
BRIDGES

• LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL •

Volume 27

Issue 7, September 2003



International radio funded...Lithuania — Eurochampions...Giving is rewarded

P E R S P E C T I V E S

September has always been my favorite time of year — first as a student, then as an 8th grade English teacher. It isn't only "school" I look forward to, but seeing my fellow teachers and students, scrutinizing the textbooks, and planning the lessons to appeal to my students' curiosity and thirst for more.

As long as I can remember, education in any form has been an ongoing adventure for me.

In addition to, what we called, "American school", my parents took us three girls to Lithuanian Saturday School in Philadelphia. As we grew older, our education was expanded to include Lithuanian language seminars and week-long camps. All of which I didn't mind and only complained about when I had really overextended myself.

As schools opened their doors this month, so have Lithuanian Saturday Schools across the nation and in European countries. Lithuanians outside of the homeland bring their growing families to introduce and support the Lithuanian culture that they enjoy at home.

For a while it was speculated if the newly-arrived Lithuanians would need such an educational system for their own already fluent and skilled children. But American culture pervaded their households also, and now schools see an increase of the new immigrant children.

Lithuanian schools have also expanded their curriculum to include classes that aid the new immigrants to better understand and connect with their adopted country. English as a Second Language classes allow parents to experience the "Saturday school" along with their children.

On the flip side, parents whose Lithuanian has become rusty, can find classes to hone and polish their vocabulary and conversation skills at these very same schools.

Just up the Garden State Parkway from us, in Elizabeth, New Jersey, the Lithuanian Saturday School has been revived after a 20-plus year hiatus. The Sts. Peter and Paul parish halls are bursting with dance, song, and recitations. Check it out for yourself — there may be a Lithuanian school around your corner, also.

Rasa Ardys-Juška

Editor

For more information about the nearest Lithuanian School in your area, visit www.javlb.org.

BRIDGES

Lithuanian American News Journal

USPS 017131 — Published 10 times per year (Jan/Feb. and July/Aug. combined). Address of publication is LAC, Inc./BRIDGES, 1927 West Blvd., Racine, WI 53403. BRIDGES is the official publication of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc., 11876 Sunrise Valley Drive, Suite 200C, Reston, VA 20191. Tel. (703) 390-0498. E-mail: lacinc@erols.com

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THE INFORMATION CENTER FOR

HOME COMING LITHUANIANS. Collects

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Address all editorial correspondence to:

BRIDGES, 1212 Mohegan Road,
Manasquan, New Jersey 08736.

Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope if return is desired.

For subscription and advertising information, please contact:

LAC, Inc./BRIDGES,
c/o Ramas Pliūra,
1927 West Boulevard,
Racine, WI 53403.

Subscription rate is \$18.00 annually (US Mail serviced subscribers; subscriptions to other addresses are \$28.00), payable in advance (US funds). Periodicals postage paid at Racine, WI; and additional locations.

Contact us on the Internet at:

www.javlb.org

Postmaster: Send any address corrections and/or changes to LAC, Inc./BRIDGES, 1927 West Boulevard, Racine, WI 53403

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An Educational Web Site to Visit...

On September 29th, 1996, the first site on the Internet for Lithuanian schools and gymnasiums was created. In 1998, it was called 'Tinklas', www.tinklas.lt.

Tinklas features...

- one of the most successful and longest educational projects in Lithuania;
- the biggest, constantly updated data base of Lithuanian schools and gymnasiums;
- yearly organizes a competition in Internet 'Web pages of Lithuanian Schools';
- a lot of web pages for teaching and self-studying, syllabi, etc;
- topics of today, discussions, surveys, and medical web pages;
- information for primary school pupils, their parents, teachers;
- And pages for leisure and entertainment.

On the cover:

This illustration was included in the 1947 edition of the children's booklet, *Tėvų Nameliai — Our Parents Homes*, written by Vytė Nemunėlis and illustrated by J. Firinauskas.

Simonas Girdzijauskas
of The Joint Baltic-American National Committee, Inc.

Senate Appropriations Committee moves to restore funding for international broadcasting

The Senate Appropriations committee, on Sept. 4th, marked up the FY04 Commerce Justice, State (CJS) Appropriations bill (S1585), which oversees funding for Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe /Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) broadcasting to Central and East European audiences. The committee approved language in the CJS bill, which would restore the funding to FY03 levels for continued VOA and RFE/RL broadcasting to the region in the coming year.

The hard work of constituents across the United States is being acknowledged in Congress for helping to keep the issue of funding for these broadcast services alive. Joint Baltic American National Committee, Inc. (JBANC) Chairman Janis Bolsteins credited and thanked Baltic Americans from Maryland through Illinois to California for their efforts. The “struggle to preserve America’s prestige and influence abroad”, is not yet over,” stated Bolsteins, “there is still much more work to be achieved on this issue.”

While JBANC welcomes the committee action, it points out that the report omits mention of Latvian VOA broadcasting. Both Slovak services were among others left out. Whether or not this was inadvertent, it is now critical to have language in the final version of the bill

that would correct the oversight. Estonian and Lithuanian VOA and RFE/RL services were included in the report along with Latvian RFE/RL.

Even though the Senate appropriations report asks for restoration of radio funding at FY03 levels, there may be room for interpretation on what the levels are. The Senate appropriations report could be seen as being about \$3.4 million less than for the corresponding authorization bill, which asks for restoration of \$8.9 million for broadcasting services in the region. The House authorization bill passed, but the Senate bill is currently held up due to unrelated issues.

The CJS Appropriations bill still needs to be approved by the full Senate and will then be negotiated in a conference committee of members from both the Senate and the House. In the House version of the CJS bill (H.R.2799), efforts to support language to restore radio funding were not successful.

Later, JBANC met with representatives of the White House to deliver a letter to President Bush’s senior advisor Karl Rove requesting a change in policy. The FY04 Budget proposal presented by the Administration earlier this year did not include funding to continue language services to the Baltics and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. ♦

SIMONAS GIRDZIJAUSKAS is the contact person for JBANC, The Joint Baltic American National Committee, Inc. JBANC represents the Estonian American National Council, Inc., the American Latvian Association, Inc. and the Lithuanian American Council, Inc.

Nicole Shahenian

Meetings with 2004 presidential candidates begin with Sen. Lieberman

The Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) met on Sept. 8th with presidential hopeful Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT) to discuss issues related to United States foreign policy. The CEEC, which represents 20 million Americans, plans to meet with all 2004 presidential candidates.

At the meeting with Senator Lieberman, the group discussed NATO and the Euro-Atlantic relationship, U.S.-Russia relations, foreign aid, and U.S. public diplomacy, including the status of *Voice of America* and *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* broadcasting to the region.

Regarding U.S. relations with Russia, the CEEC stressed the importance of holding Russia to the same standards as other countries. Russian economic pressures in the region, along with the country's record on minority, religious and human rights, including its brutal war in Chechnya, were all marked as critical areas of concern.

On the topic of international broadcasting, the Senate Appropriations Committee during the first week of September, marked up the FY04 Commerce, Justice, State Appropriations bill (S.1585). Although funding for these broadcasts will be restored to FY 2003 levels, it is not certain whether all their services will remain intact in the coming year. Senator Lie-

berman remarked that if broadcasting to Central and Eastern Europe is stopped, it will send the message that "we take the people for granted."

