

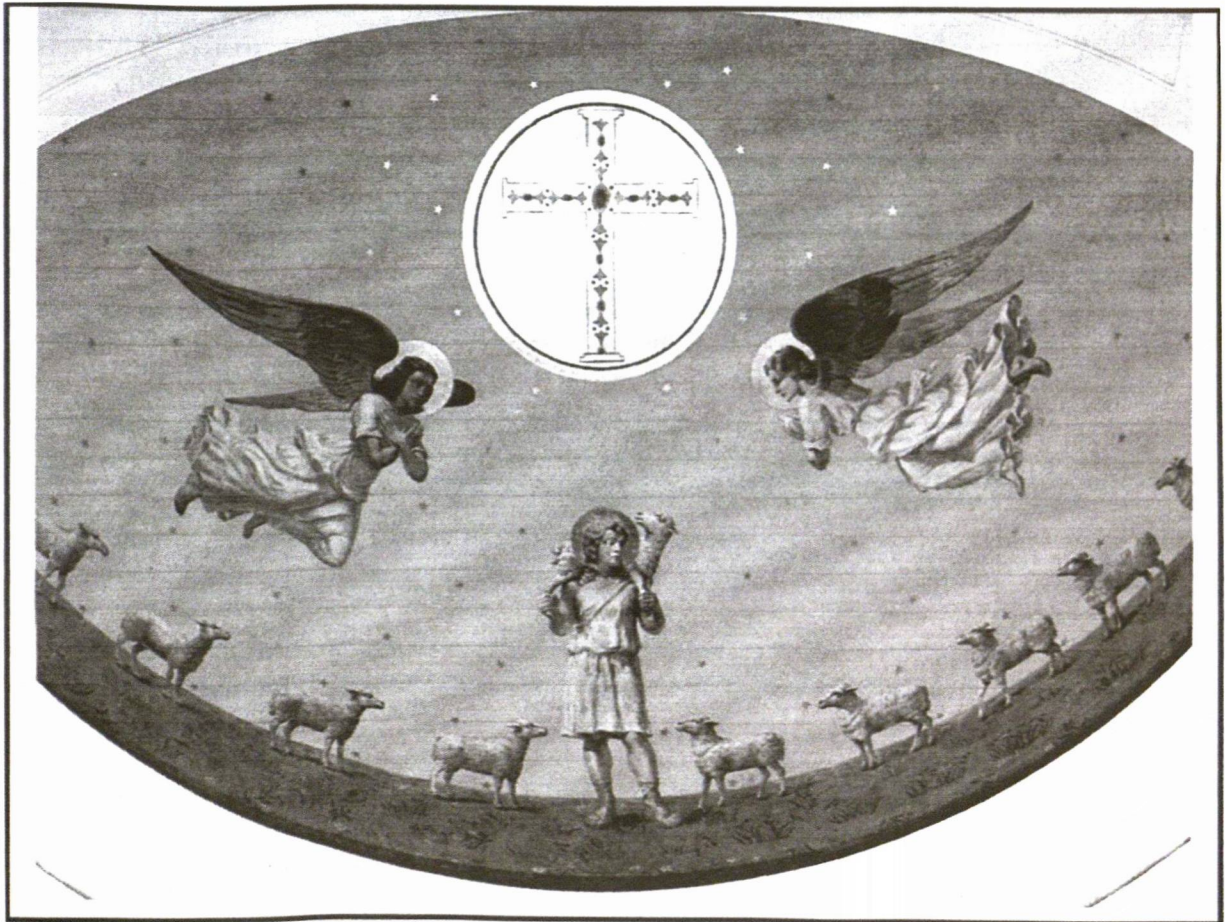
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# BRIDGES

● LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL ●

Volume 27

Issue 8, October 2003



*Lithuanian Angels...Journey to Adopt — Part II...Knights of Lithuania Celebration*

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

*Since autumn has generously given us sunny, warm days, I thought it was time to reevaluate my garden. During the summer, the blooms had been meager. Much of the open space had been encroached upon by domineering daisies and overzealous coreopsis, and the other plants had diminished in their growth.*

*It took several days, a worthy shovel, and plenty of muscle to disengage snarled roots from the soil. I found many surprises in the form of forgotten flowers, long ago planted but overshadowed by formidable mint. They seemed dainty and shy as they lay in the "replanting" pile.*

*As I tore through my garden, this small community, it occurred to me that this was just a reshuffling of some tired, yet willing members or a retirement for those who had ceased to know their boundaries. As in every community, elections and council member appointments do this job quite nicely. We give those who need a well-deserved break a chance to revitalize in another community area or as a seasoned consultant, ready and willing to give aid.*

*Then, of course, there are those who cling to their positions because they have allowed their appointment to define them as the person they are. They become lost without the familiar shuffling of papers and committee meetings. My daisies had taken this role in my garden. They presided over the geraniums, commandeered nutrients with their invasive roots, and created shade pockets for the sun-starved lavender.*

*As each shovelful of daisy was unceremoniously plopped into the compost-bound wheelbarrow, a vision of colorful perennials and annuals started to take hold. The garden would continue...with some of its original, trustworthy members alongside those that would promise a creative touch to the now patchy earth.*

*As for me, I feel that a replanting would do me good. The years with Bridges have been rewarding — the friendships that I had made with Bridges writers are priceless. Each one has my undying respect and gratitude for their loyalty and knowing when to send a much-needed article my way. Yet, restlessness pervades my "roots", and the thirst for experiencing a different side of the sun is at hand.*

*Rasa Ardys-Juška*

Editor

## BRIDGES

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## It's Harvest Time!

Autumn festivals and decorations abound in every neighborhood. During Lithuania's earlier times, flax gathering, breaking, and thrashing were prime reasons to burst into song and mimic the work movements in choreographed dance. For example, some folk dances incorporated turning round, weaving, and jumping up — all flax gathering movements.

Lithuanian folk dancing is dominated by subdued ring dances and games whose lyrics center around growing crops and livestock or relationships between young people and match making. All of which characterized village and farm life.

Harvest time was a time for celebration and the gateway to the winter months. It allowed the young at heart to hop and jump before the deep snowy drifts blanketed the countryside.



### On the cover:

*This painting, by Vl. Didžiokas, can be found in the St. Michael the Archangel Church in Kaunas. It was originally painted in 1935 and restored in 1993.*

**Karl Altau**  
of The Joint Baltic-American National Committee, Inc.

## **Although radio funding restoration agreed... Baltics, Central and Eastern Europe not part of the deal**

**A** conference committee of members from the House and Senate will soon convene to settle differences in the FY04 Commerce, Justice, State (CJS) Appropriations bill. Although the Senate Appropriations committee agreed on September 4 to restore FY03 level funding for Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) services (S. 1585), the House Appropriations committee did not include the necessary language in H.R.2799. It is critical that the conferees agree on the Senate report language to restore funding for VOA and RFE/RL broadcasts to the Baltics and Central and Eastern Europe at FY03 levels. If the conferees do not agree on this, the services will be dead.

Other important matters in the language also need to be worked out before the bill is finalized:

- 1) The Senate report language omits mention of Latvian VOA, along with both Slovak and Slovene VOA and RFE/RL services. This still needs to be corrected – these services have to be reinserted into the bill language.
- 2) The full figure of \$8.9 million for broad-



casting services in the region should be asked for, as stipulated in Senate Authorization language.

