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Lithuania's Entry into the EU...Journey to Adoption — Part III...Special Events

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

When Lithuanians came to America, they quickly searched for a "little Lithuania", a center or parish where they could socialize or pray. Contributions from their hard-earned pay helped schools, organizations, and committees to blossom. It was home away from home. It was that comfortable feel of our homeland as we all remembered or imagined if we had never known her. And now these little Lithuanias are being sold off—some due to lack of community support and some due to greed.

It all started with the community parishes with diminishing numbers of parishioners. The Archdioceses of their districts deemed economically feasible to close these church doors. In many cases, such as in Racine, Wisconsin, the parishioners had the right to donate church articles to churches in Lithuania.

Times changed. With re-establishment of Lithuania's independence, all of the focus was steered to reviving Lithuania's churches and monasteries. While in America, the children who were needed to support parishes and centers moved away.

The Brooklyn Lithuanians were next to feel the loss – their Cultural Center. With only two priests left, the Franciscans decided to close and sell the monastery, Center, and newspaper buildings, which were painstakingly built with many small donations over time by the local Lithuanians who never expected an expiration date. New York Lithuanians were left with aching hearts and only memories.

And now the scenario repeats itself in Chicago. This time, the Chicago Youth Center, or JC as it is known to Lithuanians in the area, is in jeopardy. The authorities, in need, making the decisions are from Lithuania. There is still a vibrant community with bountiful support, yet the Center is being prepared for real estate negotiations. A school, Lithuanian Institute, archives, and art gallery may not exist in the future.

What can be done? We still need the Centers, and the organizations in charge still need us. But they have made this relationship fragile and tenuous. Hopefully they will realize this before their pen reaches the real estate contract.

Rasa Ardyš-Juška

Editor

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Did you know...

...that you can find the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. on the web? This web page contains information about the organization's branches: Cultural, Education, Public, Religious, Social, and Youth.

The web page also includes a list of chapters nationwide. This is handy when you're looking for specific contacts. A calendar and events page highlights happenings from all over.

What can't be missed is the extensive links page. A listing according to topic connects you to many areas of interest.

Oh...and by the way...Bridges is here, too. In PDF version, every 2003 issue is included for your reading pleasure. See us at www.javlb.org.

On the cover:

It's spring!

This illustration comes from Keturi Valdovai (The Four Kings) by Stasys Džiugas and illustrated by Vl. Stanči-kaitė. (Italy, 1955).

The European Union expands – and Lithuania enters into a new partnership

On May 1, 2004, the European Union enlarged to twenty-five member countries – amongst them Lithuania – a momentous achievement that signaled Europe’s unification after fifty years of division. It has created a new political order that for the first time in contemporary history is based on common values and a shared desire to construct a space of security and peace. This enlargement can be compared with the historic foundation of the European Union and its institutions in the 1950s, not only in dimension—it is the first time that ten nations joined the EU simultaneously—but also in its political impact.

This “fifth enlargement,” the largest in EU history, continues past May 1, 2004, to include Bulgarian and Romanian accession, anticipated for 2007. By the end of 2004, the European Council will decide whether Turkey is ready to begin accession negotiations. From the Baltics to the Mediterranean, the eight Eastern European and two Mediterranean countries augment the EU’s population to over 455 million, its territory to 3.9 million square kilometers, and its official languages from eleven to twenty. In comparison, the United States has a population of over 293 million with a territory of 9.4 mil-

lion square kilometers and English as the common, if not official, language.

EU enlargement is a historic step toward the long cherished goal, on both sides of the Atlantic, of a Europe “whole, free, at peace and growing in prosperity,” as articulated by successive Presidents of the United States.

After generations in which internal conflict in Europe posed one of the most serious security threats to the United States, the Western alliance and world peace, the unification of Europe by consent is a major strategic prize for the US as well as Europe.

EU enlargement ensures that the democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe is irreversible. Projecting security and political stability east and south, the EU serves not only its own security and geopolitical interests, but those of the United States, too.

The enlarged EU will enable Europe to become an even more effective international partner of the US in tackling regional and global problems of mutual concern, from stabilizing the Balkans and the Caucasus to dealing with instability in the wider Middle East and beyond, and tackling terrorism and international crime.

The enlarged EU can be expected to expand

THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) is a family of democratic European countries, committed to working together for peace and prosperity. Its Member States have set up common institutions to which they delegate some of their sovereignty so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at European level.

its trade with its neighbors to the south (the eastern and southern Mediterranean countries) and east (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova) at the EU's new external borders. The EU's policy on a Wider Europe concerns the countries that will have direct sea or land borders with the EU25, aiming over the coming decade, to work in partnership to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighborhood—a "ring of friends"—with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and cooperative relations.

Already in 2002, EU15 exports (€994 billion) comprised 20.5 percent of world exports, while EU15 imports (€988 billion) were 18.6 percent. More than 95 percent of EU trade with the accession countries was "liberalized" prior to accession, and trading patterns were stabilized.