Senator Lieberman thanked the CEEC for taking the time to brief him on issues of concern and expressed his hope that this meeting would be the beginning of an on-going foreign policy discussion with the group. The Senator said, "American foreign policy at its best is all about American principles – freedom and democracy." He noted that if elected President, his foreign policy would be based on "our best values, strength of alliances, and assistance to the newly independent states of Central and East Europe."

Regarding NATO, the CEEC expressed its satisfaction with the Senate ratification vote of May 8, in support of NATO enlargement. The CEEC reiterated its support for continued enlargement to qualified countries and urged that aspirant and invited countries be encouraged to continue with reforms to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law. Although Senator Lieberman was not able to vote, he is a long-time supporter of expanding NATO and promoting western values in the region.

Karl Altau, the Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC) representative to

NICOLE SHAHENIAN is the contact person for the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC). The CEEC offices are located at 1612 K Street, NW, Suite #410, Washington, DC 20006. More Information can be found on their webpage: <http://www.CEEC-Online.org>.

the CEEC said, "Our meeting with Senator Lieberman was informative and useful. We thanked him for taking the time to meet with us. The CEEC plans to invite other 2004 presidential hopefuls to meet with the organization and to discuss issues of mutual concern. We will also closely track the major Party platforms as the process develops."

The Central and East European Coalition represents 20 million Americans of descent from that region of Europe. The CEEC is composed of 18 national organizations in the United States and has been actively involved in U.S. foreign policy issues for the past decade. Member organizations include:

- *American Latvian Association in the U.S.*
- *Armenian Assembly of America*
- *Belarusian Congress Committee of America*
- *Bulgarian Institute for Research and Analysis*
- *Congress of Romanian Americans, Inc.*
- *Czechoslovak National Council of America*
- *Estonian American National Council, Inc.*
- *The Georgian Association in the USA, Inc.*
- *Hungarian American Coalition*
- *Joint Baltic American National Committee, Inc.*
- *Lithuanian American Council, Inc.*
- *Lithuanian American Community, Inc.*
- *National Federation of American Hungarians*
- *Polish American Congress*
- *Slovak League of America*
- *Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, Inc.*
- *Ukrainian National Association, Inc.*
- *U.S. Baltic Foundation* ◆

ELTA Lithuanian News Agency

Welcome and congratulations Estonia! – European Commission

The European Commission (EC) issued on Sept. 14 a press release congratulating Estonia on the successful result of the referendum over joining the European Union.

This decision clearly marks Estonia's return to its rightful place in Europe, and sets the seal on a process of change that has been both difficult and hard-won, the EC said.

"In the dark days of its history, Estonia experienced first-hand what the Iron Curtain did to Europe. Now it can harvest the fruits of a united Europe. The Commission is convinced that Estonia's unique experience, qualities and talents will be a strong asset in this process," stressed EC President Romano Prodi.

The outcome of the referendum confirms the wisdom of Estonia's leaders and its people in pursuing accession – the key foreign policy objective over the last ten years. It is also a tribute to the enormous efforts of all people in Estonia to rebuild a home in which they have the freedom to determine their own destiny, the EC said.

"The yes-vote pays tribute to all those who have put so much energy into Estonia's remarkable transition," underlined Commissioner Günther Verheugen. "But this is just the beginning. The result demonstrates that Estonia is ready to play its full and active role in building the new enlarged Europe." ◆

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Karina Kolbrún Donnelly

A piece of U.S.-Baltic history to be auctioned

A unique document of U.S. and Baltic history will be auctioned at a Baltic Celebration, The U.S.-Baltic Foundation's annual Gala and silent auction in Washington, D.C. on November 1, 2003. The document is the original U.S. Senate roll call vote to unanimously admit the Baltic States and four other countries into NATO.

Over 300 invited guests, including many from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, will attend the Gala and bid on range of silent auction items, including cruise travel, roundtrip airfare, and weekend hotel getaways to the best destinations in the Baltics.

"The Senate roll call vote on NATO enlargement is a one-of-a-kind document," explained Karina Kolbrún Donnelly, USBF Director of Program Development and Communications. "The vote of each Senator is marked by hand," she continued, "as their name was called on the floor of the Senate."

The document is approximately 1m. long, and framed under glass along with the official report to the Senate from President George W. Bush. Ms. Donnelly, who estimates that the document could sell for as much as \$10,000 or more, said that several donors have offered to buy it in advance. Two prospective purchasers said they would donate the document to one of the governments of the Baltic States for permanent display at their Embassy in Washington, DC.

The NATO document and other items will be offered at the silent auction during USBF's

second annual gala. Next to each item will be a sheet upon which prospective purchasers will write their names and the amount they are willing to bid for the item. At the end of the event, the person who has made the highest bid will win the item. In addition to the historic Senate document, other items and services on the auction block include:

- * A seven-day cruise for two to anywhere in the world on a romantic Windstar Cruises sailing ship; luxurious trips to the Baltic Sea, Caribbean, French and Italian Rivièras, Amalfi Coast, Adriatic Coast, Greek Isles and Turkey,
- * VIP tickets to Celine Dion's "A New Day" in Las Vegas,
- * Ozo Golf Package: lesson, lunch, and a round at Latvia's first 18-hole golf course, created and owned by NHL star Sandis Ozolinsh,
- * Two roundtrip tickets on Scandinavian airlines to the Baltics or any of their other destinations,
- * Private lunch for winner and three guests with a Baltic or Nordic Ambassador,
- * Exclusive hotel packages at premier hotels throughout the Baltics,
- * Beautiful Baltic amber, fine linen, and artwork from the Baltics,
- * and a basketball signed by NBA star Šarūnas Marčiulonis.

The Gala is the premiere annual event for American friends of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Susan Allen, wife of Senator George Allen and a Lithuanian-American, is

KARINA KOLBRÚN DONNELLY is the USBF Director of Program Development and Communications. For additional information and invitations to the Gala, call +202-393-3338 or email Gala@usbaltic.org or visit www.usbaltic.org.

the Gala Chair. More than 300 guests will attend this year's black-tie Gala, which will feature Artūras Zuokas, Mayor of Vilnius, Lithuania, and U.S. Securities and Exchange Commissioner Paul Atkins. The Gala Honorary Patrons are Rolandas Paksas, President of Lithuania, Vaira Vike Freiberga, President of Latvia, and Arnold Rüütel, President of Estonia. Jan Eliasson, Swedish Ambassador to the U.S. is the official Gala Co-Chair.

Proceeds from the Gala and silent auction

will benefit USBF, which was founded in 1990 to support democratic and free market reforms in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Since then, USBF has raised more than \$8 million and established eleven local democratic institutions, including Municipal Training Centers and journalist training institutes in each country. Current activities include strengthening business and cultural relations between the U.S. and the Baltics. ♦

From the media...

European Basketball Champions? Lithuania, of course!



"Lithuania – a basketball land", "Breaking news for Lithuania and the world: Lithuanians strongest in Europe again after 64 years", "They bring gold medals to Lithuania again", "Lithuanian basketball players Kings of Europe", "Golden Star Lightens Sky Above Lithuania", and similar headlines could be read in Lithuanian major dailies on Monday, September 15.

