

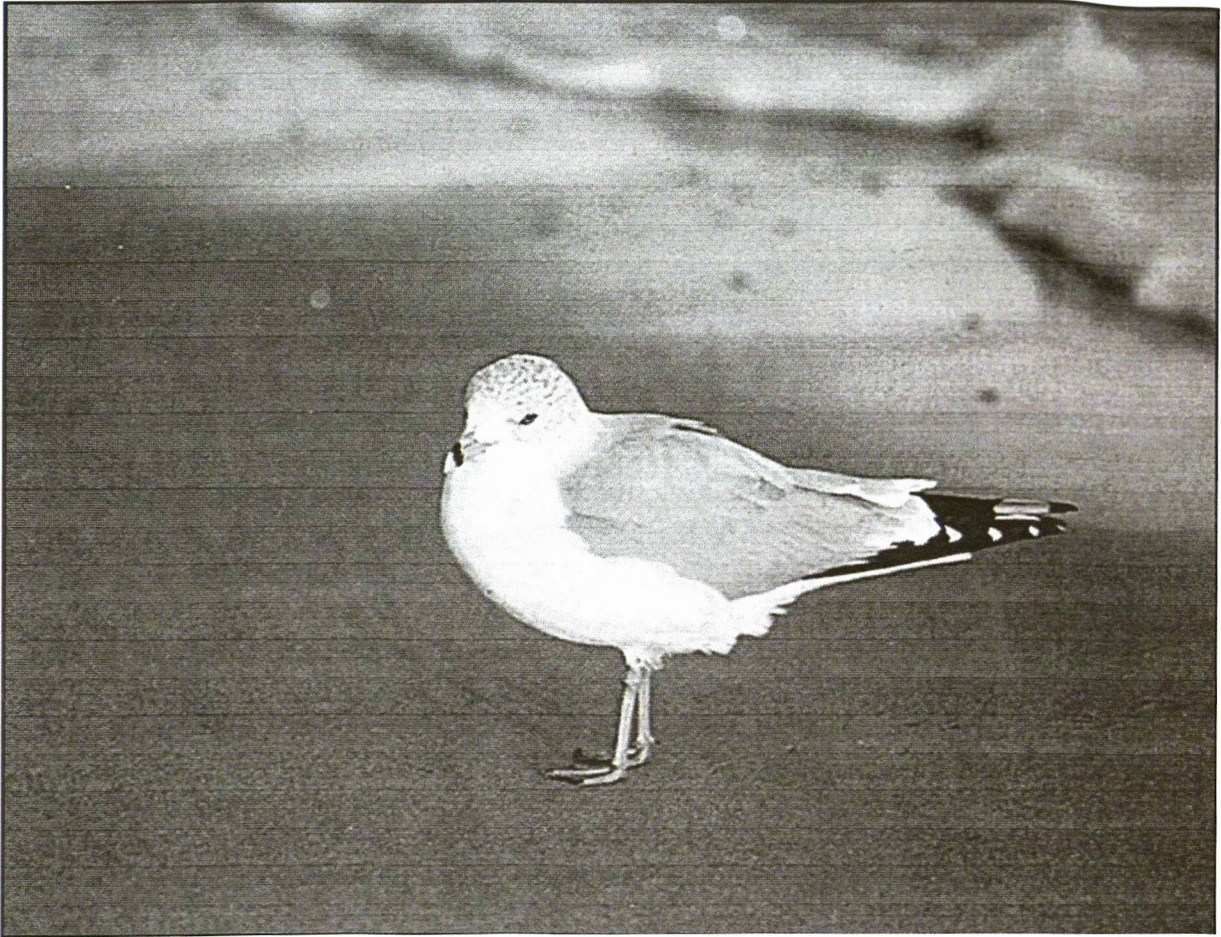
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BRIDGES

• LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL •

Volume 27

Issue 10, December 2003



Sharing Christmas memories...News from the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

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

The New Year always brings changes. Bridges has always rolled along with the times, and exciting new developments are in store for 2004.

We've focused on the Lithuanian-American Community-based elements: public and humanitarian affairs, educational and organizational aspects, and Lithuanian-American cultural and historical development.

As we presented to you our journal, life around us diversified. The Internet became a colossal source of information and insights for English and Lithuanian-speaking readers. Local area Lithuanian-American Chapter newsletters spread their wings to produce wonderful issues. Bridges became the gatherer and disseminator of news – and it served its purpose well.

It was necessary to reevaluate Bridges' purpose and format. And it was decided that Bridges will experience a metamorphosis starting in the year 2004.

You, as our valued subscriber and loyal supporter, will be sent this "new" version of Bridges when the final touches are made.

But of course we will continue to focus on the same Lithuanian community-based elements as we've done previously. We will be innovative, not repetitive, with our articles.

Until the unveiling, our work will go on non-stop to bring you this transformation. We will keep you advised, and we value your opinion.

For now, we wish for you and your family...

*a very Merry Christmas – Linksmas Kalėdos – and a...
peaceful and joyous New Year –
Raminis ir laimingas Naujųjų Metų!*

Rasa Ardys-Juška

Editor



BRIDGES

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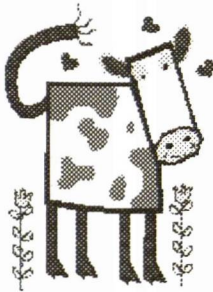
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Lithuania's talking animals...

According to Lithuanian legend, at midnight on Christmas Eve, all the animals receive the gift of being able to talk to one another. But to listen to them was dangerous because you could learn things that might harm you.

Lithuanians believed in many nature-oriented omens and stories, such as this. Others centered around the farm surroundings. If the sky was clear on Christmas Eve night and full of stars, the year would be good.

