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# bridges



april 2005

LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL



*Letter from the Editor*

*This morning as I went out the door I noticed a few tiny plants trying to push their way out of the ground. It appears the never ending winter is over.*

*Gema and I are more than half through our first year with BRIDGES. As one of the old commercials stated we feel we've come a long way. I can't believe that I can actually do more than turn the computer on and off. With Gema's guidance and patience, I've learned to do so many different things and that is no easy task as we employ two different computer systems. My gratitude is unending to all the writers and the readers who have sent me information. They are the people who are responsible for BRIDGES each month. You spoke and we listened. We are extending the calendar to cover a three month period. I would appreciate it if organizations and LAC chapters would send me their events as soon as possible. There's no such thing as "too early or too soon." BRIDGES goes through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin before it reaches your homes. As you can see, a lot of time and a lot of traveling takes place with each issue.*

*A sincere thank you to the Lithuanian Citizens' Society of Western Pennsylvania for their generous gift to BRIDGES. I can't tell you how many times these good people have helped us when we had emergencies with children in Lithuania.*

*On my last trip to Lithuania I was fortunate enough to photograph the beautiful storks you see on the cover. After many, many trips to Lithuania I am still in awe of these magnificent birds. I can look at them for hours and never tire of their beauty. Many people believe the storks bring good luck if they build a nest on their property. There are no words to adequately describe seeing one of these graceful birds in flight. How truly blessed the Lithuanian people are to have the gift of the storks even for a short time each year.*

*Although we covered Resurrection Church in last month's issue it is important enough for a second article by Sister Ann. It truly is a miracle that this former soviet factory is now a church. Barbara Clow, with the help of Eugenija Fedosejeva, points out some of the problems of buying property in Lithuania without citizenship. If it's April then baseball is not far behind and John Chernoski shows his love of the sport by writing about Jim Pransky's efforts to bring baseball to Lithuania. We can all be proud of Joe Verbalis and his work to bring the beauty of Lithuania to so many people. Mary Pyc shares her love of Camp Neringa while Dalia Bagdonaitė shows the beauty of Nantucket. Akvile continues her account of her life in a new country. Gloria O'Brien's translations of Baltic folktales have proven to be one of BRIDGES' most popular features. I have received many positive comments about them.*

*I hope you enjoy this issue and thank you for reading BRIDGES.*

  
Jeanne Shalna Dorr



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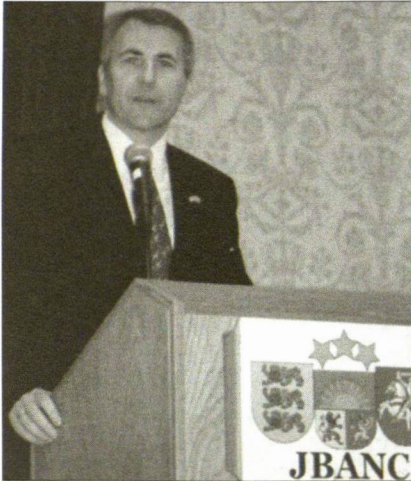
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\* The cover

Storks contribute to the beauty of the Lithuanian countryside.  
Photo by Jeanne Dorr.



Lithuanian Ambassador  
**VYGAUDAS USACKAS**  
 Opening Remarks at the Sixth JBANC Conference  
 Washington, DC  
 March 5, 2005



Ambassador Vygaudas Usackas addressing the JBANC Membership.

Photo by Rimas Gedeika

***Excellencies, Distinguished Members and Guests of the Joint Baltic-American National Committee,***

Immediately upon my arrival in D.C., four years ago I had the privilege to address the JBANC conference together with the predecessors of Maris and Jurij - Aivis Ronis and Sven Jurgenson. At that time we began to strategize how we were going to push the envelope for NATO enlargement.

Today I wish to extend my sincere thanks to all the committed friends of the Baltics for all you have done to make the day of March 29, 2004, when we became full fledged members of NATO, happen. It's impossible to overestimate your dedication and support manifested at the time of our fight for independence and, later, for our membership in NATO.

But once these most crucial goals have been achieved, we have to ask ourselves other important questions, namely, what should be the new

political role and vision for the Baltic-American organizations?

Without a doubt, it is entirely up to you to decide upon your future political issues.

I would like to share with you my own considerations.

It is my strong belief that in a broader sense of a new-old common mission, the most important task which should lead our efforts is to make the very special bonds which exist between the US, on the one hand, and Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, on the other, permanent, strong and dynamic. We are very privileged and proud to enjoy this special relationship, enhanced by an informal human chain of more than 1 million Baltic Americans, now ceaselessly commuting between their two homelands, as well as by very active and dynamic official political and military relations and growing economic exchanges.

It also means that upon accession of the Baltic countries into the European Union, we have to face new challenges as well as new opportunities in order to contribute toward strengthening of the EU-US relationship, NATO as such, and Trans-Atlantic relations at large.

How do we do that?

Lithuania and other Baltic countries are making their contribution by solidifying relations with the US bilaterally and via e-PINE program. We provide troops for the US and NATO-led operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, we help democratic transitions in Georgia and Ukraine; we support democratic opposition in Belarus. We also express, in the meetings of hundreds if not thousands of NATO and EU committees, our point

of view on how important it is to stay engaged with Americans and energize the transatlantic link.

The US-Baltic organizations, such as the JBANC, can do their share by continuing to engage actively in ensuring the US continued presence in the Baltic area.

Your outreach toward the Congress is visible and productive as we can judge by the Senate vote: "96 to 0" for NATO enlargement. Please continue to keep alert your Congressmen and Senators:

- Invite them to visit Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in order to see for themselves the achievements of democracy and free market that we were able to achieve with their support.
- Encourage them to provide financial assistance to our troops in the US and NATO-led operations under President Bush's recent Solidarity Initiative to Support Our Partners in Freedom.
- Ask them to support the democratic transition in Ukraine and Georgia, which is important for security and prosperity of the Baltic countries. Success of reforms in Ukraine and Georgia will have a powerful impact on other peoples in the area of the former Soviet Union. Cementing democracy, implementing economic and social reforms and making political regimes free of corruption will provide an example for other countries in the region. Ultimately people in the neighboring countries will notice and recognize the differences between such an authoritarian regime as of Lukashenko and a democratic pro-Western governance of Yushchenko and will make appropriate conclusions.
- When you visit your representatives in Congress bring along with you



freedom fighters from Belarus, such as Vincuk Veciorka, who is with us today. And let them tell the story about their own country and efforts they have been undertaking to get rid of authoritarian regime. I hope you will join me in requesting the administration and Congress to increase the funding to democracy-promoting political party and civic society initiatives under the Belarus Democracy Act.

- Another area where we look forward to working closely with you is on the road map toward the inclusion into "the visa waiver program", which was presented to seven Central European ambassadors this week at the State department. It will entail significant technical measures and public diplomacy to be undertaken back at home. But it will also require a considerable job at Capitol Hill. Thus, this is going to be another challenging and demanding job for all of us. And I know that we can count on your support.

- I would like to address briefly the issue of Russia. The Baltic countries need friends like the JBANC to help the political and opinion leaders to be vigilant and realistic about what is going on in Russia.

Yes, we are all: members of the EU and NATO have important economic, energy or security related bilateral relationships with Russian Federation.

However, as friends of the Russian people and passionate champions of democracy, we cannot remain silent when we see the increasing authoritarian trends and crackdown of freedoms within Russia and we observe failure to implement international commitments, such as withdrawal of troops from Georgia and Moldova.

We cannot remain silent also when we hear the attempts to justify the criminal Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that ultimately resulted in the Baltic States losing their independence, in their forceful and unlawful annexation by

the Soviet Union, and in the death or exile for hundreds of thousands of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. Such attempts on the part of the Russian leader make it extremely hard – if not impossible – for my President, Valdas Adamkus, to attend the May 9th Victory Day celebration in Moscow.

- There is another area where the experience of American democracy in action would be worthwhile to consider and apply back in Lithuania, and probably in other Baltic countries as well. As you know, my country made giant strides politically and economically since restoring Independence in 1990. But as we all know, democracy as well as civic society building is a continuous work.

Recently we have been reading reports on the existing corruption and inappropriate financing of political campaigns from the energy companies related or even controlled by the Russian government. We need to have a much deeper look into that back at home. And I think we can only do it with the support of our friends - most dedicated to democracy and the rule of law in Lithuania.