After 64 years, Lithuania is celebrating the golden victory again. The Lithuanian national basketball team triumphed in the Euro champion final in Stockholm's Globen Arena on Sunday after beating Spain 93:84. They also won a place in the Olympics in Athens next year.

According to *Eurobasket* reporter, Mindaugas Veromejus, "Lithuanians showed in this championship, that outstanding team performance and their passion for basketball could be the most important reasons for a Champion trophy."

He continued by saying that the team

"managed to discover a new leading scorer for the Lithuanian team in the final game, who was a player playing for the national team in his first major competition - Arvydas Macijauskas (192-G-80)."

Lithuania's reaction to this championship was amazing. Veromejus said, "In Lithuania, during the final game, it was not possible to find a vacant seat in any bar with a TV screen and a single Lithuanian outside. Thousands of Lithuanian flags, cars colored yellow-green-red, fireworks, people shouting "LIETUVA" – it was just part of one of the biggest parties for all Lithuanians. Incredible unity of the nation was displayed that night, probably the first time after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Simply everyone was trying to shake hands with everyone that night and congratulate each other. The celebration continued during the night and on Monday, when golden boys returned to Lithuania." ♦

SOURCES for this article included Mindaugas Veromejus, "Lithuania is the European Champion!", Eurobasket, Sept. 17, 2003 at <http://www.eurobasket.com/ltu/ltu.asp>, and the Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians.

Edvardas Baranauskas

The Jonas Kronkaitis Story

—Major General,
Commander of Lithuania's Armed Forces

George W. Bush, the first President of the United States to ever visit Lithuania, gave a speech in City Hall Square in Vilnius on November 23, 2002, informing the Lithuanian nation that they have been invited to join the strong and ever growing family of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). He went on to say: "The long night of fear, uncertainty and loneliness is over. Our alliance has made a solemn pledge of protection, and anyone who would choose Lithuania as an enemy, has also made an enemy of the United States of America".

These are words the Lithuanian nation was longing to hear. Who knows what future Russian leaders may be thinking of, years from now? Times may be changing, we feel, but there are some former Communists in Russia, who still refer to the Baltic States as "The Near Abroad", and many of them feel that the Baltic region is a part of their "Spheres of Influence".

Lithuania is very fortunate, indeed, to have one of her sons return to the land of his birth to make this invitation possible. His expertise in military matters was, and still is, invaluable, and he had to play a major part in Lithuania's invitation to NATO. I refer to the Commander of Lithuania's Armed Forces, Major General Jonas Kronkaitis.

His story is one of reality, not of fiction, but a matter of record. It is a story of a retired



colonel in the American Army whose love for the land of his birth compelled him to return "home" to modernize her armed forces. I would like to share a bit of his biography with you.

He was born on February 1, 1935 in Širvin-

EDVARDAS BARANAUSKAS is a regular contributor to BRIDGES now residing in Lithuania.

tos, a town in eastern Lithuania, about 30 miles northeast of Vilnius. His father was a policeman, and his Uncle Vaclovas was a Lithuanian Army lieutenant. He witnessed the horrors of the first Soviet occupation in 1940 when countless thousands of innocent people were deported to the wastelands of Siberia. His uncle was one of them, as were many other members of the Lithuanian Army, who were sent there to be murdered.

As the Red Army advanced towards Lithuania in the summer of 1944, the Kronkaitis family fled westward. Their journey took them through East Prussia (now called the Kalinin-grad region), and to other parts of Germany, including a labor camp. Finally, the family found refuge at a camp for displaced persons (a name given to those who refused to return to their Soviet-occupied homelands) in the city of Hanau, located in the American Zone of Germany.

The United States accepted thousands of displaced persons following legislation signed into law by President Harry S. Truman in 1948. The Kronkaitis family languished in the refugee camps until 1949, when an aunt, Josephine Dichkus, who had settled in New Haven, Connecticut, sponsored them. They then boarded the U.S.S. Marine Jumper for a two-week sea journey that culminated when they settled down to start a new life in New Haven.

Jonas Kronkaitis, then 14, learned English in six months, and five years later, in 1954, entered the University of Connecticut as an Industrial Management major. He was impressed by the reputation of the United States Army, and enrolled in the ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) program. His military career was inspired by his late Uncle Vaclovas, who devoted his life in the service of the Lithuanian Army. (As a point of information, his older brother Vytautas enlisted in the United States Air Force during the Korean War, and reached the rank of Master Sergeant. He retired after serving 22 years).

After graduating from college with a BS degree, he was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia

where he attended the Infantry Officer Leadership Course, and trained with one of America's elite fighting forces, the Army Rangers. One of his fellow trainees was Colin Powell, who is now serving as the Secretary of State in President Bush's Administration.

In 1959, now an armored infantry platoon leader, this young army lieutenant was sent to Germany where fate played a very important part in his life. There he met his future wife, Rūta, a student at the "Vasario 16-osios gimnazija" (*February 16th High School*), and they were married in 1960 in a military chapel in Nuremberg.

Kronkaitis did two tours of duty in Vietnam, where he served with distinction. During his twenty-seven year military career, he received the following awards: The Legion of Merit, 3 Bronze Stars, 3 Meritorious Service Medals, the Army Commendation Medal, Air Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, with palms.

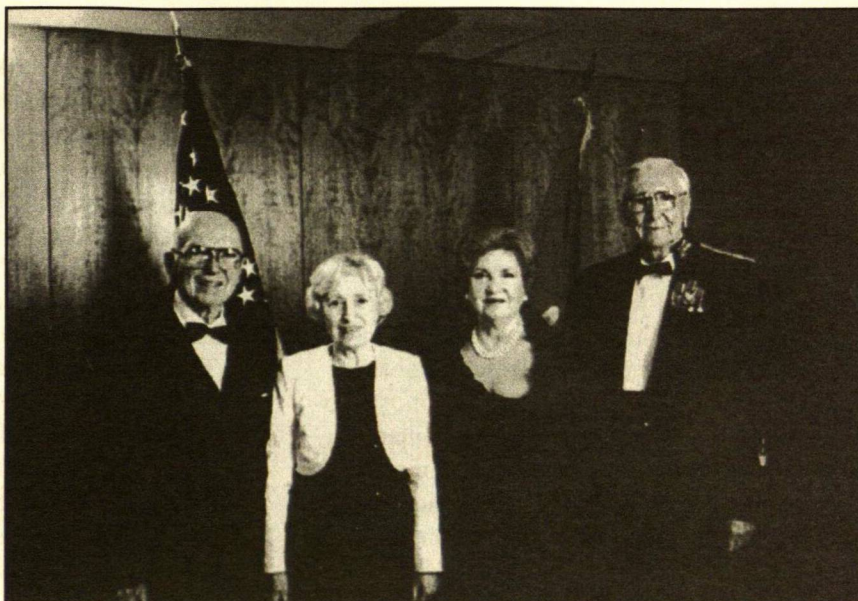
In 1979, he was promoted to Colonel, the rank he held until he retired in 1985. Before his retirement, he was the Commander (General Manager) of the Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois, the largest government owned and managed armament manufacturing facility employing more than 3,000 people. Later, he was appointed as Project Manager for Cannon Artillery weapon systems and was responsible for the development, production, and fielding of artillery weapons and laser guided projectiles.