When the first star appeared in the sky, the family gathered around the Christmas Eve — Kučios — table. Some tables had apples placed on them to recall our first parents — Adam and Eve — through whose sin mankind fell and the world was saved by Jesus, the Christ Child.

Nature became mystical and magical during this holiday season.

On the cover:

My eighth grade student Derek went out to the ocean during a snowstorm and found a lonely wanderer.

Photo: Derek Craig

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

President Bush grants waiver on military assistance to Baltics

Nearly five months after having U.S. military funding frozen under the American Service members' Protection Act, six countries were cleared by President George W. Bush to have military assistance reinstated. The countries named in the November 21 memorandum are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Slovenia.

With Washington opposed to ratification of the International Criminal Court, the U.S. requested that countries sign on to Article 98 of the Rome Statute, which established the ICC. Under this article, signatories endorse a bilateral agreement not to extradite U.S. citizens to the ICC. As supporters of the ICC, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have sided with the European Union in not signing Article 98. Congress adopted the American Service members' Protection Act of 2002 (PL 107-206), under which countries that have not signed the Article 98 provision would lose U.S. military assistance. The ASPA bill, however, does not apply to current NATO members and select strategic allies.

The prohibitions on U.S. military assistance had been in effect since July 1. Resumption of military assistance to the Baltic countries was not otherwise envisioned until they become NATO members in 2004. The President's waiver, in effect, amends the ASPA by granting military assistance for "certain specific

projects" which "are needed to support the process of integration of these countries into NATO, or to support Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom".

Recognizing the importance of U.S. military assistance to the Baltics, certain Members of Congress pushed to amend the law to include those nations that have concluded an accession protocol with NATO. House resolution H.R. 2550 was introduced in the summer by Baltic Caucus co-chair John Shimkus (R-IL) and supported by Representatives Doug Bereuter (R-NE), Duncan Hunter (R-CA), John Mica (R-FL), James Oberstar (D-MN), Ike Skelton (D-MO), and Joe Wilson (R-SC).

Senate resolution S.1317 was introduced by Senator Gordon Smith and co-sponsored by Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL), Joe Biden (D-DE), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska). Senators Smith and Durbin are Baltic Freedom Caucus co-chairs. The Senate resolution passed unanimously on November 7 in the Foreign Relations committee.

Baltic-Americans have also protested the freezing of military aid to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – countries, which have been assisting the U.S. in Iraq and other military operations. For its part, JBANC has provided background information on the issue and welcomes the needed change in U.S. policy. ♦

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.

Lithuanian President has to choose: resign...or be impeached

Lithuanian President Rolandas Paksas has signaled that he might give up his fight to cling to power as parliamentary efforts continue to try to impeach him over accusations that his office has links to Russian organized crime.

Political tremors hit Lithuania in October after security services accused Paksas and his national security adviser, Remigijus Acas, of being a security threat, alleging his office was too close to Russian mobsters. Paksas denied the charges in several statements.

Paksas, a right-wing populist who won the presidency in January on vague promises to improve living conditions for all, denies all wrongdoing and has repeatedly refused to step down. But pressure has been mounting against the Soviet-trained stunt pilot, with protesters carrying a papier mache helicopter as a coffin to mock Paksas, who conducted a whistle-stop tour of the country by helicopter during his electoral campaign. The charge also prompted a parliamentary probe and a separate investigation by prosecutors.

The Baltic state's government, opposition parties, and Roman Catholic bishops have urged the president to resign to end a crisis which has embarrassed the reformist ex-Soviet republic months before it joins the European Union and NATO.

"If God does not enlighten the lawmakers and they do gather 85 votes [from the MPs], I will resign," he told a countryside gathering of his supporters late on Dec. 13.

Parliament launched proceedings to dismiss

Paksas, a former stunt-pilot, with more and more deputies signing up to formal impeachment charges. Some 85 deputies in the 141-member lower house would have to vote in favor of impeachment to bring it into force.

Fifty-six members of the Lithuanian Seimas have already put their signatures under the draft text for the impeachment of the state leader. The list is expected to grow considerably longer by Dec. 16, on which the draft will be offered for the deliberation at the parliament.

A source in Paksas's office and diplomats believe the president may step down at any moment, but some said shady business groups backing him were not giving up.

"Paksas is seeking a way out but faces immense pressure from certain quarters to remain," a source close to the presidential office told Reuters. "He is tottering on the edge, but the question remains whether he will step over it."

A spokesman for Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas' Social Democrat Party told Reuters leaders of the majority center-left coalition and opposition parties were already discussing possible candidates for early presidential elections.

The spokesman declined to comment on reports that Brazauskas and Valdas Adamkus, the country's two former presidents, were the most likely contenders. ♦

Compiled by Rasa Ardys-Juška

WINTERS IN LITHUANIA LONG AGO...



Christmas in nineteenth century Lithuania must have been celebrated similarly to how present-day Lithuanians celebrate – or at least aspects thereof. We know that the multi-course, non-meat dishes were served on Christmas Eve, Midnight Mass was attended, and Christmas was a day for social gatherings and customs.

In Lithuanian literature, a small insight into the thoughts about the holy season, the wintry days and nights, and God's wonders for man echo in a classic entitled, *Metai*, (The Year or The Seasons) written by Kristijonas Donelaitis and published in 1818.

According to the "Lithuanian Classic Literature Anthology", a UNESCO-sponsored collection of 64 masterpieces of Lithuanian au-

thors from the oldest documents up to the nowadays, *Metai* "is an epic poem of the Lithuanians from Lithuania Minor. This epic poem, as usual for this genre, embraces the whole life of the nation. The nation is represented by peasants in the poem. They are depicted according to the cyclic understanding of time, history, and life. The relations of a human being (a peasant) with nature and God are disclosed, as well as the relations among the people, the peasants, and the landlords."

