and believing in things as they could be sustained the people of Lithuania and Eastern Europe in their years of oppression. It gave them the courage to work and fight for a better world. What they imagined in their prayers came to be. Their prayers were answered.

It is difficult for us to imagine ourselves in the place of these people because we would have to imagine a world without freedom, a society without rights, work without opportunity, and a life without comforts. What a challenge to our imagination! Because it is so hard for us to imagine these things, perhaps that is why it is so hard for us to be grateful – perhaps that is why we are so casual about the value of life, perhaps that is why it is so difficult to keep God in the center of our lives. Perhaps because we cannot imagine the need for moral greatness – perhaps that is why we rarely achieve it.

Then we need to enlarge our appreciation.

Jesus came into the world of limited friendship. People lived behind fences. Cities were surrounded by walls. The word “stranger” was synonymous with “enemy.” The accepted way to live was in your own place with your own kind.

Jesus came into that kind of world. And what did he do? He taught people to say, “Our Father.” Those two little words, more than anything else, have doomed the fences of the

MONSIGNOR JURGIS ŠARAUSKAS delivered this homily at the Lithuanian Independence Day Mass at St. Matthew’s Cathedral in February 2001.

world. If I say "Our Father," that means we are brothers. I am committed to helping you and you are committed to helping me. This means that we must learn to live together even with our differences and we must be generous with each other.

We here in the United States have probably been more successful than anywhere else in the world in building a pluralistic society – where people of various ethnic, religious, and racial groups live and work together in relative harmony. We have our problems but are working on it.

Sadly in Eastern Europe, many old ethnic and religious rivalries are impeding the development of a pluralistic cultures and democracies. We can share our example and help them to build just and civil societies.

And we must continue to be generous with our resources – material, financial, technical – all that they need to build a healthy and just society. "Give and gifts will be given unto you; a

good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing will be poured into your lap." We are a nation and a society so abundantly blessed, but our blessings only increase to the extent that we help those who are not so blessed.

The tasks facing Lithuania and other countries of Eastern Europe are enormous. Things that we take for granted: the rule of law, civil and human rights, well-ordered economics, honesty in government, security of citizens, access to health care, job opportunities, freedom of speech, worship, and the press are still in various stages of development. Thanks be to God it is going well in many countries but sadly, not as well in all.

We thank God for the passing of communism. We thank God for the gift of imagination – to see things as they could be. Today, we pledge that we will pray and work so that what could be, will be. ♦

William P. "Bill" Durbin –Ardent Supporter of Lithuanian Causes– Passes Away

U.S. Senator Richard J. Durbin's brother, William "Bill" Durbin passed away on February 8th in Bethesda, Maryland at age 71 years.

Mr. Durbin supported the Jurbarkas children's hospital in Jurbarkas, Lithuania since 1997. He and his brother, Sen. Durbin, had visited his mother's, Ann Kutkaitė's, hometown of Jurbarkas, Lithuania. Soon after the visit, Durbin's mother passed away, and Bill decided to start the Ann Kutkaitė-Durbin Memorial Fund to help his mother's hometown's children's hospital. The Fund was successful in renovating the hospital and providing additional medical and bedding supplies.

In addition, Bill was very active in his support of not only Lithuania, but also Latvia and Estonia.

Left in mourning are his wife, Lorraine Kalish, nine sons, a daughter, twenty grandchildren, and brothers Robert E. Durbin of Long Beach, Calif., and Sen. Richard J. Durbin. ♦

Chicago Sun-Times Highlighted Lithuania and Chicago's Lithuanians

In a special series spanning from March 18th to the 26th, Chicago Sun-Times reporter Neil Steinberg and photographer Bob Davis covered different topics concerning Lithuania and Chicago's Lithuanians.

According to the Sun-Times, Steinberg and Davis spent the month of February 2001 in Lithuania interviewing President Valdas Adamkus, "spent a day with the army, wandering the land, hitting four of the five largest cities, preparing [a] report card on the country as it comes up on its 10th anniversary of liberation from the Soviet Union."

Chicago-based articles focused on the Chicago-Lithuanian bond, Chicago doctors, Marquette Park, and other topics of interest.

If you missed this week-long series, you can still read it on www.suntimes.com/special/sections/lithuania. It really is a series worth reading! ♦

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