After his retirement, he was still active. He served as a Director, Department of Defense Programs, Atlantic Research Corp., located in Virginia but near Washington, where he had contact with various government representatives of the aerospace industry.

Kronkaitis was the Chairman, and one of the founders of the Baltic Institute in Washington. He established contact with Lithuania and prepared a National Defense Structure document that attracted the attention of Lithuanian political leaders. He was invited to come to Lithuania in 1996 where he was offered the position of Vice-Minister of Defense. Before he

In Vilnius, Edvardas and Genutė Branauskas and Ruta and Major General Jonas Kronkaitis.

Photos: E. Baranauskas



would consider the offer, he had to get the approval from certain United States government officials, such as the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Army, and the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, which he did. In March 1997, he was appointed as Vice-Minister of Defense and served in that capacity until June 20, 1999 when he was appointed Reserve Colonel in the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

His presence may have helped the Conservative Party in national elections, and on July 1, 1999 President Valdas Adamkus nominated him to be the Commander of the Armed Forces of Lithuania. Before he could assume this post, it was necessary, once again, to get the approval of the same United States department heads and committees as before. However, now he had to get the approval of the Lithuanian parliament (Seimas).

Objections were raised by some in parliament who insisted that he renounce his United States citizenship, and there were those who felt he should not be approved because he never suffered under the former Soviet regime. The issue was debated in the Lithuanian press. Kronkaitis went before parliament and emotionally explained to them why he would never

renounce his American citizenship, (a translation of the major portion of his speech is shown here, which follows), and outlined his plans for the modernization of Lithuania's Armed Forces.

He won over these skeptics after making his historic speech and won all but three votes in parliament. He was then promoted to Brigadier General. On August 13, 2001, he was promoted to Major General.

Today, he has won over his fellow countrymen because of Lithuania's being invited to NATO. Major General Jonas Kronkaitis deserves a debt of gratitude from the Lithuanian nation for the excellent job he is doing in modernizing its armed forces as it prepares itself in a world of uncertainty.

A translation of his speech given to the Seimas (Parliament) is as follows:

Honorable Seimas Chairman, Members of the Seimas, General Andriškevičius, and honored guests.

Even several months ago, I had no idea I will have to address the Seimas as a candidate

for Commander of Lithuania's Armed Forces.

I will take this opportunity to answer the question which is asked from time to time, so that after that, I could concentrate on the main subject concerning the security of Lithuania.

That question is: why don't I renounce my United States citizenship?

We left Lithuania with our parents in 1944. On the eve of that journey, we saw flames over Vinco Kudirkos Naumiestis; we heard rumors that the church was on fire. It was clear that terror was returning. In one year the most progressive people of my country were killed, tortured to death, or exiled. Like most of my fellow countrymen, our family experienced that terror. Thus, the journey began with many adventures, which ended in the United States in 1949.

When you and your parents lost freedom, and were enslaved, many Lithuanians, like our family, found refuge in the United States which gave us hope, respect, and possibility to look for everything what the will or intellect of a person allows.

I remember that sincerity, friendliness, and the outstretched hand of help. We had no wealth, we did not know the language, but we never felt like rejected foreigners. That sincere country opened the way for me for education and a military career.

Thousands of American soldiers perished defending faraway countries from the same dragon that tortured my fatherland. Tens of years passed, and the United States of America sacrificed its wealth and youth defending not only their own interests, but also freedom of other people too, always recognizing their rights and sovereignty. I did my share too, serving in the military for 27 years.

I respect the United States of America, its principals, and ideals. I served in the army honestly, not for one moment [did I think] that there might be any value for which I could betray it. So who can judge me for the fact that I respect and am thankful for the country, which gave me shelter, hope, and a chance for achievement. Some may despise me that I ac-

cept American ideas for my own. But, nobody should use that for asking me about my loyalty to Lithuania. I am Lithuanian, and my faithfulness to Lithuania is unconditional, and I will always defend our country from any enemy.

I will put all my strength that Lithuania will not have to be defended, so that with the help of organizations like NATO, which we seek through Lithuania's national security laws, to make it so strong that nobody will dare attack it. That's why I came back to my Fatherland, that's why I took that job, and I am performing together with all loyal and faithful Lithuanian people. I am glad that many Lithuanians who gained experience in the Soviet Army easily accepted the western system and work for the benefit of Lithuania with enthusiasm. ♦



Jeanne Dorr

A Life Blessed...

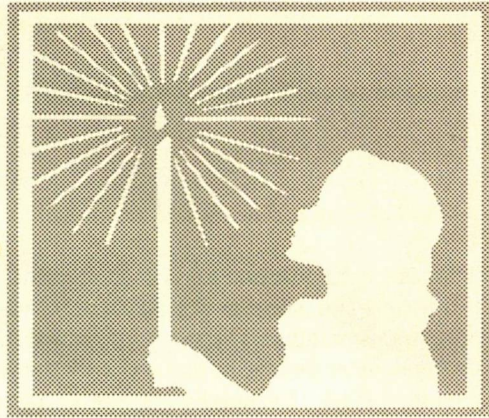
She is charming and has a marvelous sense of humor. Her energy is without limits, her faith is unwavering, her desire to help others has no bounds, and she has nerves of steel. She is a woman who lives her faith every day of her life and has suffered tremendously for that faith. I'm not describing a character in a fiction novel. I am, instead, writing about Sister Nijolė Sadūnaitė.

The first time I met Sister Nijolė was in 1991 when we were protesting the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in Washington, DC. She picked up a sign and joined the protesters as though she had spent her life taking part in protest marches.

The next day I was introduced to her at St. Andrew's Church in Philadelphia. When she held my hand I felt like a thunderbolt had struck me. She was awesome. I read so much about her sufferings at the hands of the Communists in the *Chronicles of the Church* that I couldn't believe I was standing in the same room with this great woman. I was at a total loss for words. For me, that's an unbelievable feat. I had no way of knowing that eleven years later I would be sitting in her apartment in Vilnius having a two-hour chat with her.

When I telephoned Sister Nijolė with a request for an interview, she was very accommodating. Her greatest concern, despite her busy schedule, was to schedule the appointment so that the time would be convenient for me. We agreed on a time, and my friend, Regina Svoba, who is in charge of Countryside Children's Fund, drove me to Sister's apartment.

From the outside, it looked like any other apartment building in Vilnius. It was the gray, box-like structure that was built during the occupation. Sister was standing on her balcony and waving to us as soon as we stepped out of the car. As we reached her apartment, she flung open the door and



gave us both a bear hug. Again, the interior was the same as any other apartment except for the many religious articles, candles, and the Lithuanian flag.

Sister was dressed in a skirt and blouse and explained to us that her order, from the time they were founded, never wore habits. She belongs to the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate. The order was founded in 1878 by Blessed Honoratus Kozminski, a Capuchin priest, who lived in Poland. Even at its inception, the order had a problem. The Russian czar did not allow any young people to enter the religious orders. His hope was that once the elderly religious would die, their orders would die with them. During this time, the Sisters worked and lived underground.

During the time of independence the Lithuanian sisters opened a convent in Panevėžys, and one of their goals was to take care of young girls who came to the city to look for work. They were taught cooking, sewing and other necessary skills. The Sisters found them jobs and good homes. They also worried about the spiritual welfare of these young girls. But this freedom to worship and live openly would be short lived, as would be Lithuania's independence. Once again, the sisters would be forced into hiding.