The United States and the European Union are one another's main trading partners, as well as the leading players in international trade. Together in 2002, they accounted for 37 percent of world merchandise trade, and 45 percent of world trade in services. The US and other EU trading partners will benefit significantly from enlargement. The US will strengthen its position as the EU's main trading partner, accounting for more than 23 percent of all of the EU's external trade.

The very existence of the EU has its origins

in a peace project seeking to overcome historical divisions between France and Germany. Particularly after the Cold War, enlargement—for the EU, the candidate countries and their neighbors—is rightly viewed as being as much a part of an overall security endeavor on the European continent as is enlargement of NATO. Candidate countries participated extensively in programs identical or similar to those in place for members of the EU.

NATO and the EU work together to prevent and resolve crises and armed conflicts in Europe and elsewhere. EU-NATO agreements grant the EU access to NATO's assets and capabilities for EU-led operations, effectively allowing NATO to support EU-led crisis management operations in which the Alliance as a whole is not engaged.

At present, eleven (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom) of the EU15 and eight (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) of the recent accession countries are members of NATO, as are Bulgaria and Romania. EU and NATO officials consult regularly on common security concerns, exchange information, and plan joint efforts. ♦



...freedom cannot be taken for granted...

Lithuanian ambassador Vygaudas Ušackas on Wednesday, April 21, spoke in a session, “The U.S. and Northern Europe: The e-PINE Initiative” [Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe- is an American initiative launched in October 2003] that was held before the Committee on International Relations’ Subcommittee on Europe, House of Representatives, U.S. Congress.

V. Ušackas stressed that the U.S.-led international community’s shift of its efforts and resources towards promotion of stability and democracy in the Greater Middle East is a noble mission, which Lithuania has joined at the very early stage.

“We recognize the dangers and challenges facing the Coalition forces and the international community in Iraq and the Greater Middle East. We see the tragic pictures on television everyday. But we know what must be done. From our history, we know that freedom can not be taken for granted. We are proud to be your ally and friend, and you can rest assured that we will be there, during the hard times, when you need your friends to stand up and be counted.” said Lithuanian ambassador.

He continued, “At the same time, it is imperative not to neglect the fact that Europe whole and free, which we were able to accomplish due to the EU and NATO enlargements, still retains few important gaps and striving neighbors. Therefore we strongly believe that it is of critical importance to maintain and even enlarge the US presence in the Nordic-Baltic area so as by working together we would be



Mr. Jan Eliasson, Ambassador of Sweden, Mrs. Heather Conley, Deputy Assistant Secretary, US Department of State, Mr. Vygaudas Ušackas, Ambassador of Lithuania.

Photo: Lithuanian Embassy

stronger to support and advance the cause of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law in the immediate neighborhood of the enlarged EU and NATO.”

V. Ušackas noted that with the accomplishment of two major goals – Lithuania’s, Latvia’s, and Estonia’s membership in the EU and NATO – are opening a new chapter of a unique US/Nordic/Baltic cooperation.

The Lithuanian ambassador highlighted US/ Nordic/Baltic cooperation’s mutually supportive elements which, according to V. Ušackas include: regional projects to facilitate the advancement of freedom and democracy beyond Lithuania’s borders; greater efforts to boost trade, investment and tourism; and actions to deal with dangers and risks to international security. ◆

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

Victims of Communism will be remembered

After years of quiet hope and resolve, and following excellent fund-raising results, it appears now more likely than ever that a memorial to the Victims of Communism will be unveiled in Washington, DC in 2004.

The major remaining question regards the site location for the monument. Initial hopes that the site would be located off of Louisiana Ave. and 1st St., NW have been supplanted by plans to locate the memorial on a triangle between Maryland and Constitution Avenues, NE. This location is by the Hart Senate Office Building and just across the street from the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). The Supreme Court building is also within eyesight.

A decision will be made within the next few weeks whether to proceed with securing the alternate site. The site needs final approval by the National Capitol Memorial Commission, the National Capitol Planning Commission, and the Washington DC Commission on Fine Arts.

The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation is authorized under Public Law 103-199 to build a Memorial to the more than 100 million victims of communism on federal land in the Nation's Capital. The original legislation, HR3000, was sponsored by Representative Dana Rohrabacher and Senator Claiborne Pell, and passed unanimously on De-

ember 17, 1993. It was signed by President Clinton, Speaker Foley, and President pro tempore of the Senate, Robert Byrd. It subsequently has been renewed through Section 326 of PL 105-277, approved October 21, 1998, until December 17, 2007.

The memorial includes a replica of the Goddess of Democracy from Tiananmen Square, an eternal flame and marble panels featuring quotations of the U.S. and foreign heroes of the Cold War. If approval is granted, groundbreaking for the memorial to the victims of communism and dedication of the Memorial are expected later this year.