Please contact your Members of Congress to ask them to support the Senate Appropriations report language (S. Rept. 108-144) to restore

funding to VOA and RFE/RL Baltic language services.

### ***For House members, please contact (Tel/Fax numbers):***

- Bill Young (R-FL): 202-225-5961/225-9764
- Frank Wolf (R-VA): 202-225-5136/225-0437
- David Obey (D-WI): 202-225-3365/715-842-4488
- Jose Serrano (D-NY): 202-225-4361/225-6001

### ***Other CJS subcommittee members:***

- Harold Rogers (R-KY): 202-225-4601/225-0940
- Jim Kolbe (R-AZ): 202-225-2542/225-0378
- Charles Taylor (R-NC): 202-225-6401/226-6422
- Ralph Regula (R-OH): 202-225-3876/225-3059
- David Vitter (R-LA): 202-225-3015/225-0739
- John Sweeney (R-NY): 202-225-5615/225-6234

**KARL ALTAU** 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.

- ♦ Mark Kirk (R-IL): 202-225-4835/225-0837
- ♦ Alan Mollohan (D-WV): 202-225-4172/225-7564
- ♦ Bud Cramer (D-AL): 202-225-4801/225-4392
- ♦ Patrick Kennedy (D-RI): 202-225-4911/225-3290
- ♦ Martin Olav Sabo (D-MN): 202-225-4755/225-4886

***In the House, please also contact:***

- ♦ Dennis Hastert (R-IL): 202-225-2976/225-0697
- ♦ Nancy Pelosi (D-CA): 202-225-4965/225-8259
- ♦ Henry Hyde (R-IL): 202-225-4561/225-1166
- ♦ Tom Lantos (D-CA): 202-225-3531/226-9789
- ♦ John Shimkus (R-IL): 202-225-5271/225-5880
- ♦ Doug Bereuter (R-NE): 202-225-4806/225-5686
- ♦ Robert Wexler (D-FL): 202-225-3001/225-5974
- ♦ Tom Delay (R-TX): 202-225-5951/225-5241

***Members of the House Baltic Caucus***

***In the Senate, calls are needed to (Tel/Fax numbers):***

- ♦ Ted Stevens (R-Alaska): 202-224-3004/224-2354
- ♦ Judd Gregg (R-NH): 202-224-3324/224-4952
- ♦ Robert Byrd (D-WV): 202-224-3954/228-0002
- ♦ Ernest Hollings (D-SC): 202-224-6121/224-4293

***Other CJS subcommittee members:***

- ♦ Pete Domenici (R-NM): 202-224-6621/228-0900
- ♦ Christopher Bond (R-MO): 202-224-5721/224-8149
- ♦ Mitch McConnell (R-KY): 202-224-2541/224-2499
- ♦ Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX): 202-224-5922/224-0776
- ♦ Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-Co): 202-224-5852/228-4609
- ♦ Sam Brownback (R-KS): 202-224-6521/228-1265
- ♦ Daniel Inouye (D-HI): 202-224-3934/224-6747
- ♦ Barbara Mikulski (D-MD): 202-224-4654/224-8858

- ♦ Patrick Leahy (D-VT): 202-224-4242/224-3479
- ♦ Herb Kohl (D-WI): 202-224-5653/224-9787
- ♦ Patty Murray (D-WA): 202-224-2621/224-0238

***In the Senate, please also contact:***

- ♦ Bill Frist (R-TN): 202-224-3344/228-1264
- ♦ Tom Daschle (D-SD): 202-224-2321/224-6603
- ♦ Jon Kyl (R-AZ): 202-224-4521/224-2207
- ♦ Richard Durbin (D-IL): 202-224-2152/228-0400
- ♦ George Allen (R-VA): 202-224-4024/224-5432
- ♦ Diane Feinstein (D-CA): 202-224-3841/228-3954
- ♦ Mike DeWine (R-OH): 202-224-2315/224-6519

A complete list of Appropriations committee members and contact information can be obtained by visiting <http://congress.org> (U.S. Congress/House Appropriations in the drop down menu). For more information, please see JBANC's backgrounder on the issue: "Keeping VOA and RFE/RL on the Air in Central and Eastern Europe": <http://jbanc.org/issues.html>

***Talking Points***

- 1) U.S. Public Diplomacy is at stake. The U.S. view abroad is being marginalized.
- 2) The cost of VOA and RFE/RL broadcasts to the Baltics and Central and Eastern Europe is small – the benefits are still significant.
- 3) Senate and House Authorization language should also be supported. The bills support restoration of funding.

Unfortunately, the work is not yet over.  
Help the Baltics be heard and stay connected!



Ramunė Kubilius

# A Child's Gate to Learning



**T**wo recent articles appeared in the Lithuanian language newspaper *Draugas*, published in Chicago. They show some of the societal contrasts that can be found in Lithuania today.

One news item (*Draugas*, July 19, 2003, taken from the *Elta* news service) indicated that record numbers of Lithuania's young people are seeking higher education – one of every four. This is taking place in spite of the fact that in Lithuania, like the rest of Europe, the numbers of young people up to the age of 30 are dropping (in Lithuania, the numbers of young people in that age group dropped by 10% since 1990). The numbers of children up to the age of 10 dropped 35%.

In the second news item (*Draugas*, August 26, 2003, taken from *BNS*, Baltic News Service), Lithuania's Ministry of Education (Švietimo ir mokslo ministerija) announced that between August 31 and October 31, it was undertaking a new mission called "To School? On the Way!" ("Mokyklon? Pakeliui!"). The purpose of this new undertaking is to emphasize to Lithuania's citizens how important it is for children who are truant from school to go back to school.

During this special time period, a free hotline number could be called to report on school-aged children who are out on the streets during school hours (home schooling is not in

fashion in Lithuania, so these children, for whatever reasons, are truly truant – RK). Some officials from smaller towns and villages have claimed that the problem is most prevalent in larger cities, since in smaller cities and villages neighbors take care of neighbors.

The Lithuanian government and some specially funded projects in Lithuania have undertaken this cry for support to ensure that children regularly go to school and have the supplies they need, and, if needed, that their families receive financial support. These types of news articles indicate that support at various levels and of differing types is still needed to reach the goal that young Lithuanian children successfully go beyond the early years of education and aspire towards advanced education, university level or technical college.

One volunteer group, the U.S.-based Child's Gate to Learning (Vaiko vartai į mokslą), was founded in 1998 in Chicago by a group of teachers and social workers, and in 2003 it is celebrating its fifth anniversary. The mission of the group, now numbering about 100 members, is to help the homeless and disadvantaged children of Lithuania to improve their educational achievement by providing learning and cultural opportunities, social activities, skills, and to integrate them into society as productive members. The group's activities have been described in previous issues of *BRIDGES*. Here

RAMUNĖ KUBILIUS is a regular contributor to *Bridges*. Photos from [www.childgate.org](http://www.childgate.org).

is a re-cap and update of some of the group's projects.