I asked Sister Nijolė to start at the beginning. She was born in Kaunas in 1938 and had a normal childhood. When she was 18 years old, she was living in Anykščiai with a friend. Word was out that the bishop would be administering the sacraments. Sister Nijolė's friend asked her to be her Godmother. At this point there was only one bishop in the entire country. The others had been

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. All photos from Jeanne Dorr.

arrested or exiled. The church was packed with people, and there was not even room to stand. Sister was very moved by the bishop's words. He urged the people to pray for inner peace. At that moment she felt a calling to become a nun. She really thought she was losing her mind because the thought to be a nun had never before entered her head.

When she got home and told her mother she wanted to be a nun, she was reprimanded for joking about religious matters. The more she visited the convent, the more impressed she was with the sisters and their work. Eventually her mother agreed to pay for her room and food but told the nuns not to hurry with the education. She guaranteed the nuns her daughter would not last two months in the convent. And so began Sister Nijolė's life in the religious order.

She felt a certain destiny because on the day she was talking to the Provincial word was received that one of the elderly sisters had just died. The Provincial looked at Sister Nijolė and said, "You are her replacement." From the moment they left her at the door of the convent, her parents were admonished by local party officials. The local secretary of the party screamed at her father questioning his desire to improve his daughter's life. He was furious. What kind of father would allow his daughter to enter a convent? He could not understand how Sister would ever want to be a nun because she liked to sing, dance, and was just too happy to be a nun. They were unable to wear down either father or daughter.

After two years of study, Sister received permission to live at home but visited the convent often. Then came the sad day that the convent was closed by the government. Sister continued to persevere and despite all the obstacles, and there were many, made her vows on July 2, 1959. She moved to Telšiai where she cared for the sick.

At this point Sister began to talk about how the seminaries were infiltrated by government people. They wanted the Lithuanian church to pull away from Rome. The church would be under the jurisdiction of the government. They managed to break the spirits and the bodies of many people but this plan, as so many communist plans, failed. The majority of priests and nuns were able to hold strong against great odds.

In 1970 the pressure began to mount to rid Lithuania of its religious leaders. A person who

took an exam to enter a seminary could be sent to Siberia. Not only the candidate suffered but also parents, family, including grandparents, were questioned for hours and followed by agents.

All the seminaries were closed except in Kaunas. Three candidates a year were allowed to enter, the rest were selected by the KGB. Some of the "candidates" were forced to give interviews to the foreign press about how free they were and how there was never any pressure exerted on them. They were free to go anywhere they wanted or to read anything they wanted. Sister explained that these were the only ones allowed to travel to places like Rome.

Many people around the world bought this propaganda hook, line, and sinker. And it was for this very reason that the people who knew the truth felt it had to be told. Priests and nuns who spent many years in labor camps were willing to take the risk and be returned to more years of hard labor, but the truth had to be told. Lay people who attended Mass were thrown out of work. Children who went to church were ridiculed by their principals and teachers.

On March 19, 1972, the first issue of the *Chronicles of the Catholic Church* were born. The writers put the chronicle and their own safety in the hands of St. Joseph. Sister Nijolė was asked if she would like to be part of this work. She was told of the terrors that she would face in prison if arrested. She never hesitated for a moment because she felt it was God's will.

Much of this work was done in Kybartai. Father Sigitas Tamkevičius, now Bishop Tamkevičius, was the pastor of the local church. Sister Nijolė went into great length about how they would change cars several times on their way to Kybartai. Different cars would go in different directions to throw off the "tails" who were following them. Father Tamkevičius removed the back seat of his car. They would squeeze themselves into the small space, and he would cover them with sacks of grain, flour, heads of cabbage, and anything else that was available. Since he worked with young people he always had a car filled with any items he could find, so it was not unusual for his car to be packed to the roof.

As he approached the town, he was stopped by the police. They could see that Father was alone, but after looking at the back of the car piled to the roof, they waved him on. Sister thanked God for

lazy patrols who didn't want the bother of lifting and moving all the sacks.

Father had constructed something similar to a plastic green house in the rectory yard. When there was no moon, and it was late at night, it was possible for him to pull the car into the garage and walk into the rectory alone. The people in the back seat, by keeping low, would scurry by way of the greenhouse tunnel to the rectory. They would climb into the cellar through a small window. In the meantime, the ever-watching eyes of the KGB were focused on Father who was letting himself into the rectory with his key. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary with this scene.

Once they entered the cellar, using candles and flashlights, they retrieved the typewriters from where they were hidden. The machines were covered with quilts so that there would be no sound while they were in use. It was from here that information that was gathered from all over Lithuania was sent to the free world. Nothing and no one was spared: names, dates, locations, and incidents were all put into the *Chronicles* to show the world that there was no freedom of religion in Lithuania.

About thirty pages were typed and photographed. The film was sent out of Lithuania with visitors who were returning home. One of the ways the film was taken out of Lithuania was by removing toothpaste from its tube and inserting the film in the toothpaste tube. Many of these transfers were done through students who were studying in Russia. They would take the small package, and it would be sent to the Franciscans in Brooklyn.

The KGB had a feeling something was happening but couldn't find the materials. They dug up the sidewalks near the rectory and the church, tore up the floors in the church and the rectory, smashed every piece of furniture in the rectory, and even ripped apart the dog house all to no avail. Looking back on everything, Sister feels it was God's will that despite all their suspicions, they never found anything. Every two months, like a miracle, the



Sister Nijolė in her apartment.

Photo: J. Dorr

Chronicles appeared.

Sister Nijolė spoke of one incident where one writer was visited by the KGB. He had a premonition that something was going to happen and insisted on meeting his contact a day early so that there would be no evidence in his apartment. That night he was badly beaten by agents and taken to the police station. Since they had no evidence, they had to charge him with something. A drunken woman he had never seen before accused him of attacking her, and he received a prison sentence of eight years for the "attack."

Sister told me so many incredible stories that at times they seemed surreal. How in the world could one woman have so many narrow escapes? Over and over she stressed that God had given her an incredible intuition of when to hide and when to run. Once she was carrying information in the lining of her coat when she was almost cornered. As three police cars came screeching to the front door, she ducked out the back door and jumped into a pile of leaves. Seconds later, a taxi came through the alley. Sister never remembered seeing a taxi in this area before. She flagged the cab down and once again came out the winning side a near miss.

Her picture was now circulated in every republic. She spent four years in Moscow. The KGB showed her picture to everyone in the apartment building. All the neighbors swore they never laid eyes on her. Sister Nijolė laughed when she spoke

about all her wigs and her many pairs of glasses. She would enter her building as a blonde and leave as a redhead wearing rhinestone glasses and a flashy dress. Although she dyed her hair many colors and wore wigs, she has a small mark on her face that leaves no doubt as to who she is. She had reversible coats and all kinds of make up. She said her own brother would not have recognized her.

She credits her neighbors, Russian Baptists, for saving her more than once. They would send signals to her as to what exits and stairs were being watched. These were people who also understood religious persecution. One neighbor was offered a new car if he would testify against her, but the man shook his head and said he had no idea who she was.