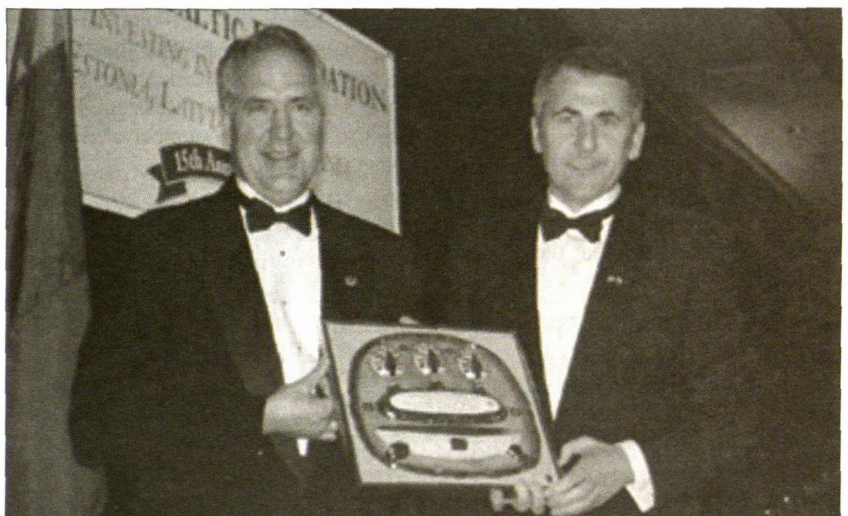
I wish to thank Ambassador Keith Smith for his study about the behind-the-scenes influence of the Russian energy business on political developments in Lithuania and other Baltic and Central European countries in recent years. We can not afford hiding from the truth and we need to make the facts known and even names of those involved named. I admire Keith Smith's study, but still I would urge him not to be shy: Name the names of those allegedly involved in inappropriate dealings and share the truth with the Lithuanian people in order to make those persons accountable. As the Bible says: "You will know the Truth and the Truth will make you free" (JN8, 32). And we do want to be free and strong.

Thank you for inviting me. Thank you for your great work. I look forward to continue working with you to make our alliance even stronger and our special bonds even deeper.

Thank you.

*Ambassador Vygaudas Usackas*

Source: The Lithuanian Embassy



Vygaudas Usackas receiving the Ambassadors Award from Congressman John Shimkus. It was presented to him during the joint JBANC and USAF Banquet.

Photo by Rimasa Gedeika



# Don't forget the USSR's evil legacy.

By Vytautas Landsbergis

Taipei Times  
Tuesday, March 08, 2005,

In May, the world will mark the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. But instead of happily preparing for that occasion, the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – which scarcely 15 years ago regained the independence they lost in World War II – are uneasy.

The heads of state of all three countries have been invited to participate in the parades to be held in Moscow to celebrate the Red Army's victory over Nazi Germany. But the host of the celebration, Russia, in the guise of the Soviet Union, itself caused the war – the bloodiest in European history – whose end is being commemorated. Of course, the USSR instigated the war in tandem with Adolf Hitler, but its responsibility is undeniable.

By holding these celebrations in the Red Square, and thus highlighting the Soviet victory, today's Russia is also celebrating its gains in that war. One of those gains was my country, Lithuania, whose incorporation into Josef Stalin's empire was accompanied by countless tragedies. Unlike Germany, Russia has never recognized its responsibility for the war and the mass graves of the innocent.

Thus, a former captive nation is now being invited to celebrate its captivity. This is why almost all Lithuanians – indeed, most residents of the Baltic countries – feel queasy at the prospect

of their leaders marking this anniversary in Moscow. But Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians are not the only Europeans who should feel this way.

When Stalin offered Hitler his friendship in the spring of 1939 – formally concluded that summer in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact – Nazi aggression was assured of not being knifed in the back from the East and so was left with free hands to do as Hitler pleased in the West. The pact came after the pogroms of "Kristallnacht" in Germany, so its Soviet initiators knew pretty well to what destiny they were consigning the Jews of Poland and Lithuania, which, in accord with the first secret protocol signed by Vyacheslav Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop on Aug. 23, 1939, were to go to Hitler. A month later, in equal secrecy, Hitler sold Lithuania to Stalin.

The other countries situated between Germany and the USSR were similarly sentenced to disappear as nations – sooner or later. Their peoples were treated practically as though they did not exist; the aggressors' only concern was territory. The death sentences and torturing that were then imposed on almost entire nations and millions of people are, it now appears, to be silently accepted and noisily celebrated on May 9 in Moscow. Some Russian officials want to unveil a monument of Stalin to crown the festivities.

When Hitler's Wehrmacht struck westward, the USSR duly supported Germany in its war against Poland,

France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway and the UK. As a result, cities in those countries were flattened and people killed not only by the Nazis, but also by their Soviet ally, which invaded Poland and supplied the Wehrmacht with the material it needed for its war against the West. In return, Stalin's USSR was given a free hand to attack Finland and to occupy Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as a part of Romania.

In law, when two criminals seal a contract with the blood of their victims, that act remains a crime, even if the two criminals later have a falling out and spray bullets at one another. The same applies to the two greatest European criminals of the 20th century. We must not forget the crimes that Hitler and Stalin committed together as de facto allies only because they later turned on each other.

The blood of World War II's victims calls for justice and fairness, but most of all it demands honesty about who and what caused their tragic fate. If those who gather in Moscow on May 9 do anything to validate Soviet war crimes, they will show themselves to be insensitive to the silent cries of World War II's tens of millions of dead innocents. The only real winner would be the spirit of that evil.

Vytautas Landsbergis, the first post-communist president of independent Lithuania, is a Member of the European Parliament.

## NOTABLE DATES IN APRIL & MAY

**April 8, 1926.** establishment of the Catholic Church province of Lithuania.  
**April 10, 1869.** birth of composer Juozas Naujalis.  
**April 13, 1871.** birth of Blessed Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis.  
**April 17, 1388.** Lithuania became a Christian country.  
**April 29, 1933.** death of author Juozas Tumas-Vaizgantas.

**May 2, 1873.** birth of poet and diplomat Jurgis Baltrusaitis.  
**May 7, 1904.** the end of the prohibition by Czarist Russia of Lithuanian books in Latin alphabet.  
**May 13, 1923.** the election of the second Seimas (Parliament) of Lithuania.  
**May 14, 1972.** the self-immolation by Romas Kalanta to bring world attention to the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union.

**May 15, 1920.** the gathering of Lithuania's Founding Seimas (Parliament).  
**May 17, 1875.** death of Bishop Motiejus Valancius.  
**May 21, 1563.** death of Martynas Mazvydas, author of the first printed Lithuanian book.  
**May 29, 1877.** birth of Oskaras V. Milasius, poet, philosopher, diplomat of Lithuania.  
**May 31, 1845.** birth of writer Zemaite - Julija Beniuševičiute-Zymantiene.



**LITHUANIAN CITIZEN'S SOCIETY  
OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA**

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President  
Dalia Yucius

Charity Committee  
Mathilda Milauskas

February 13, 2005

Mrs. Jeanne S. Dorr  
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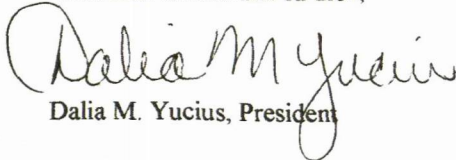
Dear Jeanne:


Congratulations on the new BRIDGES. It is a pleasure to read of the news, history and events in Lithuania and our own Lithuanian communities. Not only is it informative but also entertaining. We commend you and your staff for this excellent publication.

The enclosed check for five hundred dollars (\$500.00) is a donation from the Lithuanian Citizens Society of Western Pennsylvania.

We wish you continued success on the new BRIDGES and an increase in subscriptions. We are looking forward to the next issue.

With best wishes and su diev,

  
Dalia M. Yucius, President

  
Mathilda Milauskas, Charity Committee  
1325 Taylor Ave.  
New Kensington, PA 15068

Enc.