Donelaitis "reveals the way of life of the peasants, their traditions, work, and festivals. The life of peasants goes in circles as nature does and is determined by the same laws of God. In nature, summer comes after spring and is followed by autumn and at last winter,

RASA ARDYS-JUŠKA compiled this article about Kristijonas Donelaitis's *Metai*. Sources used include "Lithuanian Classic Literature Anthology's Web Page" <http://anthology.mireba.lt/texts/6/main.html>, "Homo Novus" information from <http://www.theatre.lv/hn/en/programma/www/gadalaiki.php>, and excerpts from "Winter Cares" translated into English by Nadas Rastenis, found in its entirety at <http://www.efn.org/~valdas/seasons.html>.

and everything starts from the beginning again. A human being is born, matures, gives fruit, and dies as a plant.”

“The peasants are reborn with the miracle of spring, in summer they work hard, in autumn collect the harvest given by nature, in winter think of their destiny and prepare for the following spring – the new cycle of the year and peasant's work.”

“The peasants are praised and scolded, encouraged and restricted according to the norms of Christian morality; their life and behavior is evaluated according to the truths of the Holy Scripture. The main merits of human beings are laboriousness, piousness, truthfulness, faithfulness to traditions and customs of the nation; the greatest vices are laziness, irreverence, cruelty, acceptance of alien fashions and habits. Donelaitis by his work aspired to reinforce the moral values developed by the nation through ages, to uproot vices, and to develop spiritual resistance of the nation.”

Donelaitis' *Metai* has even been transformed into visual poetry as performed by “Meno Fortas” Lithuanian theater production company based in Vilnius at the International Festival of Contemporary Theatre “Homo Novus” in Riga, Latvia from Sept. 19 to Oct. 5, 2003.

According to the “Homo Novus” press releases, “it was staged by the most famous Lithuanian theatre director Eimuntas Nekrošius, whose performances have traveled all

over the world. “Seasons” are based on the poetic work by Lithuanian classic Donelaitis about work and life on a farmstead, close ties with the forces of nature and seasonal cycle. On the stage it has been transposed into visual poetry – vibrant scenes of improvisation by the actors and the director follow each other.”

“Watching the performance is a breathtaking experience – the stage language is saturated with metaphors. A simple hand movement or a piece of glass creates the whole atmosphere of a season. All the stage elements, choreography, and musical material taken together create a strong emotional and theatrical experience.”

“The new production ends the Shakespeare period, during which three tragedies were successively staged, and marks a new stage in the creative work of the director. Previously Nekrošius used all possible means to stress human insignificance vis-a-vis passion and fate. Here we see more light, joy, and balance. Critic Rasa Paukštytė writes, “Life-work-creation. This is the trinity of Nekrošius’ performance. For the first time the mark of equation has been put between these concepts, proving that they are unable to exist separately.”

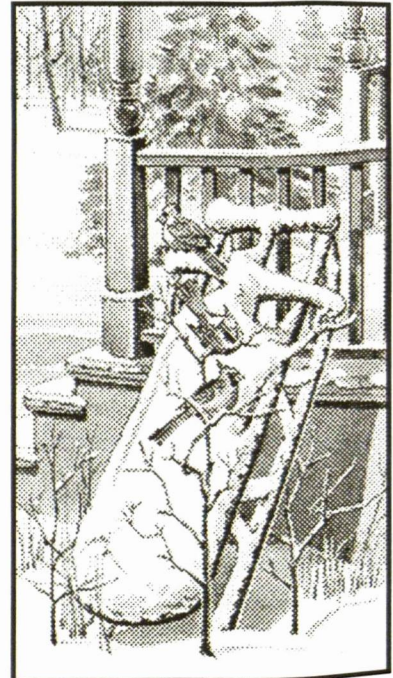
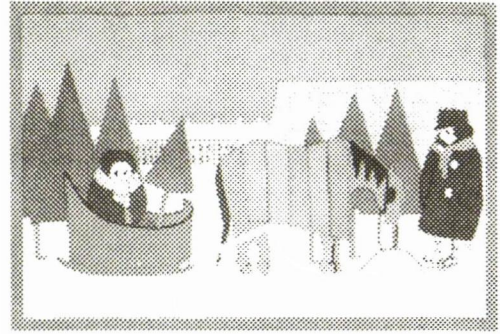
Donelaitis’ words, although written in Lithuanian, were translated into English with a Shakespearean lilt by Nadas Rastenis. What follows is an excerpt from *Metai*’s “Winter Cares”...

From **“WINTER CARES”**

Look yon! What great, fierce fangs the beast of winter bares!
 What sullen northern winds roll here to harry us!
 On the grim lakes and ponds translucent windows form,
 Like shining mirrors fashioned by a glazier's hand.
 The pools, where swam the fish and leaped and dived the frogs,
 Because of winter's threats, have put on armor plate,
 So, now in dark retreats drowse all the water folk.
 See how the winter's breath enthalls the barren fields,
 How lowland, swamp, and marsh all hard-fixed frowns take on,
 And how the mire has stubborn grown and ceased to splash.
 The dreary autumn roads, struck by the north wind's might,