Once when she returned, she found four agents in her hallway. Before she had a chance to react, an elderly man flung open his door and started shouting at her that she took too long to get his medicine. He couldn't understand how he raised such an irresponsible daughter when she knew he was ill. At that moment, Sister Nijolė became his daughter, Olga. The "argument" continued after the door was slammed and locked. The agents left the hallway without finding Sister Nijolė.

In 1974 Sister Nijole was arrested and sentenced to six years: three years strict regime and three years in exile. While in Siberia, she made gloves and worked hard to fulfill her quota. Not once during this interview did Sister Nijole show any hatred or bitterness toward her tormentors. In fact, she prays for them every day. She did not want to dwell on the past but rather look toward the future.

Siberia never broke her spirit. After she returned to Lithuania, she continued to be pressured, watched, and harassed. On February 5, 1988, she was taken to KGB headquarters. The agents were losing patience with her. The agent who was interrogating her was becoming impatient. He was chain smoking and screaming as he pounded the table with his fist. He threatened that she would find herself being pushed under the wheels of a car as so many priests had been found. She told him it didn't matter to her how she died. He grabbed a knife and held it to her throat. When she still didn't break, he began to beat her and punch her in her face.

On February 16, she was returned to the headquarters and asked what she wanted. She was offered a ticket to the United States, Canada, Australia,

or anywhere else she wanted to go. She didn't want to go anywhere; she wanted to stay in Lithuania. She told her tormentors she wouldn't dream of leaving them. After all, hadn't they, her "brothers," been with her for twenty years? They told her she had become too big of an expense for the state. She was costing them millions of rubles. They had, at times, ten to twelve men assigned to her as well as two or three cars to follow her. Once again, she rejected their offer to leave Lithuania.

Sister Nijolė is an incredible woman. She remembered every date and every incident that ever happened to her. She even remembered what was printed on the picket sign that she carried while protesting in Washington. When I asked her what became of the men who put her through so much agony, she simply smiled and said they were now among the most respected businessmen in Lithuania. They do, however, cross the street when they see her coming. She was not shy about mentioning their names.

This interview was held on July 9, 2002. Sister told me it was the Feast of St. Veronica and that Veronica was her mother's name. It was also the twenty-second anniversary of her release from Siberia.

Sister laughs at the word retirement. She has written several books and now spends her time helping people, especially abused women and children. She prays for the people who persecuted her and that the people in Lithuania make the right choices. She has been known to be vocal when she feels politicians don't have the best interests of the Lithuanian people in mind.

Since I could no longer contain myself, I asked Sister if there was anything she feared. "Yes, of course," she answered. "I'm terrified of spiders and fleas."

Many other people suffered for the *Chronicles*. Father Tamkevičius was sent into exile, as were others who worked on gathering information. The late Father Casimir Pugevičius must be given credit for translating the *Chronicles* as well as Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid, Inc. and all who worked for them in spreading the word of the persecutions in Lithuania.

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." —Mahatma Gandhi.

Sister Nijolė has taught us all that is possible to forgive. It is one of the ways she lives her faith every day of her life. ♦

Ina Bertulytė Bray

Temporary Children's Home in Vilnius – An update



In the year 2000, the Seattle Daughters of Lithuania asked me to pay a visit to a miniscule institution in Vilnius, the Temporary Home for Abandoned Children (Laikinos vaikų globos namai). Zita Petkus had made the suggestion that we perhaps support this organization, so this was to be a testing of their worthiness.

As I described that visit in the August 2000 issue of *Tulpė Times* and the subsequent issue of *Bridges*, this is a group home for some 8 to 12 children, ages ranging from 3 to 16 years, abandoned by their families, runaways from abusive homes, street kids, children brought in by child custody services or the police. In other words, the cast-offs of society.

The setting, however, is that of a family home: school, play, outings near or far, church; but in addition, never-ending medical treatments, never-ending dealings with dysfunctional members of the children's families, and a continuous struggle for the survival of the Home.

These are the fortunate children, however. Fortunate because the care and compassion in this home far surpasses anything they had experienced to that point. No more binding of arms to

keep the child from eating, no more twisting of arms to control behavior, twisting to the point of deformity, no more vermin, dirt, disease, and high fever, lack of school, begging and living on the streets, physical and emotional abuse and pain. Many children have already come and gone, usually back to their own families or relatives, but some remain.

Three years have passed since my first visit, that first touching of hearts. This summer, on a sunny evening, I arrive at the back of the tall, aging apartment house. Laima Makutėnaitė, the director and boundlessly compassionate "mother" to all, greets me with her usual warmth. Her assistant Roma Aleksiejūnaitė has left already as has the day housekeeper. The night "guardian" is already here.

The children gather, and soon poems are recited, songs are sung, stories told, all accompanied by good-natured kidding and laughter. Gifts are exchanged. I bring them American children's books and toys; they share their created pictures of Lithuanian scenes and events in their lives. Their imagination, their control of crayons amazes me. We relive their year through photographs.

INA BERTULYTĖ BRAY is an active member of the Lithuanian-American Community in Seattle, Washington and the Seattle Daughters of Lithuania. This article first appeared in the Aug. 2003 issue of Tulpė Times.

Soon coffee and pastries appear on the table for the guests, and the children saunter off to their communal bedrooms. We adults talk, the children somewhere laugh, giggle, seem to be playing games, a happy time before bedtime.

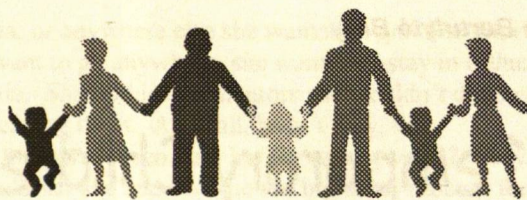
As we talk, the littlest girl tiptoes into the room and heads for Laima's lap. Very quietly, very gently, she crawls up and settles in, playing with some toys she has brought along. Laima's arms enfold her. I hold back tears. Here beside me sits Laima holding a contented little girl, no longer the wild and desperate creature who not so long ago had been rescued from a disastrous family setting and hardly capable of emotion. No force, coercion or punishment could have tamed this child as did the gentle loving hands of Laima and Roma.

Taking in this poignant scene beside me, I was reminded of a description of garbage children in Lithuania that I had read in a book review in the Lithuanian-American daily *Draugas* (Jan. 25, 2003. "*Išsiduosi balsu – You will Give Your-*



self away with your Voice", by Vanda Juknaitė). The author had vividly described the life of these discarded, feral children whose only future consisted of a choice between incarceration and suicide.

To this day in Lithuania, as in other Eastern European countries, there exists a dark level of society that seems to live a continuum of the horrors of street life of 19th century Europe, a life that defies our western imagination. Governmental child protective services and the accompanying bureaucracy have not yet matured enough where they can be effective. In fact, according to the mentioned book, they are a part of the problem. If only considering the negative population growth of Lithuania, if not moral, ethical, and religious values, should not conditions be provided for every child to be treasured and allowed to grow into an integral and productive member of Lithuania's society? Our pres-



ence makes an enormous difference.

Laima Makutėnaitė, the director and the unsung hero of by now hundreds of children, was born in Siberia, near the Sea of Laptev, to parents who had been deported in 1941. Her father's crime – he was a teacher. Life in the far north claimed or maimed many, including members of her family. Her surviving parents were released in 1959 and with Laima and her brother returned to her mother's village. Laima's life, however, because of an infection in her hip joint, became a medical horror story that dragged on for years. Absolutely miraculously, she recovered and has dedicated her life to rescuing discarded children whether on an individual level or working to change the system.