*Editor's Note: A most sincere thank you to the members of the Lithuanian Citizens' Society of Western Pennsylvania for their generous gift to Bridges. This fine group of people also included another generous gift to Lithuanian Orphan Care to buy wheelchairs and provide further medical help for children in Lithuania. Their good deeds not only include the people of Lithuania but also local causes in their area. Thank you for a job well done.*

*Jeanne Dorr*



## A RESURRECTED CHURCH FOR A RISEN NATION

The Church of the Resurrection in Kaunas, like Lithuania itself, has a history of suffering and renewal. Even during the Soviet era, its magnificent tower dominated the landscape of that section of Kaunas called "Zaliakalnis", or Green Hill. It was no longer a functioning church at that time, but had been turned into a radio factory.

First proposed in 1922, the church was to be a symbol of the resurrection of an enslaved nation and a monument of gratitude to God. In 1926 Archbishop Joseph Skvireckas of Kaunas organized a committee to work on the project, headed by President Antanas Smetona. Construction began when one of fifteen architectural plans was approved. The cornerstone was dedicated on June 28, 1934 during the Eucharistic Congress. The stone had been brought from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, the traditional site of the Risen Christ's ascension into heaven. Miraculously, it survived all the years of Soviet oppression and has been reinstalled in the wall of the present day church.

Canon Felksas Kapocius, pastor of Resurrection Church worked very hard to collect funds for the building project: children were encouraged to save their nickels and dimes to buy a brick for the church and Lithuanians overseas; especially in the US contributed generously.

Up to the summer of 1940 the walls of red brick went up, the roof was completed and a soaring 65 meter tower with a cross on top rose up into the sky. At the top there was supposed to be a small chapel dedicated to St. Casimir and Lithuania's Declaration of Independence was to be enshrined there.

However, in June of 1940 construction was abruptly halted by the Soviet occupation. The almost completed church stayed empty for several years until Stalin ordered the building to be turned into a radio factory in 1952. The factory, called "Banga" (The Wave) took up five floors built inside the church. The cross on the top was replaced by a radio antenna.

After Lithuania regained her independence, the church building was restored to the Archdiocese of Kaunas and reconstruction began in 1993. Lack of funds, however, hampered the process until 1997 when the Lithuanian government offered support. In November of 1997 the first Mass was celebrated in the Church of the Resurrection after a period of 53



years. The three concelebrating bishops offered prayers for the construction workers and contributors. Since Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevicius, himself a Gulag survivor, was now in charge of the renovation project, it proceeded at a good pace and was completed in 2004.



On December 26, 2004 the solemn dedication of the church took place with Cardinal Audrys J. Backis and eight bishops as well as numerous other members of the Lithuanian hierarchy present. President Valdas Adamkus and many government people attended as well. The president spoke to the crowd of worshippers saying that Lithuania can be proud of this church which enshrines the indestructible values of its people. It is not yet complete, just as Lithuania's journey on the road to freedom is still in progress. At the end of the solemn Mass, Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevicius read a special message and blessing for the occasion sent by Pope John Paul II. He also commented that it was especially significant that this church is being dedicated during the year of the Eucharist, declared by the Pope and it will show us the way to rebuild our nation.

This church, dedicated to the Risen Christ, celebrated its first Easter in March of 2005.

*Sister Ann Mikaila*

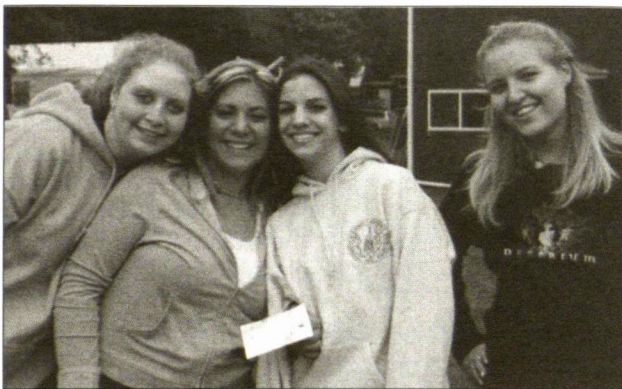
*Sister Ann Mikaila belongs to the order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Lithuanian order in Putnam, CT. and is a contributor to Bridges.*



# A Home Away from Home

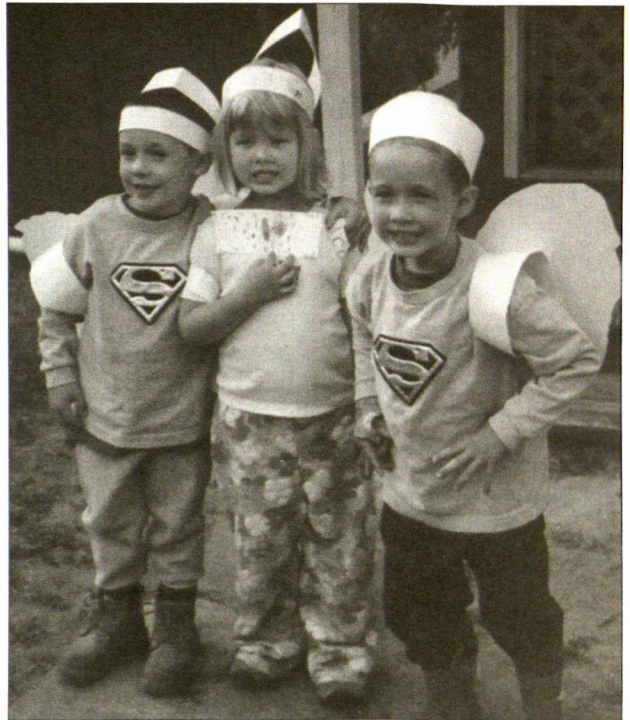
Camp Neringa in Marlboro, Vermont has been an integral part of my life for almost fourteen years. The relationships I established during my two-week experiences at camp are the bonds I cherish the most in my life. One of my best friends today was the first person I met at Neringa as an eight year old camper. Neringa has become, over the years, the place where I have learned a tremendous amount of information about my heritage and myself.

The driving forces behind the success of Camp Neringa are the staff and counselors. Every Neringa employee I have ever worked with has made it explicitly clear that they love being a part of the Neringa family, and are there primarily to ensure that the campers have a memorable and meaningful experience. We are aware that there are vast differences in the ages of the campers, and make sure that programs are geared toward being educating, exciting, and fun for all of the age groups.



The activities at Neringa range from serious to silly, but they always aim to educate campers about their unique heritage through learning traditional dances, songs, art, and cooking. Since the language is incorporated into daily activities, campers learn new words, songs, prayers, and sayings. Lithuanian history comes alive in the hills of Vermont. The English-speaking Lithuanian Heritage Children's Camp has made me feel a true connection to my Lithuanian roots. I have come away from each of my summers at Neringa with a greater understanding of my culture.

Sending children away from home for two weeks is daunt-



ing for parents. I was eight years old when I first went to Neringa, and was incredibly frightened of being away from home for two whole weeks. Thankfully, I was quickly distracted by numerous activities. Now as a staff member, I can attest that all counselors want to ensure that homesickness is not a serious factor in any camper's stay at Neringa. For this reason we even have classes devoted to the vanishing art of writing letters home for our younger campers.

A friend once sent me the following quote: "Sometimes the best way to find out who you are is to get to that place where you can't be anything else." Neringa has been this place for me. Because people come to Neringa from many different places, children can learn important lessons about diversity there. However, a single attribute that we all share is our Lithuanian heritage. Neringa leads its children not only to develop a better understanding on how to relate to many different types of people, but also to celebrate a common culture. There are no real words that can describe how deeply I cherish and love my Neringa friends and campers; they are my extended family and will always have a special place in my heart.

To learn more about Camp Neringa's programs for children and families in both Lithuanian and English, visit [www.neringa.org](http://www.neringa.org) or call Camp Director Vida Strazdis at 978-582-5592.

Mary Pyc



## The Timeless Island

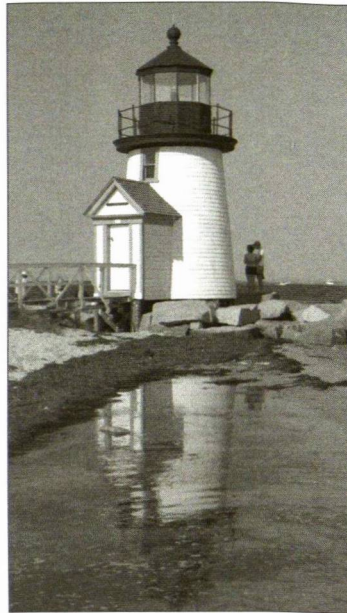
Nantucket has been called "The Timeless Island" ...and with good reason. When you first step upon the island, you feel that you have entered a place out of time. In fact, the very name Nantucket comes from a Native American word meaning "faraway island" or "land far out to sea".