Ethnic American groups, including JBANC, representing more than twenty countries and 26 million Americans that suffered under communist rule have been active in this endeavor.

JBANC Managing Director Karl Altau became a member of the Memorial Foundation Board in January, the first Baltic-American in that position. In addition, three former Presidents of the Baltic nations: Vytautas Landsbergis of Lithuania, Lennart Meri of Estonia, and Guntis Ulmanis of Latvia are on the organization's International Advisory Council. President George W. Bush is Honorary Chairman of the Foundation.

In addition to the construction of the Memorial, plans include the establishment of a virtual museum on the Memorial's website and

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.

the preservation of vital documents about communism for study by present and future scholars.

Recent articles in the press and efforts by others working to see the memorial a reality have begun to gain momentum. A March 25, 2004 article in "The Hill", a Congressional newspaper, chronicled the effort to build the memorial. The March 31 issue of The Washington Times published an article "Lest We Forget" by Helle Dale, former Editorial Page Editor of that newspaper.

Pressure from Members of Congress to resolve the final impasse is also reaping benefits. The time for building the Memorial is at hand. JBANC will continue to work with all responsible parties to see this through.

Another project related to the effort to bring recognition to the victims of communism is a documentary film project now under way, which will chronicle the tragic absurdity of the Soviet Union and help to convey the lessons of the fall of the USSR.

Professor David Satter, a former journalist with the Financial Times, who wrote extensively on the Soviet Union for that paper in the 1970's-80's and who witnessed the paradoxes of that system is the man behind the project. Satter, now with the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC, is the author of *Age of Delirium: The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Union*.

The film, based on the book, will be produced by Carolina Public Television, Dream-scanner of Germany, and the Evans-McCan group in the U.S.A. in cooperation with the Hudson Institute. Its purpose is to depict the fall of the Soviet Union as it was lived and experienced by the Soviet people.

Age of Delirium, as well as receiving critical acclaim in the U.S., was published in Russian and is being translated into Estonian. The film will consist of two, 90-minute parts. The first part will take the viewer inside Soviet society, from the factories and collective farms to the labor camps, party cells and psychiatric hospitals of the Soviet Union to show what it meant to construct an entire state on the basis of a false idea.

The second part will show the impact of truthful information on a delusory system and why, when the ruling idea began to be discredited, it was inevitable that the whole pyramidal structure of Soviet society would begin to collapse.

The method employed will be filmed interviews with persons whose experiences illustrate the forces that led to the decline of the Soviet Union and its eventual fall. These persons will return to the locations where their stories unfolded and describe the events in which they participated. There are plans to have scenes of the Baltics.

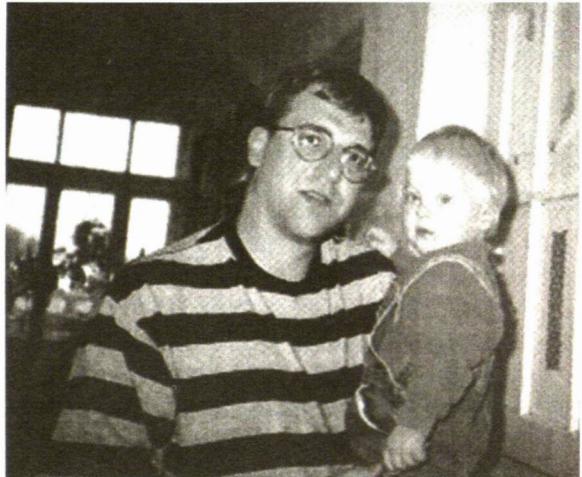
In his book, Satter writes about the bloodshed in Lithuania in January 1991, and also depicts the struggles of Baltic political prisoners, and the famous Hirvepark meeting in Tallinn, Estonia in 1989, on the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The product will be a film which will be shown on television and made available in cassettes for high school and university students in the United States and abroad. ♦



Our Journey to Adopt

Part III

This is the third 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. We received a referral of a little boy named Daumantas, born in September 2001, in May 2003 and accepted that referral shortly thereafter. This installment of the series discusses our court proceeding, Daumantas' life in the orphanage and our trip to bring him home.



Here is daddy and Daumantas, in the orphanage in October 2003.

The Court Proceeding

On Friday, October 3, 2003, we presented ourselves to the Vilniaus apygardos teismas ("Vilnius district court") at 9:00 a.m. There are a total of 4 parties participating in Lithuanian adoption hearings:

- the petitioners, i.e. prospective parents, with their attorney,
- a representative from the Įvaikinimo

tarnyba,

- a representative from the orphanage in which the child resides,
- and a representative from the regional children's rights defense council (rajoninis vaikų teisių apsaugos komitetas, in our case from Kaunas, "KVTK").

Each of these parties is given an opportunity to speak during the hearing: the prospective parents present their case, while the three

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. Part II was published in October 2003.

state representatives express their opinion on the adoption and provide further information about the adoptive child, his/her family of origin and current legal and social situation. These are the only parties who may appeal the adoption during the appeal period.