The organization supports eight after-school centers in Lithuania, and this includes two centers that take care of children full-time, children, whose parents' parental rights have been suspended (for child neglect or other reasons). It is estimated that about 500 children at all eight centers benefit from the support of the group. Two centers are in Vilnius, one in Marijampolė, but the remainder is in smaller towns and villages throughout Lithuania. Child's Gate to Learning helps the centers' directors in a variety of ways



### ***Financial Assistance...***

Sometimes a center is in need of specific financial assistance to help pay for after-school meals for the children, to provide children with needed school supplies, backpacks, sometimes shoes or winter clothing. Occasionally a donor is found who offers to pay for music lessons, outings, or other cultural activities for the children. The supplies that can be obtained in Lithuania are purchased there, but it is more efficient to purchase the items in the United States and send them directly to the specific center in need. Child's Gate to Learning officers also help center directors become aware of specific funding for which they can be eligible: funding that is administered by another organization or source.

A special "Child's Gate to Learning" fundraising drive is underway from September 2003 to January 2004 to help one of the centers in the village of Obeliai to design a woodworking shop and supply it with the needed carpentry equipment. Volunteer carpenters from the village will be recruited to help teach children in after-school seminars: about woodworking and carpentry in general, including the safe use

of tools.

More importantly, the children will learn how to make useful and decorative objects with their own hands. They will learn about the planning, patience, and good work habits that are needed to finish their undertakings. Tax-exempt donations for this project are appreciated. Checks should be made out to and sent to the Child's Gate to Learning address listed at the end of the article, and marked "Obeliai woodworking fundraiser".

### ***Volunteers...***

For the past two summers, young Lithuanian-speaking volunteers have gone to Lithuania to spend several weeks working at a particular center. The volunteers have met with "Child's Gate to Learning" officers before their trips, to become familiar with the particular center to which they are going, to find out who will be hosting them, and to receive some ideas on what skills and talents they could share with the children.

The teenagers brought their youthful energy to the centers, some gained community service credit at their high schools, and when they returned from their stays, many have vowed to return to Lithuania again. There is something very satisfying in volunteerism.

Since the children attending the centers are out of school over the summer, they have ap-

preciated lively activities, outings, and interesting projects. The teenagers taught the children English, computer skills, and participated with them in sports and other activities. Most importantly, they befriended the children who could happily tell the townspeople at the local ice cream shop or restaurant (where they were taken for treats and meals on special occasions), "these are our friends from America"...

### ***Programs...***

Center directors and volunteers have greatly valued another contribution by Child's Gate to Learning, something that has nothing to do with school supplies. Since its inception, the group has seen the need to help centers foster, encourage, and develop character and self-esteem in the children whose home lives are often chaotic or filled with stress. Programs have been developed that utilize a variety of teaching and learning methods, group discussions, games, plays, and other activities.

Two programs have been developed and implemented so far, and a third is in development, to be brought to Lithuania in early 2004. The first program was a general Character Building Program emphasizing moral, ethical, and social values. The second program was a Substance Abuse Prevention Program (Dare to Resist Alcohol and Substance Abuse). A third program is currently in the planning stages and

will be presented to center directors, staff, and volunteers in early 2004 by Child's Gate to Learning's volunteers in Lithuania.

A successful substance abuse prevention seminar was held in Kaunas, Spring of 2003, that brought together employees and volunteers of all eight centers. They went through the D. R.A.S.A. program, heard lectures, watched American substance abuse prevention videotapes (for which Lithuanian translations were provided by the group), practiced the recommended techniques, including role-playing and games.

This second program came to the attention of the World Lithuanian Community. During the World Lithuanian Congress held in Vilnius, Summer 2003, the Bishop Motiejus Valančius Award was given to "Child's Gate to Learning" for its D.R.A.S.A. program. It was deemed that the program's alcohol and substance abuse emphasis incorporated the ideals of the revered Samogitian Bishop, who was known for his stand on temperance. The award was established to commemorate the 200th birthday of the Bishop (1801-1875), and was funded by the Lithuanian Foundation.

"Child's Gate to Learning" appreciates the generous donations and support received in the past. The group's activities and programs continue to evolve as it vows to continue working for the children of Lithuania.

If you would like more information on Child's Gate to Learning, please go to the internet for <http://childgate.org> or write to Child's Gate at P.O. Box 381, Downers Grove, IL 60515. ♦

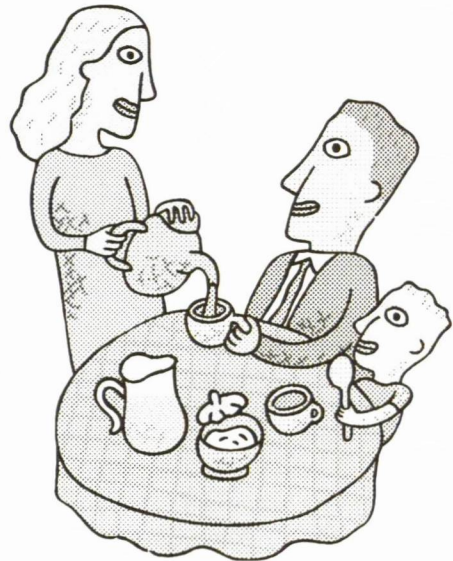




# Our Journey to Adopt

## Part II

**T**his is the second in a series of articles regarding my family's journey to adopt a child from Lithuania. We began the process in August 2001. After several months spent completing our home study and applying for pre-approval from the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services ("BCIS", the former Immigration and Naturalization Service), we finally filed our paperwork with the Republic of Lithuania's Adoption Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour ("Įvaikinimo tarnyba") in March 2002. This installment of the series of articles discusses why adoption from Lithuania has become difficult, and our personal experiences once we received a referral of a child.



### The Civil Code

Adoption from Lithuania was a relatively smooth process for the first 4-5 years following independence. However, there were allegations of corruption and other problems with the system. Further, in 1998, the Lithuanian Seimas ratified the 1993 Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption ("Hague Convention")<sup>1</sup>. As a result, between 1999 and 2001, the entire bureaucracy of adoption was reorganized, and the laws governing adoption redrafted.

The new civil code governing adoption procedures came into effect on July 1, 2001. The code includes five new requirements:

1) The biological parents must provide written consent to the adoption, and that consent must

be approved by the court;

2) If the child has a legal guardian, that guardian must provide written consent to the adoption, also approved by the court;

3) Prospective adoptive parents must be evaluated and a conclusion reached on whether they are suitable to become adoptive parents;

4) A maximum age limit of 50 years of age for the older parent was established, with individuals older than 50, as well as single individuals, being allowed to adopt only in exceptional circumstances;

5) Citizens of foreign countries may only adopt a child if no family of Lithuanian citizens expresses an interest in adopting that child after the child has been on an internal adoption

*RŪTA KALVAITYTĖ-SKUČIENĖ is a member of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. If you have any questions about this article or would like to discuss it, please feel free to contact the author directly at [RutaKS@aol.com](mailto:RutaKS@aol.com). The photo of the orphanage on page 11 was taken by the author.*

list for six months.