The Nantucket Island is one of the most unique, historic, and visually stunning places in the world. Originally a booming whaling port, Nantucket has been named a National Historic District and has architecturally changed little since the 17th century, as sea-side cottages and old-fashioned lamps still line its streets. You can walk the cobblestone streets downtown, in the early morning or at dusk and hear echoes of the past.

Nantucket is place unlike anywhere else. And actually none of our imaginary descriptions of the island can fit the reality. We, Lithuanians, consider ourselves as people from the north and the simple word island we associate with sun, palm trees and exotica. Just after looking at the map you realize it couldn't possibly be so. And here the question comes up – why do Lithuanians like the island? I'll try to describe the island from a Lithuanian point of view.

Nantucket is a very friendly place, where people are quick to give directions, offer suggestions, and share their advice with you. The population of Nantucket is 9,000 and this number is for year-round residents. During the summer season, the population swells to over 50,000! It is hard to count exactly how many Lithuanians live on the island year-round, but I think it would be 50-70 and this number increases to ~100 during summer season.

I'll never forget my first visit to Nantucket. I was visiting my friend. Actually she was the first person to tell me about this great island and she has to be credited for my moving to live there. Can you imagine the difference for me to move from Wildwood, NJ to Nantucket, MA? I remember my first summer in Nantucket as the happiest time of my life. And it's true. You would ask so what was the difference and I could answer with no thinking – people, nature, sky. In Wildwood when people asked me where I was from, I responded – I'm Lithuanian. – the majority usually



Brant Point Lighthouse.  
(Photo by Dmitriy Kalinin)

said– Aaaaa.... (and that meant they had no idea which part of the world I was talking about), but in Nantucket the majority would tell me the capital of Lithuania is Vilnius. At the beginning I felt so flattered that people actually knew my home country.

People say that Nantucket has some spellbinding powers. Something intangible lures you back every time you go off island and every time you come back. The first glimpse of its shoreline makes you feel like you're coming home. Don't be surprised. Even if you lived on the island only a year or two or spent there only one summer, each of you, I believe, would experience the same

warmth in your hearts the same feeling of home. It's a possibility that being immigrants we are longing for home. And it is inexplicable that such a tiny island 26 miles at sea off the Massachusetts shore, with the Atlantic Ocean and Nantucket Sound defining its borders, offers you its hospitality and embraces you.

In the summer you can go to almost any store and speak your language, you go to the bank you can be helped by fellow Lithuania, you catch a cab and the driver will greet you with "labas", you want to have a cup of coffee or get a sandwich for lunch and you can easily find where to place your order in Lithuanian. Isn't that amazing? Even if the island is considered to be a small place with a relatively small community everybody can find his place and fit in with no problem. Local people will welcome you, accept you and offer their friendship.

Natural beauty attracts us - nature kids from Lithuania. Climate in Nantucket is similar to ours. Beaches and plant life evoke Lithuania's pride, Neringa. The fact that nearly 40% of Nantucket is protected conservation land explains its oneness. Several areas and habitats, natural groups of plants and animals, are rare to this region and even the world. People come to enjoy natural beauty and protected land where the springtime blossom of daffodils and forsythia give way to summer's lush flowerings of roses and hydrangea, and, perhaps best of all, the rich tawny hues of autumn. Fall is the best time to enjoy the pleasures of the island, to really enjoy the views, sounds and feels of Nantucket's



long lasting fall. We feel like home, even moments of sadness are the same, especially the melancholy brought to you by fall and endless rains. Just under 15 miles long and three and a half miles wide, much of life on the island is defined by the waters that surround it. "It is a place," wrote Herman Melville in his classic novel 'Moby Dick', "made an utter island by the ocean, that to the very chairs and tables small clams will sometimes be found adhering, as if to the backs of sea turtles." But these extravaganzas only show that Nantucket is no Illinois. It's funny, because Illinois is the state with probably the biggest number of resident Lithuanians.

Life in Nantucket can be compared to life in a warm-house at some point. This small friendly and secured environment makes life easy and safe. It seems that we transpose all our Lithuanian dreams to Nantucket. Only those dreams seem approachable and all the fears and insecurity stay behind. It doesn't matter that everything around is foreign: there is no reason to feel discomfort. Nantucket is not like the rest of America. Life is very similar to the show where everybody knows his scene. And even if someone makes a decision to move out from the island a nostalgia for safety will be their companion forever. From the very beginning of my living here in the USA I have one approach to making myself feel safe in difficult situations – and that was knowing that I have a home – (that is my home in Lithuania) where I'm always welcome. Now I feel the same about Nantucket. If I have any problems or difficulties I know that there is a way back to the island. And I know that I'd see the same familiar and friendly faces who would welcome me.

It is interesting that each Lithuanian has his own favorite spot. Here they can enjoy loneliness, be only with their thoughts and really feel the nature around. They can stay in one



The sky, ocean and beaches are spectacular on the Island. (Photo by Dalia Bagdonaite)



Magnificent boat "Endeavor" from 1930's cruising the harbor and giving the tourists a chance to see the Island from the best points. (Photo by Dalia Bagdonaite)

place for hours and no one except sea gulls will witness their being. And the most unique fact about this island is that it gives a chance to experience the beautiful sunrise in the morning and spectacular sunset at night, you just need 15 minutes to cross the island. And believe me sunsets are heavenly magic.

I was telling you all these advantages Nantucket has, but as any other place it has a few disadvantages. Nantucket is a place with no limitations at summer time, but off season there are several aspects which are considered inconvenient.

First and the most important is the commute. Getting off the island takes some time and it's a bit expensive. Of course prices drop off during the low season, and residents take advantage of the special "Nantucketers" deals. The fastest way to reach the island is by an airplane. It takes only 15 minutes but it is the most expensive way, too. Taking a tiny ten seat plane might be quite an experience but the view of the island will make you forget all your fears. A trip by ferry might be very enjoyable if it's not too windy.

The other inconvenience is insularity. You see the same people eight out of twelve months a year. You know everybody around and everybody knows you. Of course, at one point people feel homey, but after some time you start to long for your privacy and sometimes you wish you were invisible. You have to be either the person who doesn't care what others think, or the person who never makes mistakes. Despite that, people like living in Nantucket.

Social life is very limited in Nantucket. Of course

*Continued on page 13*



# A Man with a Mission

Joe Verbalis produced two films 'Lithuania, Into the New Millennium' and 'Vilnius, A World Centre of Culture.' After viewing the DVD about Vilnius I decided I had to know more about the producer of this film. After numerous trips to Lithuania I thought I knew everything until I saw this film. Needless to say, I didn't know the half of it. I had the pleasure of interviewing Joe via the wonderful miracle of the computer. You are about to meet a fascinating gentleman.

**JD.** *What prompted you to produce the films about Lithuania?*

**JV.** I was prompted to do the films beginning with socialization and education at a very early age by my late father, Atty. John R. Verbalis, who regularly emphasized the importance of understanding our cultural heritage as Lithuanian Americans, the remarkable and important history of Lithuania, the singular and archaic nature of the Lithuanian language, the collective character of the Lithuanian people, and the absolute necessity to preserve this rich heritage. For my dad, this was a crusade of sorts, as that cultural characteristic he might describe as 'an incapacity to tolerate injustice' propelled him to do what he could to educate the West about Lithuania and the severe political circumstances cast upon it. One of his contributions was a Lithuanian Radio Program in the Wilkes-Barre area for a few years which ended around 1960. My mother, Irene M. Verbalis, was also quite involved as President of the Lithuanian Women's Club in Luzerne County for some time.

Due largely to the collective heroism and fearlessness of the Lithuanian people, Lithuania's political fortunes are now greatly improved, but the West still remains grossly misinformed or ignorant about Lithuania's illustrious history and culture. My research, writing, and filmmaking capacities are the way that I can best make a contribution toward generating the recognition which Lithuania so richly deserves.

**JD.** *How long it take to make the films?*

**JV.** The filming for the first two productions transpired over a two year period generating 18 hours of raw footage, much of which was theoretically usable. I did all of the filming myself with the help of a guide and assistant. This footage was then carefully tapered down to the current running time of

157 minutes for the two films combined spending four consecutive months in an editing facility on a nearly daily basis, often 10-14 hours per day. I was there every single minute and made all editing decisions. The total production time thus spanned nearly two and one half years.