Currently, there is a 40 day appeal period following the court hearing. In some cases, that period can be decreased to 14 days with good cause shown. If a birth parent wishes to appeal an adoption, they have to start by appealing to the court which first terminated their parental rights – and the chances of that occurring are unlikely, as the parent's rights are usually terminated quite some time before the adoption and the parent would need to demonstrate significantly changed circumstances.

Our hearing lasted approximately two hours. The judge was very strict. She was very upset because the representative of the KVTK did not have a proper power of attorney and had not contacted the families in Lithuania who had a few of Daumantas' older siblings as their foster children to inquire if they were interested in taking Daumantas. She was very concerned about separating Daumantas from his siblings in Lithuania.

All of the parties emphasized that Daumantas has no relationship with his siblings or biological family and that his best interests lie in international adoption. The parties also noted that Daumantas has three siblings who have been adopted by a family in the United States.

We also filed a petition to shorten the appeal period to 14 days so that we could bring Daumantas home to the U.S. faster. All of the parties supported this request and spoke in favor of it, noting that once the decision has been made to allow a child to be internationally adopted, it is in the child's best interest to arrive at his new home as soon as possible.

After a protracted discussion on this point, the judge gave a recess and went to consider her decision. Following a 15 minute recess, the judge returned to announce her decision. She allowed us to adopt Daumantas and changed his name to Daumantas Mykolas Sku-

čas.

However, she denied our request for a 14 day appeal period, stating that we had not provided sufficiently good reasons for it. So the date on which the adoption decree would become final and we could begin the process to bring Daumantas home became November 13, 2003. Daumantas remained in the orphanage to wait out those 40 days, and we returned home.

The Orphanage

As mentioned in an earlier article, the children in the Lopšelis orphanage are divided into groups by age. There are usually 11-12 children in Daumantas' group, including three who are disabled and require additional assistance, ranging between 2 and 4 years of age. During our three visits to the orphanage over the course of 5 months, several children came in and out of Daumantas' group.

Children remain at the Lopšelis home until about the age of 4-5, when they are transferred to a children's home, rather than an infant home. However, some disabled children are kept for longer periods. There are a total of 12 caretakers assigned to this group, who work in shifts caring for the children. Usually there are two to four caregivers per shift.

Despite the caregivers' best efforts, there is no way to properly stimulate such a large number of children when all have such varying needs. The caregivers must care for the disabled children, prepare meals for everyone, clean up and handle any problems which may arise. That does not leave much time to interact or play with the children, who are desperate for adult affection.

On the days when there are two caregivers caring for the 12 children, I can not imagine how they do it all. The children have three meals per day, plus who snacks. Although efforts are made to serve nutritious food, much of it is very bland. The two snacks are usually cookies. Fresh fruit was a treat to Daumantas, something he apparently got on special occasions.

The children's days are structured and efforts are made to expose them to a variety of activities to stimulate their development. During the week, the children have music lessons and go swimming in an indoor pool several times. Daumantas knows a variety of songs and hums them when he is happy.

When the weather cooperates, the children play outside in the mornings and afternoons. As the orphanage has a multi-acre property, there is room for the children to run around outside. Unfortunately, there is no playground for them to play on, only an old sand pit which concerned me given the number of stray cats in the area.

The children are also fairly isolated in the orphanage: they don't go outside of the grounds too frequently and rarely see outsiders, other than family members visiting those children who still have contact with their biological families. Before meeting Tomas, Daumantas had never interacted with a man. He had only seen the orphanage's janitor at a distance.

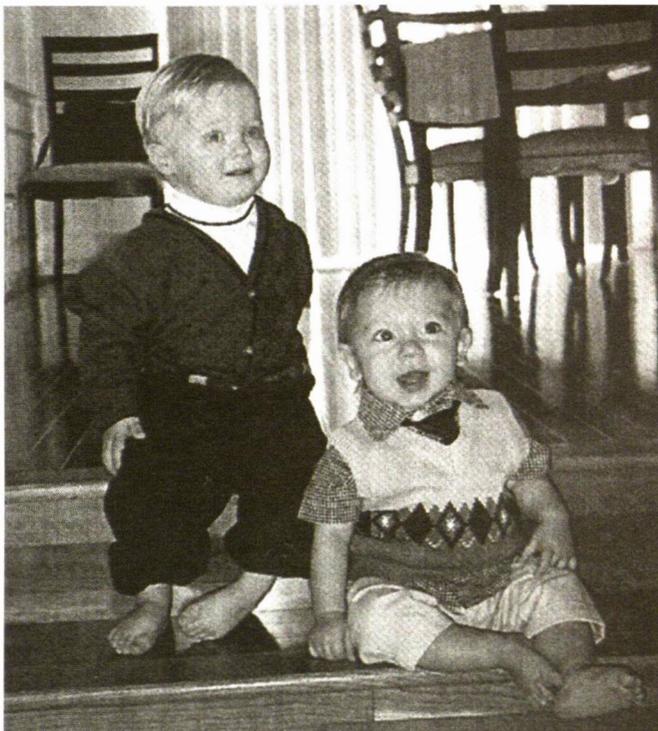
The orphanage, like most state-run institutions in Lithuania, is constantly short on funds. The social workers and caregivers see many areas for improvement or needs, but do not have the funds to follow through on these ideas. For example, the balconies on the building housing the infants are so decrepit that it is unsafe to let the children out on them. However, there are no funds available for repairs.