The first of these changes raised significant problems regarding the availability of children for adoption. Pursuant to the previous regulations, parents had to provide written consent to adoption. However, that consent did not need court approval. As long as it was notarized, it was valid. When the new regulations came into effect, they did not grandfather existing parental consents, as is customary. Rather, all of those parental consents were deemed invalid and the parents had to provide NEW consents, with court approval. As a result, many children who were previously eligible for adoption suddenly became ineligible.<sup>2</sup>

This failure to grandfather consents also raised a practical problem: who would go find the parents who had previously provided notarized consents, and get them to sign a new one and have the court approve it? According to the Įvaikinimo tarnyba, the *parents themselves* need to file a petition with the court to have their consent approved.<sup>3</sup> On a practical level, this is unlikely. According to the Įvaikinimo tarnyba, at the end of 2001, there were 72 children who became ineligible for adoption as a result of this change.<sup>4</sup>

The requirement that children be made available first to families in Lithuania is problematic on several grounds. First, as clearly delineated in many reports by the Įvaikinimo tarnyba and Ministry of Social Affairs, very few families in Lithuania adopt. There are numerous reasons for this, including negative opinions towards adoption and tough financial situations faced by many families in Lithuania. As a result, it is very unlikely that a child placed on this six-month waiting list will actually be adopted.

In the meantime, the child is forced to stay in an orphanage for six extra months while a foreign family is desperately waiting for him or her. Six months is a very, very long time to a young child. Experts state that for every three months a child spends in an orphanage, his or her development is delayed by one month.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, one can extrapolate that this six-

month waiting period results in an additional two-month developmental delay in children who will eventually be adopted by foreign families. Although the goal of encouraging adoption of the child by a family in Lithuania is laudable, there must be other options to implement that goal which would have less significant impacts on children.

Bureaucratic snafus can also extend the length of time a child is unavailable for international adoption. In one case, a mistake was made with a child's documents. The child had already spent six months on the internal list and no Lithuanian family wanted to adopt her. But a family in the United States is very interested in adopting her. Due to the document snafu, this child was placed back on the internal list for six more months before she could be referred to the family in the United States. The family in the United States hopes that she is referred to them before their home study and BCIS approval expire. It would be a tragedy for this child to lose out on a very loving home due to such bureaucracy.

Second, although the Įvaikinimo tarnyba talks about *citizens* of Lithuania having preferential access to adopt children on the internal waiting list, the reality is that *residents* of Lithuania have this access. Citizens of Lithuania living abroad do not have the opportunity to adopt a child who is on the internal waiting list. They are lumped in with foreign citizens. Given the specific terms used in the civil code and Hague Convention, this distinction is arbitrary and unfounded.

This distinction also has significant impacts on Lithuanian citizens living abroad who wish to adopt. First, it means that they cannot adopt a child as young as a Lithuanian citizen living in Lithuania could, as any child they could adopt must first spend six months on the internal waiting list.

Second, their wait time for a referral is significantly longer. According to the Įvaikinimo tarnyba, in 2002, Lithuanian families wishing to adopt waited for *one month* before receiving a referral of a child.<sup>6</sup> I, as a Lithuanian citizen

living abroad, waited 14 months for a referral during that same period of time. That is a staggering difference. Granted, our adoption process was extended due to our personal circumstances. However, the difference remains significant.

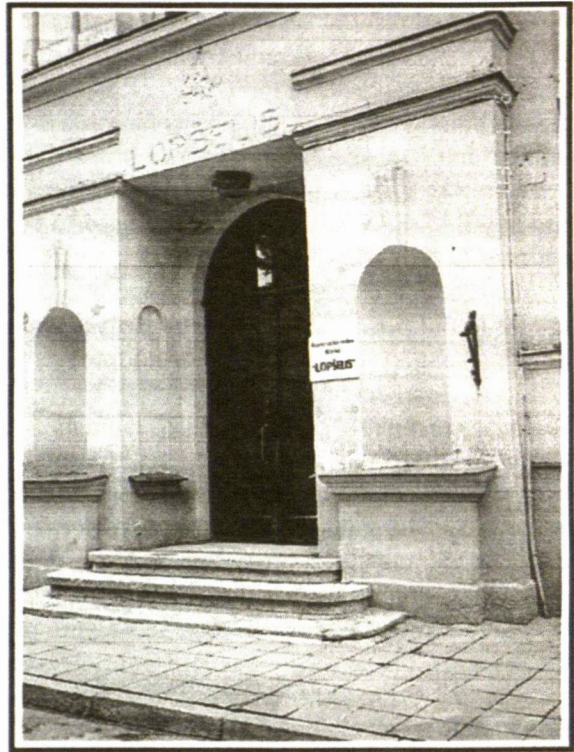
### *The Referral Process Begins*

In January 2003, when our newborn son Darius Antanas was about two to three weeks old, we received an e-mail from our representative in Vilnius, Silva Juratė Savickaitė of the Šeimos Teisės Centras, stating that Įvaikinimo tarnyba had contacted her to let her know that we were near the top of the waiting list, and that we could begin the referral process by May. We were pleasantly surprised, having been given an estimate of two to three years to wait for a referral.

In the end, our wait was 14 months: from March 2002 to May 2003. In early May, we began discussing our options with Silva. Although we had previously hoped to adopt siblings, we knew that with an infant in the house, we would be better off adopting only one child.

On May 16, 2003, the official letter arrived in my e-mail in-box: we were being referred a little boy named Daumantas who lives at the Lopšelis children's home in Kaunas. Daumantas was born September 6, 2001 and was abandoned in the hospital by his birth mother. As is very common with many, many children in Lithuania's orphanages, Daumantas is the son of alcoholics: both his biological mother and father drink heavily. Neither parent expressed any interest in their child, leaving him (as well as his seven older siblings) to the care of the state.

Unfortunately, Daumantas' background highlights the profound impact alcoholism has had on Lithuania's children. Due to their alcoholism, Daumantas' biological parents were unable to care for him or his older siblings. Further, by drinking during pregnancy, Daumantas' biological mother put her unborn son at risk for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome ("FAS") or the related, but less severe, Fetal



Alcohol Effects ("FAE").

Children born with either FAS or FAE "have a distinct pattern of facial abnormalities, growth deficiency and evidence of central nervous system dysfunction. In addition to mental retardation, individuals with FAS, [Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder] and [Alcohol-Related Birth Defects] may have other neurological deficits such as poor motor skills and hand-eye coordination. They may also have a complex pattern of behavioral and learning problems, including difficulties with memory, attention and judgement."<sup>7</sup>

FAS/FAE is the most common non-hereditary cause of mental retardation. When a mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy, the alcohol passes through the placenta and enters the baby's blood stream. Since alcohol is a known teratogen, a substance toxic to human development, there is no safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy.<sup>8</sup> Knowing that Daumantas' biological mother drank heavily during pregnancy concerned us, as the impacts for her child could be profound.

Our initial referral was about three pages long: two pages regarding Daumantas' family history and legal status, and a page of his medical history. Knowing that his biological mother drank during pregnancy, our primary concern was to determine whether Daumantas had any FAS/FAE issues that would need to be addressed.

We brought his medical reports and photographs to our pediatrician, Dr. Rita Kolyčiute Raley, an expert in internationally-adopted children. After reviewing the material, Dr. Rita was reasonably confident that Daumantas was healthy and that any existing health problems could be resolved by good medical care in the U.S. She called the orphanage to speak with Daumantas' doctor to follow up on certain issues of concern. With her positive opinion, we felt confident moving forward in accepting the referral.