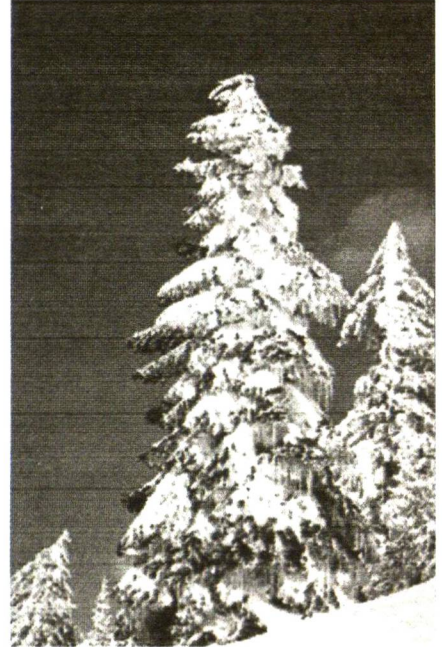
Under the wagon wheels resound like kettle drums,
 And pound the human ear many a league away.
 So now the world salutes the winter on the march.
 Yea, 'tis a proper time; the Yuletide feast is near,
 And the Advent in a few days will be no more.
 The autumn, like an elephant asplashing mire
 And rolling in the mud, had all of us worn out.
 While putting on bast shoes or pulling up high boots,
 We cursed the autumn rains and never-ending slush.
 Even the noble lords, racing by on horse back,
 Wrapped tight in rain-proof coats and wearing new high-boots,
 Splashed through the squashy mud and roundly cursed the fall.
 And so the populace, with eyes upon the north,
 Denounced the autumn's mire and longed for winter's haste.
 As these complaints went on, the skies took on a glare;
 The northern winds began to race at reckless speed,
 And blew the rains to where the storks now idly drowse.
 Then through the mass of clouds old Winter stuck his head,
 And like a tyrant, doomed the autumn's messy work;
 His chilling blasts wiped out the sodden ugliness.
 At once he frosted white and clean the fall's manure,
 Built solid icy roads across the marshy swamps,
 And prompted all to change from tumbrel to a sledge.
 So now, where we before adored the happy spring
 And gladly gathered rainbow-colored buds and blooms,
 And where we later ended hearty summer joys,
 There now the drifting snow makes ranges of white hills,
 And winter's fingers weave pearl blossoms on the bough.
 How grand it is to see the tall bewhiskered pines,
 With their snow covered crests, remaining stoically,
 Like powdered gentlemen in dignified parade.
 But in their shade, like boors under a ledge of roof,
 The naked saplings, pinched by the relentless frosts
 And harried by the whistling winds, bow down and wail.
 And e'en the fallen trees and stumps become disturbed,
 As the north wind his mighty bellows puts to work
 And sifts, as with the sieves, the pearly dust of snow.
 Too, e'en the beasts of wood of late have disappeared.
 So as the cold winds rage and the air changes clash,
 Some animals are nestling in their wind-tight lairs,
 While others cower high up in the trees and drowse.

Indeed, in our brief life we have observed full well
 How ev'ry living thing in frosty winter days
 Hides in his hole or nest and thrives on bits of food.
 For now fish, frogs, and lobsters with their lobsterlings [young],
 And ev'rything that sleeps beneath the solid ice,



And ev'rything that stalks within the forests wide,
 E'en in the winter time still finds some sustenance;
 For God is merciful and sees that all are fed,
 Even though He does not feed them with a full hand.
 So we, too, must not grieve that our reserves are low,
 And that the barren fields can offer us no food.
 For 'tis not the first year that we endure hard times,
 And 'tis not the first time we cook pea and groats mush.

Ah, gone, gone evermore those happy childhood days
 The falls and winters have despoiled their loveliness,
 And crowned us, aged men, with wreaths of gray despair.
 Well, brethren, we have passed another weary year,
 And with it we have passed its miseries and woes.
 What this incoming year and the ascending sun,
 If God still keeps us here, will shower upon us,
 We mortals do not know and thus cannot foretell.
 And e'en the frozen fields, which we this summer plowed,
 And where we on the run have strewn the golden grain,
 Now are asleep beneath the blankets of white snow,
 And do not yet reveal what the benignant God
 Has prearranged for us long ere we all were born.
 But we will see that wealth when, by the grace of God,
 The summer will appear and we will feel its warmth.
 But that takes time; so we must wait until that time -
 Until the fields will give us something, let's not fret.



Thou, O God, sustained us in all the years gone by
 And Thou wilt succor us in all the years to come.
 What the next summer will give us, we can't foresee,
 But Thou already knowest how great our needs will be.
 For we, with shallow minds, can't comprehend Thy deeds,
 And Thy eternal thoughts to us seem bottomless,
 E'en when at times we dare to take a deeper look.
 Therefore, O Father, take paternal care of us
 And all our needs, and when the summertime doth come,
 Aid us afield, when we again shall toil and
 sweat." ◆



Leona Shierant Gustaff

A Christmas to Remember...

In early 2003, Leona Shierant Gustaff published the family histories of her husband and her own family in a book entitled, ***Singing the Tears – The Immigrant Journey***. Her parents, Verna and Wally Shierant, were fondly remembered as Leona recounted the trials, tribulations, and joys of growing up in this household. In Chapter 20, “239 West Fifth Street”, Leona sets down on paper a specific Christmas memory that celebrated not only the birth of the Christ child, but also the birth of her baby brother, Wally, Jr.

Chapter Twenty – 239 West Fifth Street

During the depression, Verna and Wally lived in Mount Carmel [Pennsylvania] with Verna’s mother Ona on Maple Street. In 1932 on Christmas day, about one o’clock in the morning, their last son, Walter, Jr., was born while Wally was playing the organ and directing the choir at Midnight Mass. I had gone to Mass with my father and had been singing with the choir but actually had attended the service so that I would be there to play the organ if Wally needed his cigarette.

My father had lived up to his early promise to find a piano teacher for me. E. May Wardrop, having studied at the New England Conservatory in Boston, Massachusetts, was expert at teaching the piano, and she lived in Mount Carmel. Miss Wardrop became my teacher, and I practiced diligently.

The organ in the Holy Cross Church was available and I began to perform on it. I never became proficient at playing the pipe organ,

but I played the hymns well enough that when my dad had his desperate need for a cigarette, I was a willing substitute to help at the organ.