**JD.** *Were the Lithuanian people you encountered receptive to the filming?*

**JV.** The Lithuanian people were completely receptive to the filming, and I can say unequivocally were kind, generous, helpful, and supportive all along the way. I can honestly not recall a single negative instance in all of the extensive time spent filming! Preliminary responses to the prospect for a third film suggest clearly that this would continue to be the case for the next project on the History of Lithuania.

**JD.** *What was your most memorable moment while in Lithuania?*

**JV.** My most memorable moment in Lithuania was probably a very quiet moment entering Lithuania by bus late at night from Latvia for the very first time in 1994 (having entered on the first trip via Iceland, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia). Just to know that I was actually back on the soil of my ancestors (something that for a very long time I did not consider attainable during the Cold War) was something magical beyond belief. It was a very simple moment, but a very deep and magnificent one.

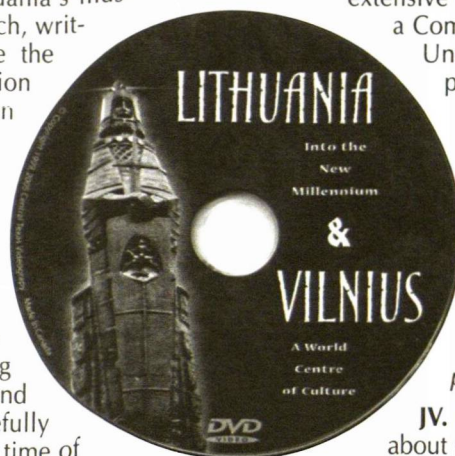
**JD.** *Can you tell us about your future plans?*

**JV.** The next project I am going to guess will take probably about a year and a half. I intend to do all research and most scripting beforehand, and have already appropriated quite a few research materials to begin work immediately when I feel the project is economically viable. I have already lined up assistants to help with travel throughout Lithuania, and the same narrator as well. A close friend harkening back to Graduate School (James Lull) who has extensive experience in broadcasting, and is also

a Communication Professor at San Jose State University dedicated his services to this project, and has already committed his talents for the English narrative for the third film on the History of Lithuania. I will also do all shooting in one longer stay in Lithuania rather than over a two year period, and this of course will move the project along with greater facility.

**JD.** *How can readers purchase the films or become involved in your next production?*

**JV.** If people would like more information about supporting the project or about pur-





Continued from page 11

## the *Timeless Island*

you can find ways to keep yourself busy and entertained. There is a health club and couple places where you can take yoga classes, a lot of outdoor activities, a library, a movie theatre (at summer time two), skating rink, community pool and etc.. But once again where ever you go you meet the same people, because you usually do this during the low season when all the visitors are gone. During the high season everyone is busy working and saving money so they can have a nice long vacation off island in January or February.

Another concern of mine as a young person, as a Lithuanian who lived in Nantucket, is usage of drugs, smoking pot and drinking. That's how some of the young single people entertain themselves. Smoking pot is usual and that often leads to usage of more serious drugs. A few Lithuanians residing on the island are no exception. Drinking is more or less the same problem. Alcohol is the frequent entertainer of the young single men. Not everyone manages the long, cold, lonely evenings of a Nantucket winter.

The age range of the Lithuanians who live in Nantucket is 20-30 years old. And that is the age when you really allow yourself to try all the crazy stuff. Can you imagine what amounts of beer were purchased if one of the liquor store owner's decided to order Lithuanian beer? Now you can buy Lithuanian or Russian beer at the liquor store as well as some bars. And it has won a great deal of popularity among Lithuanians. Or a local grocery store offers some Lithuanian-Russian specialties (as buck-wheat). It seems that not only Lithuanians adapt to Nantucket's life style, but Nantucket tries to readjust to the needs of <sup>o</sup>. Of course I cannot attribute

chasing DVDs or VHS Videos already made, they can contact me directly at

**joeverbalis@telus.net** or **centxvid@texas.net**,  
may phone at **250-837-3437**,  
or may access our Website at  
**http://centxvid.home.texas.net/**.

DVDs may also be ordered directly by submitting \$34.95 USD plus \$4.75 for shipping and handling to: **"Black Bear Productions", P.O. Box 2344, Revelstoke, BC, V0E 2S0, Canada**. Shipping is free for additional DVDs after the first, if ordered at the same time. These films are also available as a VHS Tape Set for \$43.95 plus \$7.00 Shipping and Handling.

A way to support the third film would be through \$150 individual contributions that will be immediately rewarded with four of the current DVDs, or alternately four of the upcoming DVDs on Lithuania's History if the contributor prefers. They will also be mentioned on an 'honor roll' at the end of the third film. If there is not enough final

only to Lithuanians for this, because there are a lot Russians, Byelorussians, Bulgarians on the island who contribute a great deal to Nantucket's adaptation.

Having an opportunity to live in Nantucket and call yourself a Nantucketer is an incredible feeling. It is so different from life in Lithuania and at the same time it makes you feel at home the moment you step on the island. Local people love us and value us as employees. They cherish our heartiness and hard work and very often invite us to stay or try helping us to come back. And we all come back or stay with pleasure, because this place makes us feel special. Nantucket makes our souls sing, open up, feel and live our lives like we never lived before.

*Dalia Bagdonaite*

*Dalia Bagdonaite lives in New York and is studying desktop publishing and graphic design.*



Nantucket welcomes you. (Photo by Dalia Bagdonaite)

support to do the third film, they will have the option to return unopened DVDs for a refund of their contribution, or keep one or more for the normal retail price including standard shipping and have the balance of the contribution returned.

Joe Verbalis was born and raised in Wilkes-Barre, PA. He is a graduate of Penn State in State College, Pennsylvania emphasizing filmmaking, media, screenwriting, acting, directing, and also Speech Communication. After graduation he pursued a Master's Program in Communication Arts at The University of Wisconsin-Madison. He began his Doctoral work at the University of Texas at Austin.

He ultimately founded Central Texas Videography, providing a broad spectrum of Video Production Services to the Austin, Texas area for 18 years. It is here that he researched, scripted, filmed, edited, and produced the two films "Lithuania, Into The New Millennium", and "Vilnius, A World Centre of Culture".

*Interview- Jeanne Dorr with Joe Verbalis*

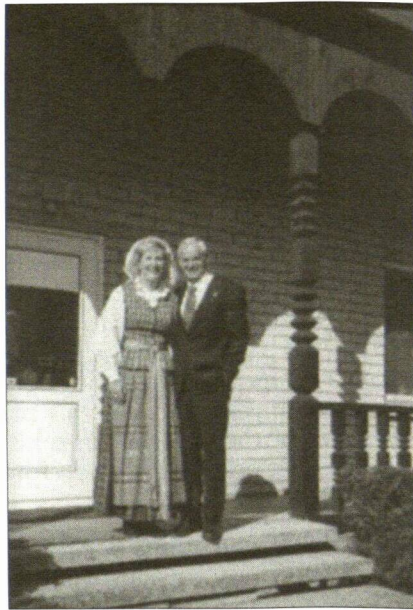


# Buyer Beware

*Lithuanian story  
(some people have  
called it a nightmare)  
as told by Barbara Clow*

After traveling to Lithuania every year since 1994, and discovering my long lost Paznokaitis cousins, I fell in love with Lithuania, the land and its people (actually, my mother's maiden name was Gertruda Paznokaitytis and her father – my grandfather - Klemensas Paznokaitis. Later, after arrival in the USA, he changed his to Karl Clemens). In August 2000, we purchased a house in Jurbarkas, near my cousins, in anticipation of our planned retirement of October 1, 2000. The land surrounding the house was placed in my cousin's name, as at that time non-citizens could not own land in Lithuania. We spent only a few months in Jurbarkas that year, completing several of many remodeling jobs on the house and yard. The following year 2001, since we planned to stay longer than 90 days, we applied for and received our first visa, which was good for one year. Our visa was approved quickly, since we had our own income (pensions), medical insurance and a house to live in. I had asked immigration about applying for Lithuanian citizenship based on both my grandparents, but they said it wasn't necessary, since after we lived there 5 years they would give us permanent residency. We quickly became involved in our Jurbarkas community, as well as with a Children's Home in Raseiniai where we had sponsored a child since 1994.