Before making the final decision to adopt Daumantas, I traveled to Kaunas over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. I spent part of two days with him: due to the orphanage's schedule, I was restricted to visiting him from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon, and then from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The children in the Lopšelis orphanage are divided into groups; there are eleven children in Daumantas' group, including two who are disabled and require additional assistance.

Our initial meeting was tentative: he is a shy little boy and was not quite sure what to think of this strange woman paying attention to him. After our initial meeting outside, I accompanied Daumantas and his group upstairs to their common room, where I gave the children a box of toys and stuffed animals I had brought. Their little faces lit up as they explored these new treasures they had received. Following lunch and afternoon nap, I returned at 4:00 p.m. I then spent the afternoon playing exclusively with Daumantas, getting to know one another. The two days passed very quickly and it was difficult to leave him behind.

Having officially accepted the referral, we next began to prepare our court petition. As most of our documents, including the home

study, police clearance, financial disclosure, employment letters and others, were almost two years old, we were required to obtain fresh copies of these documents. That took over a month. Luckily our home study agency was very cooperative and expedited the process. Once we filed our petition to adopt Daumantas with the district court in Vilnius, we waited approximately two and a half weeks for a judge to be assigned and a court date to be set.

Finally, the news arrived: our court date was set for Friday, October 3, 2003 at 9:00 a.m. We now anxiously look forward to this home stretch of our journey. ♦

*Part III: The court proceeding and our journey to bring Daumantas home.*

#### **Works Cited:**

1. *The Hague Convention #33, Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, May 29, 1993, is available at <http://www.hcch.net/e/conventions/menu33e.html>. Interestingly, although the United States is a signatory to the convention, it has not been ratified by the Senate, and therefore, has not entered into force.*
2. *For a good discussion of this issue, see "Civilinis kodeksas tampa įvaikinimo kliutimi" ("Civil code becomes a hurdle to adoption"), Lietuvos Žinios (Feb. 25, 2002), available at <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=817151>.*
3. *2001 metų ataskaita ("2001 Report," in Lithuanian only) at 3, available at <http://www.ivaikinimas.lt/new/docs/2001%20metu%20ATASKAITA.doc>.*
4. *2001 Report at 3.*
5. *See, e.g., <http://www.bcadoption.com/info/intercountry/medical.htm> ("Developmental delays are more profound the longer children are in an orphanage. This can lead to what [Dr. Julie] Bledsoe termed the orphanage slide. For every three months in an orphanage the child experiences a one-month delay.")*
6. *2002 metų ataskaita ("2002 Report," in Lithuanian only) at 5, available at <http://www.ivaikinimas.lt/new/docs/2002%20m.%20ataskaita.doc>.*
7. *"What is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome?," [http://www.nofas.org/main/what\\_is\\_FAS.htm](http://www.nofas.org/main/what_is_FAS.htm), visited on August 25, 2003.*
8. *Id. For further information on FAS/FAE, as well as other conditions arising from maternal alcohol consumption, the following web sites provide excellent information: <http://www.nofas.org>; <http://www.acbr.com/fas/>; <http://www.come-over.to/FAS/>.*

*Regina Juška-Švoba*

# 90 Years of Service to "God and Country"

**T**he Knights of Lithuania is a national Roman Catholic organization consisting of men and women of Lithuanian ancestry. Its motto is "For God and Country." The Knights of Lithuania's primary focus is to foster, maintain and nurture an appreciation of the Lithuanian language, customs, traditions and culture among its members. It further stresses the importance of the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. The Knights are actively involved in programs to assist their less fortunate brothers and sisters in Lithuania. There are four charity groups within the organization: Aid to Lithuania, Inc., K of L Foundation, St. Casimir's Guild, and the newly established Our Lady of Šiluva Fund.

The Knights of Lithuania organization was founded by Mykolas Norkunas in 1913, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Currently there are 51 councils in the United States. There are approximately 3,000 active members. A National Convention is held annually at different state sites. The year 2003, marked the 90th anniversary of not only the organization, but also of Council 1 located in Brockton, MA, "where it all began."

August 14-17, 2003, Council 1 hosted the 90th jubilee convention in Dedham, MA.

Nearly 150 delegates, clergy, guests, and youth converged to participate in the four-day-long meetings, cultural activities, and banquet celebration. Prior to each day's sessions and meetings, Mass was celebrated at various sites.

On August 14, 2003, Thursday, the opening 90th jubilee National Convention Mass was concelebrated at St. Casimir's Lithuanian Church by pastor Rev. Joseph Prusaitis, K of L Honorary Member Rev. Peter Shakalis, Rev. Albin Janiunas, and Rev. Steve Zukas. The members of the organization processed in the church. Boston mayor Jack Yunits participated and formally greeted the delegates.

The first convention session was held at the Dedham Hilton Hotel (as were all subsequent sessions). The Supreme Council Officers were brought in and introduced. Greetings from organizations and individuals were read. Among the numerous greetings received were those from President of the U.S. George W. Bush, an apostolic greeting from Pope John Paul II, U.S. ambassador to Lithuania in Washington Vygaudas Ušackas, and Mgrs. Algimantas Bartkus from the St. Casimir Pontifical College in Rome.

The cultural evening brought much excitement and delegate and guest participation.

*REGINA JUŠKA-ŠVOBA is the Public Relations Chair of the Knights of Lithuania Supreme Council. For more information about the nearest Knights of Lithuania council, contact Regina at [Rjuskasvoba@cs.com](mailto:Rjuskasvoba@cs.com). All photos from R. Juška-Švoba.*

Everyone gathered in the hotel ballroom where guests were greeted by the Sodauto folklore ensemble led by Gita Kupčinskā (the ensemble recently returned from Lithuania after successfully participating in the Song and Dance Festival in Vilnius). There was much beautiful ethnic singing and dancing. The group involved the delegates and guests in singing, dancing, and playing games. One of the most popular enjoyed was "Kleckai" (Dumpling dance). There was true entertainment for all ages.

On Friday, August 15, Mass was celebrated at St. George's Lithuanian Church by Rev. William Wolkovich, Honorary Member Msgr. A. Contons, Rev. A. Janiunas, and Rev. Claffey.

During the plenary session a panel presentation was made by Laurynas (Larry) R. Misiūnas, C-141, Bridgeport; Linas Balsys, C-7, Waterbury; and Joe Stiklius, C-7, Waterbury, to re-establish the sports committee within the Supreme Council. It should be noted that a sports committee did exist at one time, but due to lack of activity and member participation,

the committee disbanded. But in active efforts to promote the K of L organization to attract younger members and the "third wave" Lithuanians, a resolution to reinstate the sports committee was presented and was unanimously passed. Linas Balsys was elected as the Sports Committee Chair.

Historian Rev. W. Wolkovich (author of *Lithuanian Fraternalism: 75 Years of U.S. Knights of Lithuania*) gave a comprehensive presentation about the Lithuanian emigration to America, establishment of various atheist groups and federations who focused on fighting with the Church and its beliefs, and the organization origins and founding. Friday evening presented another cultural gem: "A Viennese night in Vilnius". Noted local singers and pianists exceptionally performed opera and played Chopin to the 150+ guests. The Lithuanian Boston men's sextet sang beautiful Lithuanian songs. The audience truly appreciated the performances by the numerous ovations. After a wonderful concert, the delegates and guests had an opportunity to speak and mingle with the performers.