The Final Procedural Requirements

On November 15, 2003, Tomas and I boarded a flight to return to Lithuania to bring Daumantas home. Before our arrival, our representative obtained an official copy of the final adoption decree and presented it to local authorities in Kaunas so that a new birth certificate would be issued for Daumantas, listing us as his parents and reflecting his new name.

With the new birth certificate in hand, we went to apply for a Lithuanian passport for Daumantas, so that he could travel with us.

After a bumpy process which was saved by



Here are Darius and Daumantas, new brothers, at Thanksgiving.

an absolutely wonderful commissioner at the Kaunas Region's police offices, we received Daumantas' passport within 24 hours. Usually, this process of obtaining the birth certificate and passport takes 4-5 days: once the birth certificate is issued, the child must be re-registered as a permanent resident of Lithuania under his new name. That registration usually takes 24 hours to take effect, but can occasionally take 2-3 days. A passport can not be issued until the child is officially listed as a permanent resident in the police commissioner's computer system. Usually, a passport can be issued in an expedited manner within 24 hours, but if there are any bureaucratic snafus, then the process can take longer.

Having obtained a birth certificate and passport reflecting Daumantas' new name, and with the final adoption decree in hand, the Lithuanian end of our adoption process was done.

Our next step was to obtain an immigrant

visa for Daumantas to be able to enter the United States as a legal permanent resident. This entailed three steps: (1) a visit to the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius to complete an I-600 form and have the Embassy's consular officials conduct an Overseas Orphan Investigation; (2) a visit to a U.S. Embassy-approved physician in Vilnius for an immigration physical; and (3) a trip to the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw, Poland to obtain the final visa for entry into the U.S.¹

Our trip to the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius went very smoothly: the consular officer was efficient and thorough but also pleasant. The physical in Vilnius also went smoothly: there is one physician in Lithuania who is approved by the U.S. Embassy to conduct physicals for prospective immigrants. He spent a good 45 minutes with us, both conducting the required physical and giving us his opinion of Daumantas' general health and issues we should address with our pediatrician once we arrived back home.

The drive to Warsaw was grueling. Daumantas was not accustomed to cars, especially long car rides spent buckled into a car seat. Unfortunately, due to the uncertainty of when we could depart for Warsaw, we decided that advance purchase of an airline ticket could prove problematic.

We arrived at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw at 9:00 am for our visa appointment. Luckily as U.S. citizens we could bypass the very long line outside the Embassy of people seeking visas. After about 2 ½ hours of completing forms and being interviewed by consular officials, we were told to return at 3:00 p.m. to pick up Daumantas' visa.

After a lovely walk through Warsaw's Old Town and a nap for Daumantas at the hotel, we picked up his new visa and headed back to Vilnius. After a weekend in Vilnius, we flew back to the United States.

An international flight with a newly-adopted toddler is not an experience I look forward to repeating, but we all survived relatively unscathed. We landed in Dulles on Sunday, November 23rd in the afternoon. Pursuant

to U.S. law, Daumantas became a U.S. citizen upon his arrival in the United States.

Part IV: Home at last – a postscript and summary.

Works Cited:

1. See Child Citizenship Act of 2000, Pub. Law 106-395, amending 8 U.S.C. § 1101(b)-(c) (2000). Pursuant to this law, foreign-born children adopted by U.S. citizens acquire U.S. citizenship automatically when they enter the United States as Lawful Permanent Residents. Available at <http://travel.state.gov/childcit.html>.



V. A. Sužiedelis

Baltic Religious Music Symposium in Florida



During the week of March 9 through 15 a Baltic Symposium was organized by the Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Naples, Florida. This event featured several lectures, a special choral repertoire during worship services, and a Baltic hymn concert. Emmanuel Lutheran Church led by Senior Pastor Rev. Steven Wigdahl is well known in the area as a sponsor of cultural activities, including visual arts and musical performances.

The principal organizer of this event was Dr. Marian Dolan, Director of Music and the Arts at Emmanuel Lutheran, who has recently relocated from Atlanta with an impressive professional background in the field of religious music. She was Assistant Professor of church music and choral conducting in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University from 1996 to 2003. Marian Dolan served there as conductor of two chamber choirs: the

Choraliers and the Candler Chapel Choir. Although trained as a flutist, her special talent is in arranging music and conducting choirs.