We subsequently received two more visas, which brought us up to July 23, 2004. In April of 2004, we asked immigration if there would be any problems in renewing our visa for another year, as we wanted to purchase a garden plot and a new car. Immigration assured us that all things were in order. So, we bought the car and since we would not be



Barbara with her husband Ray at their home in Jurbarkas on Easter (2004).

allowed to own the land we purchased a 99-year lease on a garden plot in Taurage County. That was the first of many lies we were told, as our attorney had the Lithuanian law in writing that said foreigners could own the land if they had lived in Lithuania for three years. Taurage's authorities even refused to change the land ownership around our house into our names. They said, "The law is vague and only means commercial property", although our attorney and the notary understood otherwise.

Then came June 1, and immigration representatives in both Jurbarkas and Vilnius refused to take our applications and documentation for a new visa. They told us that with Lithuania joining the European Union, we could no longer legally live in Lithuania when our visas expired on July 23, 2004. They said, "Pensioners who were NOT citizens could no longer live in Lithuania." We could only come as tourists for three months per

half year. That would mean stay three months, leave for three months, stay three months, leave again etc. That would be impossible, since we had sold our home, our car and all that we had in Connecticut. It also would mean our home would be empty and unguarded for long periods of time invalidating our insurance.

Now there are only four categories that foreigners can live under in Lithuania and we didn't fit any of them. They are: student, business owner registered with the government worth 250,000 litas, worker with a work permit through Labour registry office, or the founder of a charity registered with the government.

We weren't students, didn't have a business, and our attorney said to start a charity would be too expensive and complicated. So I tried for a work permit. I had been volunteering for our parish priest on a fund raising project to raise money to renovate our church and rectory. He tried to make it a legal job in order to get me a work permit, but labor registry office in Vilnius wouldn't accept it. So after I had paid attorney fees and Labour registry office, I was turned down.

In the meantime, we also asked a former American-Lithuanian, Dr. Kazys Bobelis, a member of the Lithuanian Parliament, "Seimas", as well as a representative of the Foreign Affairs Committee at that time for help with our problem. He said to try for Lithuanian citizenship. I did, and was also refused that because



Barbara and her cousin Tomas, his wife Albina, their daughter Rima and their two grandsons Paulius and Tomukas at their apartment in Jurbarkas (2003).



# News and Views

Please visit St. Peter's website at:  
[www.savestpeter.org](http://www.savestpeter.org)

According to [www.nbc17.com](http://www.nbc17.com) Statesville Christian's Zygis Sestokas scored either 75 or 76 points of his team's 117 points in a basketball game between two private high schools.

Either point total breaks the record for a North Carolina private high school.

Statesville Christian coach John Jordan said they wanted to showcase Zygis for a college scout.

Covenant Day coach Steve Dinsbeer said his school's scoring book showed Sestokas with 72 points, but that the totals for all players in that book didn't add up to the final score. He said Sestokas should have been credited with a 3-pointer that was inadvertently dropped from his book, bringing his total points to at least 75.

Jordan said that in addition, a free throw was wrongly credited to another player instead of Sestokas, bringing Sestokas' point total to 76. He said the official scoring book would credit Sestokas with 76 points.

Dinsbeer said his school would not dispute the 76-point total.

*Submitted by: Reda Pliura*

## Buyer Beware



Barbara and Ray at the high school play in Jurbarkas at Christmas (2003). Ray made the angels in his workshop.

I didn't have a copy of my grandparents' birth certificates or any other Lithuanian document that said they were born in Lithuania. Both the churches which could have grandparents' certificates of birth had been burned, and the Vilnius archives did not have any records. There were no old people left who knew my grandparents to testify about it. We even had seven reference letters from vari-

ous people and organizations that we had been helping through the years, but to no avail.

So in July 2004, just before our visa expired, we crossed the border into Latvia for one day, so that we could re-enter Lithuania as tourists. We needed more time to dispose of our house, car, garden and possessions. We ended up selling the property with

everything in it at a great loss. Also about the same time the motor vehicle registration department took our car registration away from us because they said we couldn't have it without bearing a valid visa. So we lost our insurance and had to give our car away. Also we gave away our garden and returned to the USA on September 2, 2004...

We are currently staying with our daughter Tereasa Setser in California, as we are "homeless". My husband, Ray, is so bitter against Lithuania that it is unclear when he will return. He has vowed not to spend one more cent on anything for Lithuania. For myself, I can't stay away, and will be returning there most probably even this year (2005).

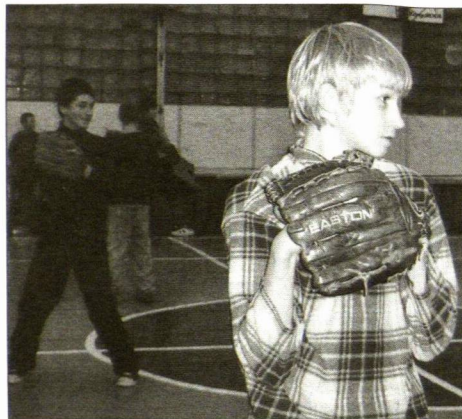
It makes no sense to us or to anyone else who has heard our story, that Lithuania, who is losing population every year, won't let healthy pensioners who contribute daily to their economy live there. After all, it's no paradise even being part of European Union since May 1st, 2004! The moral of this story is: Don't try to live in Lithuania if you are not a citizen.

*Barbara Clow as told to  
Eugenija Fedosejeva*



# Darius' Dream Becoming Reality

## Lietuvos Beisbolas An Update



The dream of Darius to bring Lithuanian-Americans and Lithuanians together through baseball is becoming reality. Jim Pransky is a Lithuanian American, a major league baseball scout for the Oakland Athletics, and the operator of Sandlot Baseball Center in Moline, Illinois. Jim recently had the opportunity to travel to his ancestral home and share his love of baseball with Lithuanian players and coaches. During the first week of December of 2004, he conducted several indoor clinics in Lithuania in the cities of Kaunas, Vilnius, and Utena for players of all age groups. Jim also received a special gift from Lithuania, a direct connection with his Lithuanian roots when he met a Lithuanian cousin and her family.

The June 2003 issue of Bridges contained an article (Lietuvos Beisbolas — A History) detailing the history of Lithuanian baseball, a recital of Darius' dream to use baseball as the vehicle to connect Lithuanian Americans with the youth of Lithuania, and a call for assistance to Lithuanian American baseball enthusiasts to lend a hand to the development of Lithuanian baseball. The Lithuanian Baseball Federation insightfully scanned the article on to their website. One eventful day a few months ago, Jim was searching the Internet, he discovered the Federation's website and the article, and he decided to answer the call for assistance.

Jim's paternal grandfather, Vladislaus Pranskunas, emigrated from Lithuania to the United States in the early 1900's and settled near the town of Coudersport located in western Pennsylvania. Jim was raised and attended school in nearby Eldred. He now resides in Davenport, Iowa with his wife, Grace. Jim has been involved with baseball most of his life. His impressive resume includes stints as the head coach or assistant coach at St. Bonaventure University, George Washington University, and Quincy University, and at the

professional level, for the Quad City River Bandits of the Midwest League and for the Medford A's of Northwest League. Since 1992, Pransky has been a Major League Baseball scout, first for the Houston Astros from 1992 to 1998 and with the Oakland Athletics from 1998 to the present.

Jim's love for the game of baseball led him to establish the Sandlot Baseball Center in Moline, Illinois. The Center operates during the off-season and provides local youngsters with the opportunity to improve their baseball skills under his direction. Jim indicated that because of the nature of his job, he frequently travels during the baseball season and it is very difficult for him to become involved in local baseball activities. With the Center operating during the off-season he is able to give something back to his local community.







This spirit of making a contribution to his community lead Jim to the website of the Lithuanian Baseball Federation. He stated, "I was getting to the point in my life where I was pondering my Lithuanian ancestry. My wife, Grace, was very supportive and encouraging in regard to my decision to get involved with Lithuanian baseball. The call for help provided me with the opportunity to travel to Lithuania and explore the land of my paternal roots and also to use my baseball experience to make a meaningful contribution to Lithuania."

Vilnius and the opportunity to work with Edmundas' thirteen year old son in one of the clinics. His son demonstrated impressive skills and it was apparent that Edmundas has been providing his son guidance from his first infant steps." Indeed, this is how baseball has become the American pastime; a sport loved and played by each generation with that generation passing it on to the next generation, and so forth. Slowly this same process is taking place in Lithuania.