*Knights of Lithuania delegates after closing Mass at St. Casimir Lithuanian Church, Brockton, Massachusetts. In the center stands the Archbishop of Boston, Rev. Richard Malone.*

On Saturday, August 16th, Mass was celebrated at the hotel. The organization's ancillary groups' – Aid to Lithuania, Inc., Foundation, St. Casimir's Guild, and the newly established Our Lady of Šiluva fund – presidents gave updates about the past fiscal year's activities and projects.

Marytė Bizinkauskas, singer, convention coordinator, and the organization's third vice-president (working with the junior/youth members), gave a comprehensive report about the junior K of L members' activities. This year, 22 junior members participated in the National Convention. The youngest member present was a six year-old from Illinois. The youth were busy and active during the convention. They held fund-raisers during the cultural evenings (selling candy bars, photo albums, drawings, prints, greetings cards). With the money obtained, they purchased toys that will be sent to children at a school in Kėdainiai in Lithuania. The juniors also wrote letters to the students, which will be included in the packages they will send.

Elections of the new 2003-04 Supreme Council were held. Agnes Mickunas, Council 3, Philadelphia, PA, a member since 1955, who has held various local, district, and Supreme Council offices, was unanimously elected as president to lead the K of L organization. The formal sessions were concluded.

After every K of L National Convention completes the working sessions and elects a new Supreme Council for the next year, a celebratory banquet is held. So too, the 90th National Jubilee Convention celebrated with a formal banquet. Approximately 200 delegates, guests, and family participated. The hostess for the evening's program was Marytė Bizinkauskas. The Supreme Council elect marched into the banquet hall and were introduced to the guests. The Ambassador to Lithuania in Washington, Vygaudas Ušackas, and his wife Loretta and Dr. Kenneth M. Leavitt MD, recipient of the 2003, Friend of Lithuania award were among the honored guests. Ambassador Ušackas greeted the dele-



*Knights of Lithuania Lithuanian Affairs Chair John Mankus presents Dr. Kenneth M. Leavitt, MD, with the "Friend of Lithuania" Award.*

gates of the 90th National Conventions and guests, and read a greeting from the Republic of Lithuania's president Rolandas Paksas.

Veronica Bizinkauskas-Cote, K of L Scholarship committee representative presented this year's scholarship monetary awards to: \$1,000, will be presented to a seminarian studying at the St. Casimir's Pontifical College in Rome; \$2,000, Elena Meile, C-112, Chicago, IL; \$1,250, Michael Pant, C-96, Dayton, OH; and \$1,000 each Povilas Mecys, C-103, Providence, RI, and Megan Rudmin, C-112, Chicago, IL.

The Honorary Members of 2003, were announced: Nellie Bayoras-Romanas, C-143, Pittston, PA; Rev. W. Wolkovich, C-27, Norwood, MA; and Rev. A. Zakarauskas, C-112, Chicago, IL. Nellie Bayoras-Romanas was presented with her Honorary Membership medal. Due to health reasons, the two clergy could not participate in the banquet. Their Honorary Membership medals will be presented to them at a later date.



*During the banquet are, seated, Loretta Ušackas and newly elected president of Knights of Lithuania Agnes Mickunas; and standing left to right are outgoing president Robert A. Martin, Jr., Ambassador Vygaudas Ušackas, and John Mickunas.*

Lithuanian Affairs Chair John Mankus presented Dr. Kenneth M. Leavitt, M. D., with the “Friend of Lithuania” award for his outstanding contributions to Lithuania and her people. Dr. Leavitt developed the first Baltic-American Medical and Surgical Clinic in Vilnius, Lithuania. To this date, it is the first and only private in-patient hospital in Central and Eastern Europe granted a hospital license. Dr. Leavitt received a Doctor of Podiatric Medicine from the Illinois College of Podiatric Medicine in Chicago, Illinois, in 1983. His work consists of numerous publications, lectures, and training presentations throughout the world, including numerous lectures in Vilnius University Emergency Hospital, Klaipėda City Hospital, Šiauliai City Hospital, Pasvalys Regional Hospital, Grodno (Gardinas) Orthopedic Hospital, Belarus, and training at the Baltic-American Clinic. He has received numerous professional awards.

The formal portion of the banquet closed with words from outgoing K of L president

Robert A. Martin, Jr. and newly elected president Agnes Mickunas. Music and dancing livened the rest of the evening.

August 17, Sunday, the closing Mass was concelebrated by Boston archbishop Richard Malone, Honorary Member Rev. Peter Shakalis, Rev. J. Prusaitis, Rev. A. Janiunas, and Rev. J. Petrauskas at St. Casimir’s Lithuanian Church. Prior to the celebration of the Mass, the organization’s members who earned their 4th degrees gave the oath and received their medals. The Supreme Council elect gave their oath of office. After the Mass, a formal National Convention photograph was taken on the church stairs.

The 2003 National Convention and sessions were productive and fruitful. It was good to see and nurture special friendships of members known for many years and establish new acquaintances and contacts. It was a special time of sharing and catching up. The 91st National Convention will be hosted by Council 90, Kearny, NJ. Hope to see everyone there! ♦



## R E F L E C T I O N S

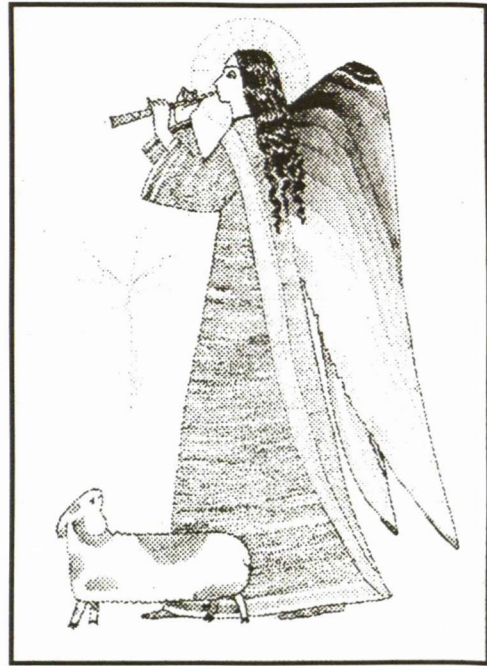
Sr. Ona Mikailaitė

# Lithuanian Angels

Lithuanian folklore has many tales about foolish devils who are tricked by wise and witty farmers. These devils are not so much fearsome as funny, and, despite all their machinations, they never win. On long winter nights, Lithuanian folk artists liked to whittle wood in the form of mischievous devils. They seemed to have caught the popular imagination. In Kaunas, there is a museum of these clever wooden sculptures – three whole floors of them!

But Lithuanian art has been concerned with angels as well. The well-known folk artist Vincas Svirskis (born in the middle of the nineteenth century) carved a host of angelic figures as integral parts of his wayside shrines. They are somewhat similar to the round-faced cherubs of baroque art, but they also have a distinctive Lithuanian look to them.