At that Midnight Mass in 1932, the choir sang unusually well; the carols were more beautiful than ever. I failed to notice that my father had not given the invitation he usually gave at each Midnight Christmas Mass for the members of his choir to come to his home afterward and have some of the delicacies that Verna would have prepared for them. In addition to the coconut cream pies, chocolate and coconut cakes, raisin and rye breads, cookies, and candies, Verna would have roasted a large ham, which she would serve with her own pickled beets, chowchow [a marinated vegetable dish], and relish. Christmas breakfast was a delicious feast.

At the end of the Mass, my father Wally and I walked the small distance home together. We greeted friends and hummed the melodies that were just performed in church. I looked forward to reading the books I expected to discover. No library existed in Mount Carmel, and literature for avid readers was hard to get. My mother would not disappoint me, was my

LEONA SHIERANT GUSTAFF is the author of *Singing the Tears – An Immigrant Journey*. She passed away earlier this year.



thought. She always bought books on this special holiday.

I also looked forward to decorating the Christmas tree with the ornaments that my parents had collected through the years. At last I was old enough to take part in this task. I knew that I would carefully put pretend icicles all over the branches of the green tree that I knew had been in a pail of water at the bottom of the steps under the back porch.

The tree was never transported into the living room until Christmas Eve. Wally and Verna thought they had hidden it well, but my sisters and I had searched until we found that beautiful harbinger of delicious and exciting days to come. We savored our discovery and never let on to our parents that we knew the hiding place.

After the tree was fully decorated that year I would be permitted to help my parents place all the gifts under the tree. Gifts for the family were never wrapped. They were placed in or-

ganized piles under the Christmas tree so that each child would know which gifts were his or hers.

The children always arose early on Christmas morning and rushed down to see what Santa Claus had left for them. There were gifts of clothing — pajamas, socks for all of us, blouses for girls, shirts for boys, a jacket or coat for my sister Irene who had outgrown her hand-me-downs. We also found toys — a bike for Johnny, a sled for Fritz (Francis), a new doll each for my sisters Veronica and Irene, and books for me.

Socks that we children had hung near the stove in the kitchen would be filled with fruit and nuts, a coloring book, pencils, paper, and always a nickel, a dime, and a few pennies at the bottom of the sock. As we grew older we may also have found a quarter in our sock.

But on that early Christmas morning in 1932, as my father and I entered our home, there he was — a new brother, a tiny red-faced baby I was not happy to see. I wanted to say, “Take him back where he came from.” I was angry. How could Verna, my mother have another baby when I was so old, all of fifteen years of age. Also, I never knew that a new child was on the way. My mother managed to keep secret her physical condition even as she gained much weight.

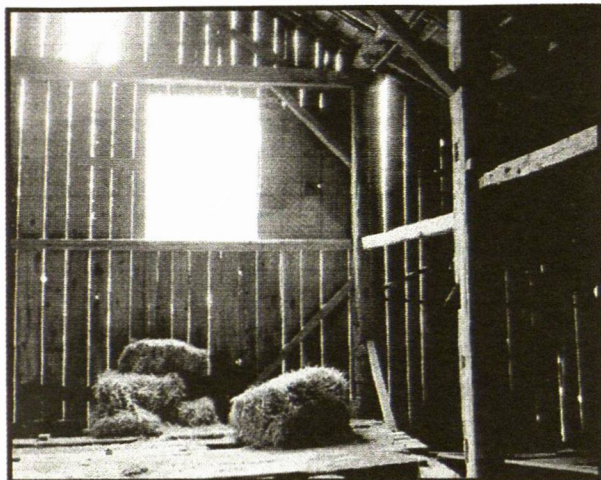
“Pick him up,” my mother urged.

I stormed out of the room in tears. I didn’t wish to decorate the Christmas tree. I was devastated.

My sister Veronica, in the meantime, picked up the baby, stroked his little hands and feet, and spoke to him softly.

Walter, Jr. became the joy of the family. ♦

Nomeda Lukoševičienė
Translated by Zita Petkus



A Handful of Hay

When I waken, everything somehow dissipates and hides. Not only have painstakingly recreated scenes disappeared, but also a handful of sparks from the tiled fireplace flies into my eyes. Why does the wood crackle so? Are the logs wet? Overly dry? No. They're just inanimate remnants of a once living, breathing tree, and now they seek to transport me back from the past to the present.

Onikė (Annie) woke up very early that morning. The window was considerably frosted over, and the street lamp was sharing its artificial light rather reluctantly. The lamp paid no attention to years, but from its post on high it merely looked out on passersby — at homeless dogs and abandoned cats. Only totally unexpected reflections caressed the frozen window.

The young girl got out of bed and lounged against the window, using her little finger to dig out a little patch from the frosted over glass. Gosh, what beauty! It must have snowed all night while the frost created its magic... white, white everywhere...

The way my mother always told the story was how incredibly lovely the morning was. When she was just a little girl, she and her daddy would take the sled to the woods to pick out a Christmas tree. The story goes, that my grannie would wrap my mom's feet in a warm blanket, and grandpa would pull the sled behind him while she rode as the passenger. They would find the most graceful fir and bring it home.

Onikė reflected that Baby Jesus was born at a really good time of year: during the winter when trees are asleep, so if the person who chops down the tree really knows what he's doing and the tree won't feel any pain. Thwack, and it's over! Of course, to tell the truth, she hadn't ever witnessed a tree being cut down.

Maybe the tree rustles in a particular kind of way, maybe it utters something, perhaps it cries? Pondering these thoughts, the young girl snuggled back into her feather comforter and sweetly dozed off. The dawning day will feel mercilessly long until that very evening arrives.