In 1996, she and her assistant Roma, through enormous effort, were granted space in a multi-storied apartment house in Žirmūnai not far from the center of Vilnius. With donations from the late Dr. Albina Prunskienė, an American Lithuanian, they renovated and furnished what had been virtually a "garbage dump" into a cozy apartment. Today, children's artwork decorates the walls; each child is allowed to express individuality in some form, an attitude of the togetherness of a family prevails. Again I was struck by the genuine happiness that shines from the children's faces.

Since both Laima and Roma have medical training, even in that respect the children are well cared for. One little girl had suffered deformed and almost useless arms because her demented mother for years had tied them to her body to keep her from searching for food. I remember that shy little thing vividly from my first visit. It took years of Laima's physical and mental therapy, but today this traumatized girl smiles and with great pride demonstrates that she even can wash dishes.

This then is the Home for whom the Seattle Daughters of Lithuania have been the helping "aunties", as the children themselves call us, fi-

nancially, physically, and morally (this year to the tune of \$1,500). "Saulutė", a Lithuanian child welfare organization in Chicago, provides small donations, as does an individual in Florida, but otherwise we are the mainstay from the outside world. Yet the money is desperately needed in a country where governmental "budgetary problems" habitually provide a convenient cover for continued withholding of support. When I tried to call this summer, the Home's regular phone had been disconnected for lack of funds.

An additional threat looms large: the city wants to eliminate this home and move the children to a large and impersonal institution, a potential breeding ground for disaster. In such institutions the warehousing of children, a condi-

tion in Easter European countries that we all have seen in the western media, is still more the norm than the exception. The threat is real, and Laima is fighting hard.

No doubt, the Daughters will continue their support. If you would like more information, please call me at 205-523-1620. However, should any of *Bridges* readers individually be interested in becoming an "auntie" at whatever level (they need everything, the turnover of children is continuous, and clothing for example is always an issue), here is the address:

Laima Makutėnaite
Laikinos vaiku globos namai
Zirmunu 123
2012 Vilnius Lithuania ♦

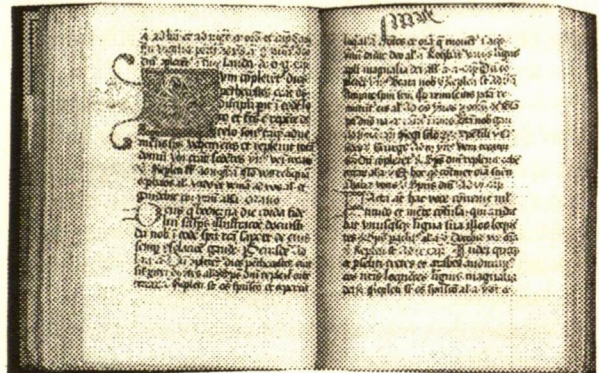
Fr. Jonas Rikteraitis

An appeal for the faithful in Lithuania

At the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Priests' League Convention in October 2002, the Bishops of Lithuania through Bishop Eugenijus Bartulis, Ordinary of the diocese of Siauliai, asked the League to finance the publication of the Lithuanian language "Breviary", Liturgy of the Hours, for the priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers, and seminarians of Lithuania.

Father John Rikteraitis volunteered to spearhead a "Priest to Priest Breviary Appeal" with a goal of \$100,000 toward the publication of the "Breviary", asking priests of the United States to help priests in Lithuania.

The "Breviary" is extremely important for Lithuanian priests because most of the priests do the best they can with the English, German, Latin or other language ones that they now have. For priests to have a "Breviary" in their own language will help the priests connect with the Church that more closely, that more



spiritually.

The League asks American priests and religious organizations to help the League meet this goal. If you would like more information regarding this publication and the "Priest to Priest Breviary Appeal", please contact Rev. John E. Rikteraitis at 1039 Maple Ave., P.O. Box 341361, Hartford, CT 06134-1361 or tel.: 860-956-1661. ♦

FATHER JONAS RIKTERAITIS is the treasurer of the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Priests' League of America and the Appeal's chairman.

C U R R E N T E V E N T S

New York Times covers the Baltic Republics

Bill Keller, well-known correspondent for *The New York Times*, wrote a travel article entitled "The Baltic Republics" in the *New York Times* September 14th edition. The review is written more like a travel journal than a review featuring recommended or not recommended sights and hotels. It is sprinkled with personal commentary, historical updates, and interesting encounters with Baltic residents.

Keller's descriptions of his trip were "user-understandable", as in this excerpt, "... our itinerary was essentially three capitals and a coastline. Our mode of transportation was a rented Ford Mondeo, soon littered with the detritus of two guys on a road trip – Pringles, Nutella, soda bottles, a bag of little dried fish that became our Baltic junk food. The CD player blared Jay-Z and Sean Paul when we weren't investigating the local radio options."

His trip seemed also to be an exercise in testing previous Baltic trip accounts and verifying the truth behind travel guide recommendations. As Keller said, "I'm happy to report, first of all, that the Baltics, whose aspirations of independence once struck me as brave but improbable, have been reborn as genuine, modern, entirely appealing European countries. Word of this has spread slowly. Two years ago Jonathan Franzen, in his novel "The Corrections," conjured a Lithuania that was a hyperbole of post-Soviet decay and lawlessness, "rattling down the road toward anarchy." Until recently, the Bradt Travel Guide series (the most reliable of the few English-language tourist books on the Baltics) listed scarce gas stations and warned against the conditions in local hospitals. Even in neighboring countries that have begun to discover the secrets of Baltic tourism, there is still persistent word-of-mouth that they are a little iffy, suitable perhaps for the adventurous, but not entirely civilized. For the record, the Baltic countries are now as safe, stable and traveler-friendly as any destination in "old" Europe. Indeed, if you knew the Baltics when they were vassals of Soviet power,

you will marvel at things travelers in most countries take for granted – the ubiquity of 24-hour gas stations, A.T.M.'s, hassle-free car rentals, good and well-marked roads, convenience stores, Internet cafes, and friendly, free-map-dispensing tourist information offices."

Keller also pays an endearing compliment to Lithuanians. "I've always had a soft spot for Lithuania. According to type-casting, Lithuanians are the most passionate of the Baltic peoples, Estonians the most standoffish and cerebral, and Latvians temperamentally (as well as geographically) in between. I know people who give the lie to all three stereotypes, but it is certainly true that the Lithuanians – who alone among the Baltic states were once a power in their own right, subjugating swaths of Poland and Russia – were the most daring in grabbing for the freedom dangled by Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980's. This was the first Soviet republic to declare independence. I was there in 1991 when that courage was challenged by Soviet tanks."

The article includes descriptions of the ongoing renovation of Vilnius – "there was a whirl of saws and clouds of dust as workmen cut new paving stones. Many buildings in the sprawling old town were undergoing face lifts."

He described the hotel, Stikliai, he and his son, Tom, stayed at as "a luxury hotel cleverly insinuated into a 17th-century building in the Jewish quarter. The furnishings and food were exquisite, although the architects seem to have been sometimes baffled by the challenge of reconciling the 17th and 21st centuries. We stayed in a sloped attic room the size of an Olympic swimming pool, with the furniture clustered at one end and the closet at the other end."