Our great national artist M.K. Čiurlionis was fascinated by angels – he painted some fifteen pictures with angels in them. His angels are portrayed in a different style from those of the folk artists. They are elongated forms with huge, graceful wings. Like many of his contemporary artists, Čiurlionis depicted angels as



symbols of the supernatural – incarnations of beauty, peace, and devotion. They are shown in attitudes of adoration, gracefully bending over a flower or attending an altar of sacrifice. The artist's fascination with angelic beings may have been a reflection of the Northern Romantic tradition toward which he leaned, but also a personal concern with the spiritual world that inspired his imagination. Prototypes of grace and light, Čiurlionis' angels express other worldly goodness and beauty.

Among our Lithuanian diaspora artists, both Paulius Augius and Vytautas Ignas depicted angels in the style of folkart. They are child-like, somewhat mischievous little beings, who appear in serious pictures as if to provide some lightness and comic relief. Augius illustrated a children's prayer book written by Fr. Stasys Yla. The angels in this charming little book are made to be attractive to a child, but they also have a distinctive Lithuanian appearance.

*SR. ONA MIKAILAITĖ* belongs to the order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Lithuanian order in Putnam, CT. Sr. Ona is a writer and the editor of *Bendradarbis*. Angel illustration by A. ŽIUPSNYTĖ (1991).

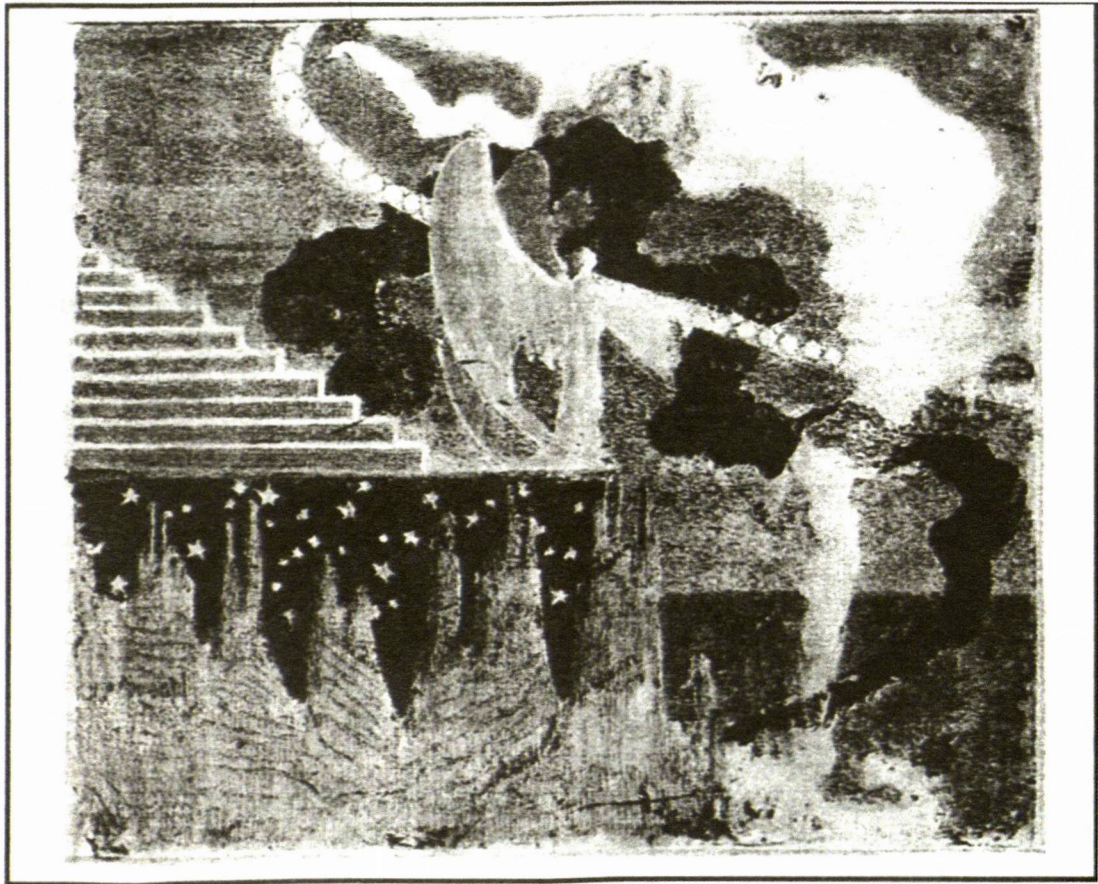
Ten years ago I had the opportunity to watch the restoration of the Church of St. Michael the Archangel in Kaunas. Originally built as a Russian Orthodox Cathedral in the Byzantine style with a large dome, it was given to the Lithuanian army when Lithuania gained its independence in 1918. My father used to tell me how he, as an army captain, would march the young Lithuanian soldiers to attend Sunday Mass there during the era of Lithuania's independence.

The Soviets desecrated the church and ruined its beautiful decorations. In 1993, Fr. Richard Mikutavičius was restoring it to its original splendor. Inside, over the main altar a painting of the Good Shepherd appeared with two angels flying on either side of him. The

angels' wings were painted in yellow, green, and red – an interesting bit of patriotic art.

In one of the art galleries in Kaunas, I came upon an exhibition of the artist A. Žiupsnytė, whose works were exclusively of angels. These angel portraits were of various styles; some in folk art style – a set of four depicting angels of the seasons – others more sophisticated. She used a lot of blue in her pictures, which produced an ambience of calmness and peace. I remember coming back several times to view this exhibition, since it created such a feeling of peace and joy in me.

In this year's *Lituanus* (vol. 49:2), the photographer Algimantas Kezys has made some interesting studies of carved angel sculptures by the Lithuanian artists Raminta Butkuvė and



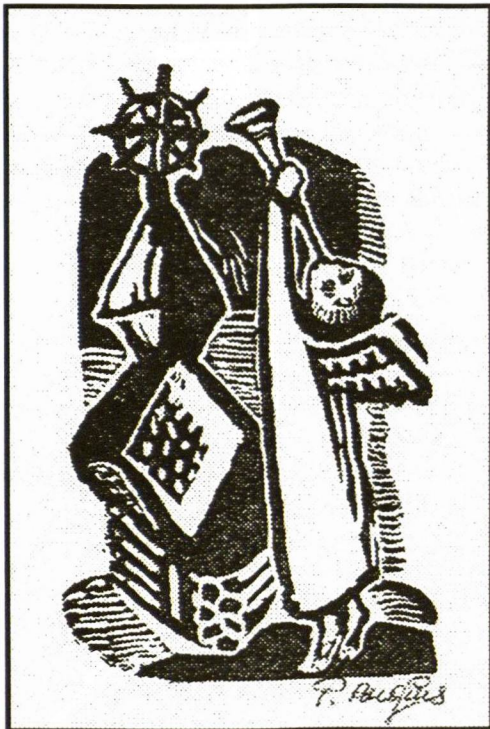
M. K. Čiurlionis' "The Offering"

Vaida Juozapavičiūtė. These sculptures were exhibited at the gallery of the Lithuanian embassy in Berlin in March, 2003. These Lithuanian angels with round faces and large eyes are somewhat reminiscent of the folk art tradition. Both artists, says Kezys, are “avid believers in the existence of heavenly guardians of the human race and [these] devoted carvers of angelic figurines [are] based on their own understanding of angelic nature.