NOMEDA LUKOŠEVIČIENĖ wrote this story originally for the *Tulpė Times*, December 2003 edition. She dedicated it to her ailing mother in Lithuania. *ZITA PETKUS*, editor of *Tulpė Times*, translated the story. Barn photo from www.julianhaight.com/newphotos/barn.jpg.

She slept... and dreamed of sled tracks leading to a forest in Aukštaitija.

Everyone's bustling about in a hurry. Annie helps out wherever her little hands are welcome. Her dexterous fingers line up the *šlīžikai* (Christmas Eve biscuits) on the metal tin slated for a trip to the oven, later to yield brown-cheeked drops of pastry.

"No tasting! You must wait for evening."

Her eyes glaze over, and the mouth waters. Not much longer to wait, only about an hour. Grannie and mother are rolling out the dough, chopping onions, frying up mushrooms. They're seated at opposite ends of the table, but their closeness is palpable as they softly harmonize a folk song. Their busy fingers are rolling out dumplings, sealing their corners.

"Onike, child, go get a handful of hay from Marile. It's time to set the table, and you know we can't start the meal without the hay." Grannie's smile accompanies her request.

The granddaughter heads out. Although it's getting dark, snow has lightened up the night, and there is nothing to fear. It's beautiful outside! The door rattles, and winter pinches the little cheeks, tiny nose, and small hands.

The neighbors, Marilė and Henry, live across the road. They keep animals, and that's where the handful of hay awaits, as it does every year. Onikė swings onto the path leading to the house. Her feet noisily sink into the white carpet of the night. Just see how funny the snowed-over briars look! The branches, well, they look like branches, but the berries look like little bumps. Should she try listening quietly at the barn door? Maybe she'll hear something? After all, it is said that on Christmas Eve the animals speak in human voices. It's silent. They're not talking yet, or maybe they've already said what they have to say?

Marilė steps into her boots and lifting her feet high over the snow heads off to the barn. Žučikas, their black dog, pokes his head out of his doghouse. He'd bark, but he's a little lazy. No problem. This peace should not be disturbed.

Onikė raises her eyes to the sky and takes

delight at the snowfall. How many snowflakes have to fall in order to blanket everything? It's kind of sad that you can't really capture even a single one: open your little hand to catch one, but the playful snowflake hides right away. Those that land on the white fur coat lie forgotten, given away only by the three large gray clasps.

The dog's eyes follow the mistress as she strides by.

"Thank you for the hay. A very merry Christmas to you."

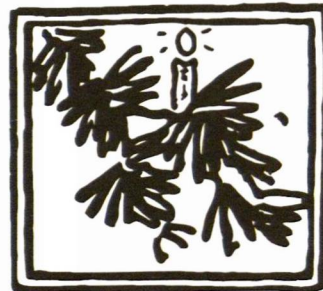
Ah, the smell of hay in the middle of a winter night, in the middle of all this great silence. It intoxicates, it induces sleep, it enchants.

Back at her own door, delaying going inside, Onikė sat on the stairs clutching her handful of hay and looking at the snow topped shrubs. It was peaceful and a wisp of hay was tickling her cheek. The snow came down. Onikė knew they wouldn't start without her.

The first order of this evening is to spread the fragrant hay on the table and lay a pure white tablecloth over it (not store-bought, mind you, but homemade.) The dishes will be lined up just so in their place. After that, everyone will gather around the table, make the sign of the Cross, and wait for Grannie to lead the prayer:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..."

There's that crackling from the fireplace again, but I don't need a reminder. I already remember everything. I know that on every Christmas Eve, having started to pray the "Our Father," I can inhale that scent of hay and taste my childhood. And the words of the prayer are enshrined somewhere in my throat... "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done..." ♦



The LAC reports...

Changes in the LAC...

On December 6, in Bridgeport, CT, the present Executive Committee turned over official duties to the new 17th National Executive Committee (NEC) confirmed by the LAC's Board of Directors. The 16th NEC not only takes this opportunity to say good-bye but also to thank you for your assistance, your support, and your understanding. Everything that we accomplished was done with your encouragement.

The new Executive Committee is as follows:

- **President:** Ms Vaiva Vėbra
- **Executive Vice President:** Mr. Al Dzikas
- **Vice President, Academic Affairs:** Stanley Bačkaitis, Ph.D.
- **Vice President, Development:** Elona Vaišnys, Ph.D.
- **Vice President, Resources:** Laima Karosas, Ph.D.; **Committee:** Mr. Linas Banevičius and Ms. Danutė Dmowski
- **Vice President, Sports:** Mr. Larry Misičiūnas
- **Vice President, Youth Affairs:** Ms. Sigita Šimkuviene
- **Executive Manager:** Regina Stankaitis
- **Secretary:** Ms. Giedrė Stankūnas
- **Information Chair:** Ms. Irene Ivaška. **In Lithuanian:** Ms. Birutė Bernotas, Mr. Evaldas Malinauskas. **In English:** Mr. Linas Balsys, Mr. Eugene Žiurys
- **Treasurer:** Mr. Ramutis Pliūra
- **Chairs of the Councils –**
 - **Cultural Affairs:** Mrs. Marija Remys
 - **Educational Affairs:** Mrs. Dalilė Polikaitis
 - **Economic Affairs:** Indrė Biskytė
 - **Public Affairs:** Ms. Asta Banionis
 - **Religious Affairs:** Sister Margarita Bareika
 - **Social Affairs:** Mr. Juozas Polikaitis
 - **Lithuanian Youth Association:** Aras Matišis (Representative)

The 17th LAC National Board of Directors was elected in May 2003. There were 92 candidates of which 60 were elected. The first annual session of the Board was held September 12-14 in Omaha, NE. During the session, a memorial Mass was offered for Birutė Jasaitis who died just days before the session which she had planned to attend. As chair of the LAC Human Services Council, Birutė was one of the truly irreplaceable people! Our most sincere thanks to Danguolė Antanelytė-Hanson, president of Omaha Chapter, and her able committee for hosting one of the most memorable Board of Directors sessions ever.