Keller reminisced about the 1991 attack on the television tower. He said, "a parade of tanks – dispatched by the same renegade hardliners who later that year would try to overthrow Gorbachev – roared up the grassy hillside, firing off thunderous artillery rounds. Thirteen Lithuanians were shot or crushed under the tank treads,

and the tower become the Alamo of Baltic independence.”

One featured Vilnius resident who has previously stood out in newspaper and magazines articles appeared again in Keller’s description of residents who married business with nationality. “Rita Dapkus, a Lithuanian-American who moved here to aid the independence movement and is now a member of the Vilnius City Council, has struck a blow against creeping [European] uniformity by opening a restaurant in an unfashionable shopping center in northern Vilnius, offering food, drink, and music of strictly Lithuanian origin. (No Coke, no Pepsi, and the only “coffee” is made from carrots or acorns.) The night we went, a wild, accordion-propelled folk band filled the room with delirious polkas and waltzes. We ate hogs’ ears, deviled eggs with pickled herring, Lithuanian goulash, chicken liver patties. Lithuanian cuisine is not for cholesterol watchers, although you can dance it off.”

Other trips in Lithuania that Keller took were to Trakai: “from a distance, the orange-brick castle seems to float on a wind-ruffled lake like a Lord of the Rings apparition; Šiauliai: “Europe’s odder roadside attractions – the Hill of Crosses, a weedy hill densely planted with thousands upon thousands of crucifixes, a pilgrimage site that honors, among other victims, the Lithuanians deported to Russia in the 19th century”; and the Curonian Spit: “On our drive through the forest, we encountered a large family of wild boars panhandling for snacks from delighted human visitors”.

The rest of this Baltic trip took the Keller entourage “north from Lithuania around the Latvian coast, and finally up into Estonia. The coast is flat, so the road affords no view of the water, but from time to time we would turn left through the coastal forest to discover a fishing harbor or an industrial port.”

During their stay in Latvia, Keller recounts an evening spent near the medieval town of Kuldiga. “Our host was Yuris Akis, an English-speaking double-bass player from Riga who retired from the jazz life into country hostelry. We joined him for a strange, multitasking evening – drinking beer, watching a muted Formula One

race on TV, listening to an a cappella jazz sextet sing Christmas music at top volume, all the while poring over our host’s memorabilia from encounters with the likes of Duke Ellington and Oscar Peterson. His wife fired up the sauna for us before bed. We roasted and smacked each other with birch branches, and fell into a clean country sleep.”

Keller’s visit to Riga can be summed up by the following, “It is the largest, with about 800,000 residents, and the most cosmopolitan. It has a lovely old town hugged by leafy parks and a serene canal, and its own architectural treasure – in particular, scores of immaculately restored buildings in variations of opulent Art Nouveau from the 1890’s and early 1900’s.”

Keller and his son Tom spent the last day of their journey with “Lennart Meri, the eminence of Estonian independence – writer, film director, philosopher and, until recently, president.”

Keller closed his article with Meri’s remarks, “On his patio, Meri poured us coffee and mulled a question about Estonia’s national identity – the eroding influence of global culture, the lingering effects of Soviet dominion – and concluded that Estonia, like his landscaping project, is a work in progress. ‘Except for the Vatican, I don’t know any countries that are finished,’ he said.”

The piece in its entirety casts a hopeful and admiring glance at the Baltic Republics. It also allows Lithuanian-Americans to question how much do they really know about the other Republics. This type of trip would allow many to realize the interconnectedness each country has with each other – and how this can be extremely important living outside the three homelands.

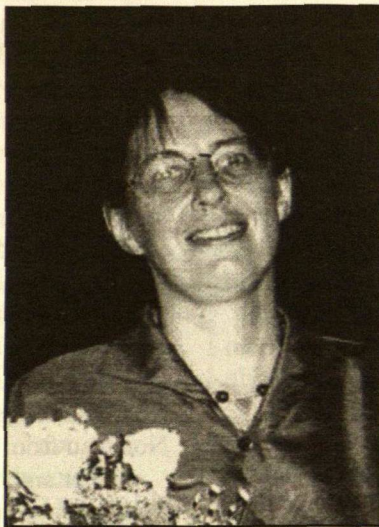
This piece in its entirety can be found at www.nytimes.com. ♦

— Rasa Ardys-Juška



New LAC president — Vaiva Vebraitė-Gust

LAC, Inc. XVII National Board, convening for the first time in their three-year term elected Vaiva Vebraitė-Gust as the president of the LAC, Inc. National Executive Committee. She will be the second woman and the second president to have been born in the U.S. to hold this office in the 50 years that the Lithuanian-American Community has been in existence. The meeting was held in Omaha, Nebraska on Sept. 12 to the 14.



Vebraitė-Gust was born and raised in Connecticut. She has been a lifelong active member of the Connecticut Lithuanian community and the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. Among her many accomplishments, she was instrumental in starting the “Atgimimo” Lithuanian Saturday School in Connecticut and for some time headed the “Vėtra” folk dancing group. In 1990, she and Jūratė Krokytė-Stirbienė founded A.P.P.L.E. – American Professional Partnership for Lithuanian Education and served as general director for several

years. From 1998 to 2000, Vebraitė-Gust held the position of the Republic of Lithuania’s Education Vice-minister. Presently she is a consultant to the Republic’s Education Ministry.

The LAC, Inc. XVII National Board also voted for the Presidium Committee – taking the job for a second term was Regina Narušienė and her staff members Juratė Budrienė, Gediminas Damašius, Birutė Vilutienė and Birutė Vindašienė.

The LAC Honorary Court members include Vytautas Alksninis, Saulius Anužis, dr. Vytautas Bieliauskas, Teresė Gečienė and dr. Kęstutis Keblys.

The LAC Controller Commission includes Gintaras Čepas, Andrius Jurkūnas and Irena Veitienė.

The Lithuanian Republic Seimas and Lac Commission will be made up of Gediminas Leškys (pres.), dr. Dalia Giedrimienė, Vytautas Maciūnas, Angelė Nelsienė and Dalia Puškorienė. ♦

The LAC loses their human services pioneer — Birutė Jasaitis

Birutė Jasaitis the Lithuanian-American Community’s Executive Director of the Human Services Council passed away on September 9th, in Chicago, Illinois. She was instrumental in establishing and guiding numerous committees that sent aid to the needy of Lithuania: orphans and handicapped children, destitute Freedom Fighters, and others. In addition, she ran a senior citizens center, the Seklyčia restaurant in Marquette Park, and assisted immigrants after Lithuania reestablished her Independence. In 2002, Jasaitis was voted woman of the year by the Lithuanian-

American Community.

She left a loving family — daughters and sons-in-law with their families, Juratė and Antanas Budrys and Aušra and Terrence Petry; and a son, Algirdas Jasaitis; siblings Vytautas, Šarūnas, Egidijus Užgiris, Otilija Barkauskas and their families. Her husband, Jonas Jasaitis, had predeceased her.

Her loyalty and hard work for the Lithuanian-American Community will never be forgotten. Birute’s strength, lively personality, and caring heart will always shine in her accomplishments. We bid you a peaceful rest. ♦



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• LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL •

Volume 27

Issue 7, September 2003

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