The Lithuanian tradition of the artistic portrayal of angels seems to be not only alive and well, but also experiencing a renaissance in the post-Soviet era. It would seem that these angelic beings represent a desire to welcome back all vestiges of goodness into a land weary of evil and violence. Kezys states that,

“During the course of history, portrayals of these spiritual beings found ample expression in ecclesiastic architecture, Sunday services, private devotions, folklore and works of art.”

Lithuanians seem to have a liking for angels. In Scripture, the word “angel” denotes function, not nature. Angels are messengers and guardians. Let us hope that their return to Lithuania is a prophecy of peace and goodwill. ◆



*Paulius Augius' rendition of a Christmas Angel.*



*V. Ignas' graphic of St. Casimir with angel.*

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## C U R R E N T   E V E N T S

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### A Lithuanian in the Football Coaches Hall of Fame

**O**il City, Pennsylvania newspaper, *The Derrick*, printed an article about Rich Vidunas's induction into the Pennsylvania Football Coaches Hall of Fame in July 2003.

According to the sports editor, Ed Brannon, Rich Vidunas "spent 29 years as head football coach at Union High School in Rimersburg, Pennsylvania, retiring from the post in 1985. The team's record during his tenure was a remarkable 186-71-7. The Golden Knights en-

joyed a 24-game winning streak from 1961-64 and an 18-game win streak from 1984-85."

"Vidunas' team captured eight conference titles, and he was named the conference Coach of the year six times. In 1989, four years after he retired from teaching, Union rededicated the football field and named it Vidunas Stadium."

Congratulations, Rich Vidunas! ♦

— sent in by *Ernest C. Raskauskas*

### The Baltic environment: a subject for discussion

**T**he environment ministers of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are to gathered in the Lithuanian seaside resort of Palanga on Oct. 24 for consultations on regional environment protection issues.

The Baltic environment leaders have established a tradition of convening twice per year to discuss common issues. In May, the region's top environment officials met in Latvia's Sigulda town.

The environment ministers discussed the future role of Helsinki Commission, exchanged information on the implementation of the Bremen Declaration concerning highly sensitive sea zones, deliberated on trilateral cooperation needs, and heard an account by the Baltic Environment Forum.

Lithuania's Environment Minister Arūnas Kundrotas and his Latvian counterpart Raimonds Vejonis signed an inter-ministerial cooperation agreement on protection and harmonized use of bordering water bodies.

Following the meeting, the Baltic officials will piad a visit to the Lithuanian Butingė oil terminal and Klaipėda state seaport.

On the same note, The Baltic Times (<http://www.baltictimes.com/raksts.php?rnum=567>) reported that former Lithuanian president Val-

das Adamkus slammed Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas during a radio interview on Oct. 22 for his positive attitude towards Lukoil's planned exploitation of the D-6 oil field off the Curonian Spit.

Adamkus criticized Brazauskas' friendliness with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov during his visit to Moscow early this week. After meeting with his Russian counterpart, Brazauskas gave an interview to the newspaper Izvestia, in which he stated that Lithuania "had no right" to interfere either with Lukoil's plans or with the Russian government's sanctioning of the project.

Adamkus told Lithuanian state radio that Brazauskas had created an ambiguity in the country's official policy toward the drilling, countering efforts in other branches of government to increase international pressure on Russia to stop or limit potential environmental damage.

Lukoil announced earlier this year that it would begin drilling in the D-6 oil field at a site 22 kilometers from the Curonian Spit, a UNESCO world heritage site, and only seven kilometers from the Lithuanian maritime border. ♦

## Lithuania's educational system experience to benefit Russia

**T**he first ever agreement between Lithuania and the Russian Federation on cooperation in the field of education and science was sealed in Vilnius on Oct. 24 to ease the acknowledgement of university diplomas and procedures of scientific decrees between the countries, to continue the support of the ethnic culture of national minorities, and to stimulate the learning of the official language of the state.

A bilateral five-year agreement was signed by Lithuanian Education and Science Minister Algirdas Monkevičius and Russian Education Minister Vladimir Filipov.

Both countries agreed to facilitate the exchange of information about educational systems and effective educational regulations, to create conditions for the acknowledgement of scientific degrees and university diplomas, to work out student exchange programs, and to introduce distance education to improve the skills of Russian language teachers.

Monkevičius stressed that the historic document will eliminate those small differences remaining between the educational systems in

both countries. Under the Bologna Declaration in 1999, Lithuania is a part of the EU educational space; whereas, Russia has only recently joined the educational exchange program of the bloc. Lithuania's experience in building an effective network of schools, solving the problem of student transportation, and ensuring the permanent growth of the "student's basket" could be of great use for Russia.

Monkevičius also praised the activities of the Jurgis Baltrušaitis School for Lithuanian children in Moscow. It has 400 students at this time. Filipov assured his Lithuanian counterpart of Russia's determination to continue supporting Lithuanian schools in other regions, Kaliningrad included. Referring to officially available data, Filipov said that the number of Lithuanian nationals in Russia is 60,000, of which 18,000 live in the Kaliningrad Region.

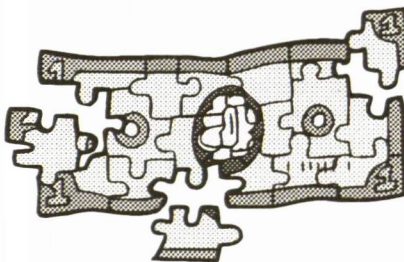
The Russian education minister also mentioned that a recently published collection of Russian literature in 100 volumes is expected to reach Russian schools in Lithuania in the near future. ♦

## Lithuania to contribute to rebuilding Iraq

**T**he Lithuanian Cabinet of Ministers ruled on Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup> to earmark 100,000 litas (29,000 euros) as humanitarian aid for Iraq.

"The Foreign Ministry will transfer the aforementioned sum to the Multilateral Donor Fund for rebuilding Iraq, founded by the United Nations Organization and World Bank," the government's press service-issued press release read.

It is not the first time that Lithuania decided to send humanitarian aid to a foreign country. In April, the government earmarked 235,000



litas (68,100 euros) to Turkey to be used for protecting local residents against mass destruction weapons and supplies to refugees from Iraq.

Chechnya and Afghanistan, each had received 50,000 litas (14,500 euros); whereas, Ukraine was offered 100,000 litas (29,000 euros) to be used for humanitarian aid to the people who had suffered because of the floods there. ♦

## Lithuanian citizenship goes to former basketball coach

According to *The Baltic City Paper*, (Oct. 20, 2003 -- [http://www.balticsww.com/wkcrier/daily\\_news.htm](http://www.balticsww.com/wkcrier/daily_news.htm)) Donn Nelson, the American who helped coach the Lithuanian basketball team that recently won the European Championships, will reportedly be granted Lithuanian citizenship.

The Internet daily quoted that *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram* announced that Nelson, the Dallas Mavericks' president of basketball operations, was told about the government's decision by the Lithua-

nian ambassador to the United States.

The 41-year-old Nelson, who is said to speak passable Lithuanian, was also Lithuania's assistant coach when it won bronze medals at the Olympics in 1992, 1996, and 2000. Lithuania won the European Championships for the first time since 1939 in September, beating favored Spain 93-84. ♦

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