Marian Dolan has traveled extensively throughout the world and likes to stretch the stylistic boundaries of her singers. Her choir performance may range from singing a black gospel tune to a selection of Christmas carols from Scandinavia. Her choirs have sung in Latin, Finnish, Estonian, Korean, Russian, and Creole.

Her latest collection published in 2003 by WorldSong (Augsburg Fortress Press) is named "Let the Peoples Sing" and contains twelve scores of sacred choral music of the Baltic countries: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Several compositions in this publication are by Kristina Vasiliauskaitė, a highly regarded young composer of religious music in Lithuania

During early 1980's, Kristina Vasiliauskaitė

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served as a music editor in Lithuanian TV and radio programming. Since 1983 she works as music teacher and accompanist at the M. K. Čiurlionis School of Fine Arts and since 1993 also serves as composer, piano teacher, and accompanist at Ažuoliukas School in the Lithuanian capital city of Vilnius.

Marian Dolan had previously sponsored Kristina Vasiliauskaitė in a religious concert at Emory University, then met her again during last year's visit to the National Song Festival in Lithuania, and invited her to participate in the planned symposium at Naples.

One of the principal events during the week's program was a lecture on Saturday, March 13, by Dr. Saulius Sužiedelis on the subject of "Baltic States as Outposts of Western Christendom in Historical Perspective".

Saulius Sužiedelis is Professor of History at Millersville University in Pennsylvania with an extensive background in Russian and Eastern European Studies. He has traveled widely in Eastern Europe and has been engaged in a variety of historical research projects in that region. His presentation, accompanied with visual graphics, traced the growth of Christianity in Eastern Europe from the 13th century to the present with particular emphasis on Reformation and Lutheranism. He very effectively portrayed the influence of religion on emerging cultural, educational, and political developments in the Baltics and other adjoining Eastern European countries.

The finale of the symposium was the Hymn Festival "Music from the Silenced Church" on Sunday afternoon, March 14, featuring the Emmanuel Choir directed by Marian Dolan, with the accompaniment by organist Karl Schmidt and solo performances by organist Joyce Finlay and flutist Sharon Denisen.

The program presented religious music by composers from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, including several new compositions by Kristina Vasiliauskaitė. Hymns of particular impact were "By Faith" and "From Your Good Hand, O God" composed to the English translation of the words of Lithuanian poet Bernar-

das Brazdžionis. The guest composer Kristina Vasiliauskaitė was introduced to the audience by Rita Kliorys, Director of Music at the Church of the Lady of Perpetual Help in Cleveland and a well-known chair conductor in the Lithuanian communities, whose assistance with technical direction and language translation was particularly helpful.

The symposium concluded with remarks by Rev. Vytas Memėnas about the silenced church in the Baltic countries during fifty years of Soviet occupation with some of his personal recollections from that dark era. ♦

collected by **Laurynas (Larry) Misevičius**

A Lithuanian Mayor

On February 11th, 2004, Peter Verseckas of Waterbury, Connecticut, was honored by its Lithuanian community by being chosen as Lithuanian mayor for the day.

According to Linas Balsys, Knights of Lithuania Council 7, Verseckas is an active member of the St. Joseph parish and the community. He has worked with the Building and Grounds Committee, the Parish Stewardship initiative, acted as Parish Council president and advisor to the pastor for Lithuanian affairs, and is an energetic member of the Knights of Lithuanian, the Lithuanian-American Community of Waterbury, and the Lithuanian Sports Club of Connecticut. Verseckas also organized the Lithuanian Catholic Evangelization Mission to America last year.

In his speech accepting this honor, Verseckas highlighted the history of Waterbury's Lithuanian community and the many changes it has gone through over the years. Below is an excerpt from his speech.

In humility, I accept this special honor as "Lithuanian Mayor for the Day" from the Knights of Lithuania Council 7. This truly is a unique "once in a lifetime" opportunity that affords me the time to reflect upon and share what is truly Lithuanian not only in my life but in the community called Lithuanian, here in Waterbury.

Most importantly, I accept this honor for the many Lithuanians and Americans of Lithuanian ancestry, who came before us all. Many



Celebrating in the Waterbury Town Hall are (from left) Lithuanian-American Community and Knights of Lithuania Council 7 member Janina Navarskiene, Theresa Verseckas, Peter Verseckas, and Bernard Verseckas.

are no longer among us anymore. For their contributions to the Lithuanian Community and St. Joseph Parish, a very special prayer of thanks.

As I have been told, this tradition, "Lithuanian Mayor of the Day" has been a part of our community for a very long time, dating as far back as the term of then, Mayor Ray Snyder Sr., from the late 1940s. That is quite a long-standing tradition.

It is most fitting to begin with something of my family's Lithuanian ancestry. Some of my relatives have spent much time researching the "family tree." With past upheavals and the world wars, many records in Lithuania had gotten lost or destroyed. Without getting into too much detail, I can tell you, of course, my father a Verseckas, and my mother being a Satula, all of their parents emigrated from

LAURYNAS (LARRY) MISEVIČIUS is a regular contributor and the vice president of Sports Affairs of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. Photos from Larry.