The LAC Board of Directors during the session also elected LAC national leadership. Board of Directors will be headed by R. Narušis as president, G. Damašius, Juratė Budrys, Birutė Vindašius and Birutė Vilutis. Also elected were the Audit Committee, the Court of Honor (organization's ethics committee), and members of the LAC and Lithuania's Seimas joint commission. The next session in the fall of 2004 will be held in Phoenix, AZ at the invitation of Dr. Rimantas Vaitkus, Arizona LAC chapter president.

Publications...

Lithuanian-American Community -- *Five Decades*, a 799-page history of the LAC (in Lithuanian) was published last summer in Lithuania. The price of the book is \$35, and it is available through all ten regional presidents, at *Draugas*, or by contacting LAC NEC treasurer Ramas Pliūra, whose address is on page 2 in this issue.



The second edition of the book *For Lithuania and Lithuanian Heritage* is in the final stages of publication. This book reviews the philosophical basis and history of the creation of Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. as an organization.

Other LAC publications during our term include the 200-page program book for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of LAC, Inc. in 2001.

Also, the publication of a summary of presentations and discussions at the 2002 Dainava Conference compiled by Dr. Romualdas Kriaučiūnas. He was the main organizer of that conference. A Lithuanian songbook with music is in the final stages of compilation by Antanas Polikaitis. All of the above publications received financial support from the Lithuanian Foundation for which we are grateful.

Symposium a success...

The 12th Symposium of Science and Creativity was held May 21-25, 2003 in Lemont, IL. The principal mover to revive the organization of a Symposium was Dr. Stasys Bačkaitis, LAC Vice-president for Academic Affairs. The Symposiums of Science and Creativity are the joint venture of Lithuanian-American Community, Inc., Lithuanian Physicians Association, Engineers Architects Association, and the Lithuanian Studies and Research Center. With the approval of Prime minister Brazauskas, the Lithuanian government supported the Symposium by financing the participation by 90 academicians from Lithuania.

For newcomers' concerns...

The continuing second installment of the 2002 Dainava conference took place October 25-26 in Putnam, CT. It was organized by Sigita Šimkuvienė, LAC vice-president for newcomers' concerns. The theme of the conference was "New Faces – New Ideas". The conference was supported financially by the NEC, the Lithuanian Foundation, CT LAC Region, and CT chapters. Sincere thanks to Sisters of the Immaculate Conception for their hospitality extended to the attendees.

One concrete result of the 2002 Dainava conference was the creation of an informational brochure for travelers and immigrants from Lithuania to the United States. The brochure lists important addresses and web sites in the major Lithuanian communities and organizations in the United States, of the Lithuanian Embassy, consular offices and Lithuanian-American media. It was distributed by the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius with every visa issued to prospective travelers. The first printing has been exhausted and a second printing is in the works.



Activities of National Executive Committee and its Council...

Educational Council, chaired by Dalilė Polikaitis, successfully opened the new school year, completed its September fund-raising mailing, and is preparing various writing and other competitions for Lithuanian heritage school students.

Cultural Council, chaired by Marija Remienė, on Sept. 21st, organized an enormously successful international opera diva Violeta Urmana's (Urmanavičiūtė) concert in honor of King Mindaugas 750 year jubilee. On Nov. 1st to the 5th the 21st Cultural Awards Gala hon-



ored this year's winners in Music, Fine Arts, Journalism, Drama, Radio, and Folk Dance.

Public Affairs Council, chaired by Dr. Elona Vaišnys, has been active in appealing to members of Congress to continue funding for Radio Free Europe broadcasts to Lithuania; through ambassador Ušackas appealing to the government of Lithuania to repay the debt to Latvia for Latvian funds in the U.S. helping maintain the Lithuanian Embassy during Soviet occupation (when Lithuanian funds in U.S. had been exhausted); and trying to find a replacement for Juratė Mikšėnienė, who has moved to Baltimore with a newborn son and cannot travel to LAC Public Affairs Office in Reston, VA.

Human Services Council is carrying on without Birutė Jasaitis with the help of Council members. All activities and fund-raisers are going on as previously planned and scheduled.

Religious Affairs Council chaired by Sr. Margarita Bareikaitė is contacting bishops of closing Lithuanian parishes to get church inventory donated to churches in Lithuania. Algirdas Rimas, deceased chair of Public Affairs Council, was remembered at a special memorial Mass on July 8 in the Cathedral of Vilnius. Audronė Pakštys represented LAC, Inc. at the swearing in of Stephen Mull as the new U.S. ambassador to Lithuania.

LAC news in brief...

We are sincerely sorry to have lost to sudden and unexpected death Irena Vilgalienė, president of the Long Island LAC chapter. Our sincere sympathy to husband Jonas Vilgalys and family.

Philadelphia Lithuanian Youth Assoc. on Nov. 22nd celebrated its first anniversary with a concert by four folk dance and song groups from Philadelphia, Washington, and New Jersey.

U.S. and Canada Folk Dance Festival will take place July 3, 2004 in Chicago.

Through the efforts of Vytautas Alksninis, CT regional president, U.S. Congressman Bob Simmons has joined the "Baltic Caucus". Alksninis also received a personally signed thank you letter from Pres. Bush for February 16 Resolutions mailed to the White House.

Salt Lake City, UT has an LAC, Inc. representative in Sandra Aleknaitė-Stahle who has requested information about the Lithuanian-American Community and will try to organize a core group to establish a chapter. Our most sincere welcome and congratulations!