Jim brought with him on the trip, an old letter his great uncle had received from a cousin, Gene Dzeniene, in Kaunas. He gave a copy of the letter and the envelope to one of the Lithuanian baseball officials, Antanas Adomenas, in the hope that he might be able to translate the letter into English. Several hours later, Antanas returned to announce that he had located Jim's cousin and that Jim had been invited to his cousin's home. Jim indicated, "Antanas' action was absolutely amazing and something that I never expected. I actually met family in Lithuania and learned much more about my Lithuanian roots than I ever expected."

Jim's baseball adventure to Lithuania was a complete success. He brought to the players and coaches new insights about baseball, which will hopefully result in improvement and increased success at all levels. He returned with the knowledge that he had made a valuable contribution to the land of his ancestors and received the gift of finding family in Lithuania. Jim intends to return to Lithuania and continue to work with the Lithuanian baseball players and coaches. His efforts were greatly appreciated by the Lithuanian Baseball Federation and all baseball enthusiasts in Lithuania. The seeds planted by Darius eighty years ago are slowly beginning to bear fruit. If you would like to be part of Darius' vision or for further information about the Lithuanian baseball, please visit the Lithuanian Baseball Federation's website at [www.beisbolas.lt](http://www.beisbolas.lt).

*John J. Chernoski (Cerniauskas)*

*John J. Chernoski (Cerniauskas) is a retired attorney, a high school baseball and softball umpire, and a long time supporter of Lithuanian baseball. He resides in Ewing, New Jersey.*

Jim was in Lithuania for only six days, but what a great six days. He conducted an indoor baseball clinic every day for coaches and players. Jim said: "I was pleasantly surprised by the degree of baseball knowledge and skills possessed by the players and coaches. Some of the younger players demonstrated some of the same faults exhibited by American youth players. I would bring a fault and a suggested remedy to the attention of the coach and after a few words between the player and his coach, the correction was immediately implemented." The Lithuanian national team has had some success in Pool B of the bi-annual European Cup play. By working directly with the coaches over a period of time, Jim is confident that there will be significant improvement at every level, including at the European Cup level. By teaching the teachers, the disseminating of baseball knowledge has a much greater and ongoing impact. Jim said, "Currently the American sports media will occasionally report on the success of a Lithuanian playing basketball at the U.S. professional or collegiate level. Within a few years, I hope we'll start reading and hearing about Lithuanians successfully playing baseball in America. This type of success will start with strong coaches in Lithuania."

Jim indicated that when he read the Bridges article, he noted that Edmundas Matusevicius was one of the pioneers of Lithuanian baseball having played on the 1989 Soviet National Baseball team as a pitcher. Jim stated, "I had the pleasure of meeting Edmundas in





# The New World

First steps in America. It's amazing; I can't believe that I'm really here. I am seeing those yellow taxis that I only could see on TV. It is so unbelievable. When I was back in Lithuania, I didn't see so many different people in one place, well that's because Lithuania is a small country and not too many people know about it. But I am sure if more people knew about Lithuania and her wonderful people, there would be more visitors to such a beautiful country. So, Jeanne and Tim took us to their home with all our bags and luggage. On the way there we saw a little of ambience, what it is like to be in the United States. Honestly, there is no difference, except huge highways, big trucks, and a lot of houses. I was looking through the window like I was 2-year-old girl. I wanted to see everything in one day. It was so exiting.

When we finally got there, in the house was something that I didn't expect. It was an always happy dog, Jackie. He was so happy to see new people (that's what I think) he couldn't sit still in one spot, he was jumping, running around, and barking. Then I noticed cats, 4 beautiful cats. Then I remembered my own cat, which I had to leave... There is no doubt that mother and I were crying, everybody understands that. Then Jeanne showed us where the bedrooms are, kitchen and etc. We unpacked some bags with our clothes so we could change and then we all

had dinner and went to sleep. I was exhausted because of the long journey, and two planes and I was still living in another time zone. When it was daytime, for me it was night and vice versa. It wasn't that hard to get used to the time change. The very next day we went shopping to Acme. That was my first food market that I went to. Later on we spent some time together and went to Pizza Hut for dinner, it was also my first place where I went to eat. But what I liked most that we went to Friendly's in the evening. It was 9pm, but in Lithuania it was 4am. Amazing, could anyone believe that I went to eat ice-cream at 4 am? Probably not.

The rest of the week we all were helping Tim and Jeanne Dorr get ready for Easter. That Sunday I met a lot of new people. It was so hard to remember all their names and faces. Now I remember everyone perfectly, but then it was horrible. I couldn't tell who was who. I met Kristina and Albert; they are the first friends of mine. On the very same day they took me to their house to stay over night and have fun like going to movies. We were talking about everything, how it is in Lithuania and here. Of course, there are a lot of differences but still you can live there and here. For instance, music; here the majority of young kids like us listen to rap, in Lithuania kids also listen to rap but most people like trance better. I can talk and talk about differences, but there is no point talking about that, because we all know what it is like. We had a good time that evening.

Next week we were looking for our own apartment or some place where we could live. We found a nice apartment in Northeast Philadelphia and it's almost a year that we live here. Little backyard, grill, table, benches, I like this place. But of course I forgot

to mention that my parents bought a car. We couldn't buy a new one, because we still didn't have anything, so we bought a used one. As long that car runs we're good.

Then it was my turn. I had to find a school that I could finish ninth grade. With Jeanne's and Mrs. Jurate Krokys-Stirbys help I found one school in Philadelphia's downtown. It was just like my old school back in Lithuania. Uniforms, discipline, respect, and everything else was the same. I like that school a lot, but there was something that I couldn't deal with. It was too far from my house. I live in NE Philadelphia and the school is all the way downtown. The school is for architecture and design; there I learned a lot of stuff about drawing, painting, blending colors, shading and etc. some teachers became really upset when I told them about me transferring to another school. But I had to do it. And now I'm attending George Washington High School. And I am pretty happy being in this school. But discipline is different, other thinking, "different" respect for teachers. That doesn't bother me because I always have a feeling of responsibility of what I do and how I act. It is in my blood. I always show respect to others and maybe that's why I have a lot of friends. And for me being in this high school, my parents and I are very thankful to Mrs. Terese Gecys because she helped us a lot. Everybody helped us who could. It was really nice of people and we will do the same to new people in our Lithuanian Community.

...To be continued...

*Akville Dudonyte*

*Akville Dudonyte lives in Philadelphia and is a high school sophomore. She is also a member of St. Andrew's Lithuanian choir, Laisves.*





# Aidas

DANCERS  
Kansas City

The AIDAS Dancers were founded in 1982. They chose the name, AIDAS, (echo) because it was symbolic of the Lithuanian history in Kansas City. The group was an outgrowth of the rebirth of the Lithuanian Community a few years ago.

In 1981, the Lithuanians of America sponsored its first Lithuanian Festival at Wyandotte County Park. The AUSRA Dance group of Omaha came and performed for this festival and was the inspiration for the Kansas City group to be formed. Members of the Omaha group graciously came to Kansas City and helped them with initial steps. The AIDAS Dancers became a reality and made its debut at the Lithuanian Independence Day celebration the following February.

Currently the dance group consists of 25 members

ranging in age from teenagers through adults. The AIDAS Dancers are very proud of the fact that we are family oriented.

The AIDAS Dancers are under the direction of Anita M. Strumillo.

We have participated in the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th Lithuanian Folk Dance Festivals.

Performed in Vilnius and Kaunas (1992).

Danced at the "Lithuanian Days" in Los Angeles, Ca.

Performed for half-time ceremonies at the Kansas City Chiefs Football Game.

Since its inception AIDAS has performed over 280 times for Lithuanian and American audiences.

This year we are proud to have started the AIDAS Junior Group. They are under the direction of Amy Zemaityte Newman and Michelle Mazaityte Morgan. They performed at their first Lithuanian Festival this year.