Lithuania sometime before the turn of the 20th century, the 1890's seems nearly accurate.

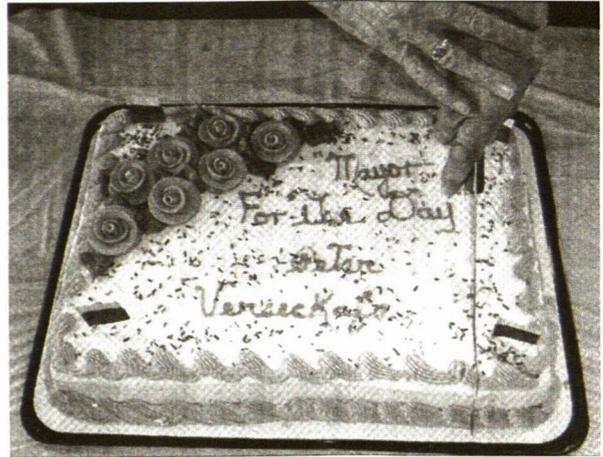
Both of the families lived in Suvalkai, the southern region of Lithuania, villages near the towns of Marijampolė, and Vilkaviškis. My Satula grandparents, Edvardas and Magdalina, were married in Lithuania prior to coming to America; my Verseckas grandparents, Petras and Carolina, had the honor to be the first couple married in the newly completed St. Joseph Church in 1904. The Verseckas family had six children, the Satula five.

As a youngster, I was attentive with my grandparents, especially in conversation with my grandfathers, Petras (Peter) Verseckas and Edvardas (Edward) Satula. They equally enjoyed conversing and sharing with their grandchildren.

Grandpa Verseckas [worked] in a tin mine somewhere in Great Britain; then, when in America, worked in forestry as a lumberjack in northern Massachusetts and Vermont prior to settling in Waterbury. Grandpa Satula, went to work somewhere in Pennsylvania, in "coal country". When the mine caved-in, he found his way to Waterbury as well.

Waterbury, then with its thriving Lithuanian Community in the Brooklyn neighborhood, seemed to have had a special attraction as a final destination of not only my grandparents but also to many Lithuanian immigrants throughout the years in their quest to make America their new home. From that first immigration wave for which the St. Joseph Parish was established; then for the second immigration, unfortunate victims to Nazism and Communism who after WWII were displaced from their homeland of Lithuania. The prosperity of the brass industries provided the ample work sought by these early immigrants to raise their families in the growing presence of the Lithuanian community here in Waterbury.

In 1894, the St. Joseph Parish was established to provide for the spiritual needs of this new community of Lithuanian immigrants by Fr. Juozas Zebris, who was referred to as the "Lithuanian Pioneer Priest". He saw the estab-



lishment of St. Joseph, the first Lithuanian parish in New England. As a pioneer or missionary priest, wherever a community of Lithuanians existed, he saw the establishment of many other parishes throughout his travels in New England in a short period of time.

Since the Lithuanian Community in Waterbury numbered in the thousands in those early years, the Parish of St. Joseph had to accommodate those changes. So the first church, built in 1894, was soon replaced with the present day edifice in 1904. The old church building was moved, and in 1904 opened as St. Joseph School. Then there was the old school on Congress Avenue, built in 1912 that was used and joined in conjunction with the 1925 present school structure on John Street. There were always evolutions of change in the parish history. [As] an historical note, this year St. Joseph Parish is 110 years old.

St. Joseph School, now largely closed but with a great place in our history, is remembered "Forever in our Hearts" – Amžinai Mūsų Širdyse. This year, St. Joseph School would have been celebrating a century of educating the children in the Catholic tradition. The city of Waterbury presently leases the building for its immediate needs.

When "Lithuanian Community" in Waterbury comes to mind, I can't help but think of a popular phrase coined by then Associate Pastor, Reverend Paul Sabulis – Fr. Sabu-

lis as we knew him: “The cradle of Lithuanian faith and culture in Connecticut”. He served St. Joseph Parish for nearly four decades at various assignment levels, the most recent, his last, under Pastorship of Fr. Francis Karvelis, until the year 2000.

Father Sabulis was laid to rest, from the St. Joseph Church he so loved, in late spring of 2001. It is most fitting to give Fr. Sabulis a special mention for his thoughts in our regard. He was a humble spirited yet affable priest.

As for the Lithuanian Community, “it all began here”. For all that the Brooklyn Community provided through the years: a home, a way of life, until the ravages of the flood, then its certain demise caused by the highway, and the most recent loss of the Lithuanian Social Club late last year. The “center” of activity certainly, all along and through it all, has been St. Joseph Parish. One thing for sure, the Lithuanian Community and the overall Community of the parish remains active and thrives.