Elizabeth Chapter has revived Vincas Kudirka Saturday School with the initiative of Dr. Rasa Apanavičienė and assistance from Julius Veblaitis and Rimas Bitėnas.

Changing of the guard in regional and chapter leadership...

Western region - Antanas Polikaitis;

Midwest region - Aušrelė Sakalaitė;

Los Angeles Chapter - Stasys Maksvytis;

Philadelphia Chapter - Dr. Daumantas Matulis;

Washington, D.C. - Linas Orentas;

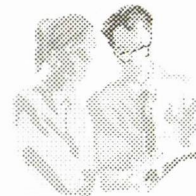
Minnesota - Algirdas Vosylius;

Waukegan/Lake County - Dr. Algimantas Birgiolas;

Cape Cod - Algirdas Dapkus;

Detroit - Raminta Vilkiėnė;

Baltimore - Gintaras Buivys. ♦



R E F L E C T I O N S

Sr. Margarita Bareikaitė

Faith in the Church is...

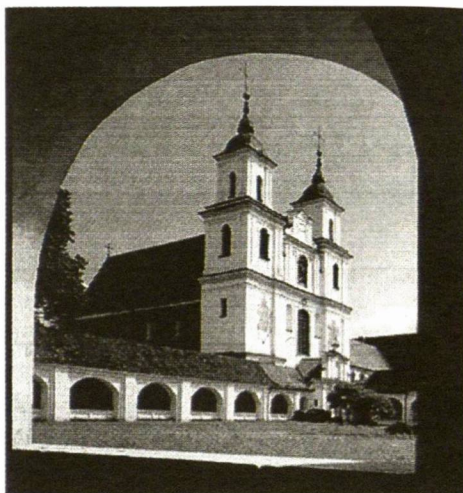


There is a tendency today to find God individually; and in one's own way. Can God be found in the Church?

Today's pragmatism seems to demand that the individual who loves and is attracted to Christ can move into life without the organized, institutionalized community of the Church. Some want to do away with this community. However, there is a vague awareness that some sacraments should be retained. What we should keep in mind is that our Faith in the Church is inseparable from faith in Christ.

The Scripture scholar, John L McKenzie, asserts that the more familiar one becomes with the New Testament, the more aware one becomes of what the Church is and should be. "The Gospel lives in the Church..."

The Gospel writers not only portrayed what Jesus said and did, but also they wrote as believers to believers, as members of a Church to a Church, about the founder of the Church –



Jesus.

According to John McKenzie, the Gospel of St. Matthew is perhaps the most ecclesial of all the synoptic writings. A passage in chapter 18 of Matthew's Gospel indicates how the Gospels were written for the Church. In a few verses further in St. Matthew's, we read those familiar words, "where two or three are gathered to-

gether, I am in the midst of them", again implying the communal nature of faith in Christ.

Matthew's Gospel also stresses the choice and activity of the twelve Apostles and that the faith of the Israelite people descended from the twelve sons of Jacob was founded on Christ and the twelve apostles. In reading the Acts of the Apostles, one of the initial activities of the Church after Christ's ascension was to fill up the void felt by the defection of Judas. Matthew relates the confession scene at Caesare Philippi (Matt. 16:16), where Peter was designated by Jesus as the Rock, the foundation of His Church.

*SR. MARGARITA BAREIKAITĖ belongs to the order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Lithuanian order in Putnam, CT. and is a regular contributor to **Bridges**. Photo is of Tytuvėnai, Church of the Virgin Mary and the Bernardine Monastery. Architect T. Kasperas(?) 1614-1639; 18th c. Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo. Photo by Arūnas Baltėnas and Raimondas Paknys. <http://www.lcn.lt/en/bl/sventoves/>.*

The institution of the Eucharist in Matthew's Gospel, as well as in the other gospels, brings to mind the community motif. "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many unto the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:28) This community theme implies a conventual people with whom God has made a new pact, a New Testament. The Eucharist is not only a gift to individuals but also a gift signifying a relationship of love between God and

his united people.

The Church we are talking about is no abstraction; nor is it a building in a particular neighborhood. The Church is people, all of us, "the people of God: who are led by the Holy Spirit." At the same time, they are people who are admittedly weak, fallible, selfish, and struggling. Faith in the Church is one and the same a real necessity – as is faith in Christ. ♦



"...For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace..." (Is 9:16)

A Merry and Blessed Christmas

With every passing year we celebrate

a birthday of Jesus Christ. Isaiah announced a great light, which would appear at the birth of the Messiah. At Christmas we see the newborn Infant in the stable. Christ alone was the center of attention with the mother of God, Mary, the foster father, and the shepherds. Yet here, too, one can discern the message, the coming on Earth the Light of the world, King and God an amiable Savior to all men of good will.

Christmas is the feast of love. The divine infant of Bethlehem lying in the manger is divine love manifest in human form. This love flows out from the crib into the world.

We find a beautiful symbol of this divine love in our practice of exchanging gifts at Christmas especially with the poor and needy.

Christ, on this day, is the center of interest for it is the day of His birth. "The Lord said to me, 'Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten

thee.'" Faith alone can lead us to accept this mystery. It is the basic idea of Christmas. As St Augustine once said, "The Son of God was made man in order that men might become the children of God."

This child of Bethlehem is likewise our teacher and our guide. In becoming man, Christ has enabled mankind, and has become a second Adam to the human race. Christ lay down a new commandment, which can be summed up briefly: we must live soberly, justly, and piously in this world. These words tell us how Christians are to live in relation to self, to neighbor, and to God. Give to each man his due. True justice is love. By love, we fulfill perfectly the law of justice.

With these thoughts in mind, we now approach the crib of our Lord. As Isaiah the prophet said of Him, "A bruised reed he will not break and a smoking wick he will not quench." (Matt. 12:20). ♦

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