At the same time, in acknowledging many of you present today, the Lithuanian-American Community of Waterbury, you are the reason for so much good, the perpetuation of the “Faith and Culture” at St. Joseph Parish, the Community as a whole. There are those special days of remembrance and celebration that connect us all with a sense of conscience, and Faith to the past.

You brought something special with you over a half century ago that to this day exists. The late Victor Vaitkus surely will not be forgotten for his efforts; neither will you for yours, Mr. Antanas Paliulis. You tirelessly continue to lead the “Lithuanian Senior Choir” and the weekly radio program on Sunday mornings, “Memories of Lithuania”. Thank you Julia for your sincere expression of kindness. Mr. Melninkas for keeping the Lithuanian Community, Bendruomene together. Linas Balsys, you have a hand in everything Lithuanian, a kind of “Goodwill Ambassador”, bringing extra meaning to special events, thanks. For the “honorary Lithuanians” among

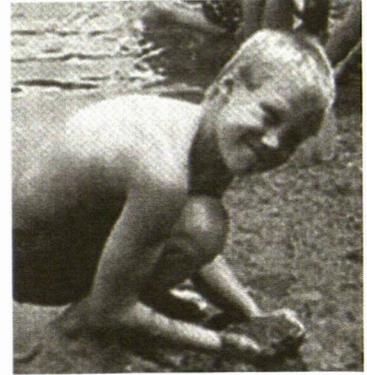
us, Frank Melvin and Jerry Covino, many thanks for the coffee and more.

Just as late Victor Vaitkus followed the footsteps of the former and late Professor Alexander Aleksis with so many eventful cultural programs right here from St. Joseph Parish, such as his most recent “Classics in the Afternoon” fondly remembered by so many. Then years later after him, there was the “Kanklės” concert by the Traditional Lithuanian Folk Ensemble in 1999. Again most recently, last June we had a real “Classic Opera”, the “Three Tigers – Trys Tigrai” performing here from Lithuania.

In many premonitive ways, Father Sabulis you were right. So many good things in the past have taken hold from this “Cradle of Lithuanian Faith and Culture” so close to our hearts. We all call St. Joseph’s Parish home. ◆

Philitha Stemplys

My Full Circle at Camp Neringa



Fifteen years have passed, and I have returned to the beginning, back to the place where my love of Camp Neringa started. I was six and my brother was seven, it was mid-summer, and we were visiting his godmother, Aldona Saimininkienė. We had visited often, but this visit was special. I remember we were all in her kitchen talking about the summer while working on straw snowflakes (snaigės), and Aldona asked my parents how old we were. When she heard the reply, she started telling us about a summer camp called Neringa.

She told us that Neringa's program centered on the Lithuanian heritage and culture; she had been collaborating with the camp since it was founded in 1969. Aldona told us her stories of teaching the straw art to the campers and how fun and exciting it was to be up in the woods of Vermont. As I was listening to her tales of this camp, I immediately started begging that my parents send me there the following year.

The year passed, I was 7 years old, our bags were packed, and we found ourselves on the long journey to the Green Mountain State. During the car ride my brother and I fantasized about what our two weeks would be like. Spurring on our imaginations was what Aldona had told us about the people, places, and memories that she kept with her from this unique place.

When we finally arrived, the beauty of the surroundings and all the smiling faces were so overwhelming to me that I forgot all about my parents and fell into everything as if I were a seasoned camper.

Through the two weeks I learned much of my heritage. I learned history of the country, folk songs in the native language, dancing, folktales,

and, most important to me, folk art and ornaments made with straw. I loved to create the different Lithuanian symbols in the various crafts: the Iron Wolf, the Vytis, folk dancers, even simple juosta (sash) patterns. Every year when I returned to Neringa until age 16, the one thing I looked forward to most was having art classes with Aldona and the new crafts and patterns that she had to offer.

Aldona has since "retired" from her art position at Neringa, but my love and interest in Lithuanian folk art as an expression of my own heritage still thrive. Fifteen years after my first days at Neringa, I have come back to Aldona's home to learn the intricacies of her craft. My sincere hope is to demonstrate these skills at Neringa and perhaps with my own children some day so that future generations can speak of their cultural background not only through songs and history, but also through works of art. May folk art bring these children the joy and gratification that I have gained in pursuit of these skills.

To me, Neringa is all about having pride in your Lithuanian heritage, which is passed down from generation to generation. I return now as a counselor to share my knowledge of the history, customs, and art so that a piece of me, a piece of my heritage, can touch at least one person.

Camp Neringa offers camping sessions for children as well as for families in Lithuanian and in English. For more information on Neringa's programs, please visit www.neringa.org or call Camp Director, Vida Strazdis, at 978-582-5592.

"Another child finds joy working with his hands at Camp Neringa. Many children bring home fond memories of Neringa's prudas (pond) and its salamanders and mud pies." ♦

PHILITHA STEMPLYs is a former camper and great supporter of Camp Neringa.

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