# The White Witch

## THE WHITE WITCH - PART I

### BALTOJI RAGANA

*I siaures vakarus nuo Eisiskiu, prie Bartautu kaimo, yra nedidelis gražius miškelis, o prie jo is rytu puses kalnelis, zmoniu vadinamas Baltos raganos kalneliu.....*

Southwest of Eisiskiai, near the village of Bartautai, there lies a lovely small strip of forest, with a little hill at its eastern edge, which people called The White Witch's Hill. Younger folk had no idea why it was so called, but the older inhabitants told many stories about the reasons for the name. The truth of those tales was confirmed by the discovery, in the archives of the Eisiskiu church, of a diary that had been written by the Franciscan monk Izidore, who had been living in the parish rectory. A comparison of his writings with the oldsters' tales makes it clear that the hill's name was not mere chance, but rooted in historical fact.

Many, many years ago, a large house stood on the hill, with a lean-to smithy. The buildings and the woods belonged to Juozas Balcius, a resident of Bartautai, whose grandfather had given up farming, allowed his fields to turn to forest, and moving a little further from the village, built a house and smithy on the hilltop. As a young man, he had learned the trade from the master smith Vrackas, who had relocated to Eisiskes from Cekija.

Balcius' house and smithy were notable because there were two chimneys, and the roof was covered by shingles, unusual at that time, when most people's roofs were thatched. The smith's trade survived in the Balcius family for a long time and descended from father to son for many generations. The last smith of the Balcius family of Bartautai village was Petras Balcius, and with him the dynasty ended in 1863.

The legend of the White Witch had its origin in 1830, when a poor but popular fellow named Darunas often visited the village. Though he had nothing and lived on charity, everyone liked him, because he could read and write, told tales about what he had seen and experienced in his travels from one village to another, and brought news from the wider world. He found an especially attentive audience in the youth of the village, telling them about Lithuania's history, her hardships, about the

Russian army in Lithuania and its offenses against the people, and the people's desire to be free of such misery. Darunas didn't neglect to visit Balcius' smithy and often stayed there overnight.

He functioned as a messenger between villages, and through him, people often would communicate with relatives living in a far-off settlement. Darunas' travels took him even as far as Vilnius, and from there to Asmena, Lyda, Varena, Daugiai, Aukstadvaris and Trakai. Sometimes his journeys would stretch out for a longer period, sometimes shorter. That all depended on his mood, or, as he liked to say, on his "affairs". What sort of "affairs" this poor wanderer might have, no one considered nor cared.

Petras Balcius, the smith, was unmarried and lived alone in his spacious home. His parents had been dead for some years, and his elder sister, his only sibling, had married a wealthy farmer, living near Aukstadvaris, far from Bartautai. Petras kept no animals, except for a few chickens that ran loose around his yard and to which he paid no mind. From earliest morning he would be working at his trade, and the clang of his hammer on the anvil was often the first sound heard as the village woke from its nightly slumber.

He managed at home alone, but a few women from the village would often help him with housekeeping chores. This was mostly because of the well on his property, whose water was so delicious that the ladies couldn't resist the temptation to draw some for a fine meal. There was even a saying in the village, "A meal so tasty, as if cooked with water from Balcius' well."

The well was in the middle of his yard, on a little mound, deep enough, and even during times of drought, its water did not diminish, but maintained the same level.

Though he wasn't particularly close to any of his neighbors, Petras maintained friendly relations with all of them. Farmers who brought their work to the smithy often lingered for a while, discussing business or exchanging bits of village news. Petras was a talented smith, and did a good job in a timely manner at a very reasonable cost, and the farmers usually repaid him in barter, with their own products. And apparently, Petras was the only



person in the village able to read and write, having been taught by Darunas, who sometimes left him one or two books.

In the spring of 1851, Lithuanians rose in rebellion against the Russian oppressors. One day, a couple of villagers came to the smithy with a few farm tools that required attention, and were surprised to find the house and lean-to closed, large padlocks hanging from both doors. No one had any idea where Petras Balcius had gone, nor when he might return. At the same time, many of the village youth began to disappear. The villagers had no way of knowing what was going on in the rest of Lithuania and the wider world, especially since even Darunas had stopped visiting them. They began to hear rumors that a large Lithuanian army was moving through the land, and that the Russians were retreating to their own country in defeat.

Much later, in the autumn of the same year, more rumors spread, this time that the Russians had beaten the Lithuanians, consolidated their position, and again taken over the country. Darunas returned, weary, older-looking, and depressed, reluctantly describing the rebellion and its defeats. A few of the missing village youth came home, saying that the rest had retreated to Prussia. But Balcius, the smith, did not return, and his property remained padlocked.

One morning much later during that same autumn, the seniunas (village elder), Raciūs, stepped out of his house and, glancing toward Balcius' home, saw a narrow stream of smoke rising from the chimney. – Good, he thought, Balcius had returned, and we won't have to travel to another town's smithy anymore.

After the unsuccessful rebellion of 1851, the Russians greatly strengthened their security measures. They sent in many more soldiers and police, visited the villages more often, and strictly instructed all village elders and headmen that it was their duty to inform the authorities immediately, should a stranger appear amongst them. There would be grave consequences if this directive were ignored. But Balcius was no stranger, having been born in that same village, and so seniunas Raciūs felt no need to tell anyone about his arrival. Raciūs reasoned, thegendarmes could start asking questions, like where he had been until now, and they could even arrest him, and then the village would again be without a smith.

During the following days, many people noticed the smoke from Balcius' chimney, but no sound at all was heard from the smithy. About a week later, some of the village children told the others that they had sneaked around to Balcius' house and peered through a window, when they heard a stern voice:

“What do you want here?”

Startled, they looked back and saw a woman cloaked in black, her head covered by a hood of the same color. Deeply hidden inside the hood they could see a somewhat young-looking face, and a few strands of long, wavy hair that seemed as white as snow. The frightened children ran back towards the village, while a large raven, black as pitch, shot out of an old linden tree, cawing loudly, beat his heavy wings and escorted them from the property. Soon, word had traveled through the entire village, that Balcius' property had been taken over by a white-haired witch with a young person's face. The villagers began to refer to her as the “White Witch”.

After a couple of weeks had passed, the seniunas began to worry about the witch's continuing occupation of Balcius' property. She didn't cause any trouble, didn't bother anyone, but he remembered the gendarme's warning that there would be serious consequences if the authorities were not informed about strangers in the area. The Russians didn't need a serious crime to excite their interest, and it sometimes happened that completely innocent persons were arrested and imprisoned, to be released only after much effort and repeated petition. Wanting to be safe, the seniunas decided to walk over to the property himself, and find out just exactly who had taken up residence there.

At that time of year, autumn, there were no big jobs to be done; the fields had been seeded and the potatoes harvested. So after the midday meal, Raciūs took his walking-stick and made for Balcius' hill. As he neared the house, he heard the raven croaking in the linden. He stopped, listened, grasped his stick more tightly, and resolutely entered the yard. All was quiet. He suddenly felt uncomfortable, almost fearful. It seemed as though the surrounding area had changed in some strange way, and that something unusual was about to take place. He warily stepped up to the house, and grasping the handle, opened the door and walked in. He felt the same discomfort inside.

*Continued on the back page*



# Calendar of Events for April - May - June

Please verify all dates, times, and places as events are subject to change.

## APRIL

### April 3, 2005

Easter Egg decoration  
Lithuanian style  
9:00 am to 12:00 noon  
(bring some hard-boiled eggs to work on)  
202 W. 4th Ave., Escondido, CA  
Sponsor: Bernardas Brazdionis  
Lithuanian Saturday School  
and San Diego Lithuanian  
American Community  
You'll be served coffee &  
cookies and have a great time.  
[www.javlb.org](http://www.javlb.org)

### April 3, 2005 - 3:00 pm

Potato Pancake Dinner  
We're reviving a favorite from  
the past: the all you can eat  
potato pancake dinner!  
No lines this year, as the pancakes  
will be made ahead of time. Come  
on by for companionship and food.  
Admission: \$10  
Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall  
1151 S. Galena Street  
(just west of Mississippi and  
Havana)  
Denver, CO 80247  
For information contact:  
Arv Jarasius (Colorado Chapter)  
[www.javlb.org](http://www.javlb.org)

### April 9, 2005 - 7 pm

Lithuanian Music Hall  
2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Phila, PA  
Lithuanian Drama Group of  
Connecticut presents one act  
comedy by Vida Bladykaite  
"Zenteliai" (Sons-in-Law)  
Followed by dancing to the  
music of Stasys Telsinskas.  
Sponsored by Phila. Chapter  
of LAC and Phila. Chapter of  
Lithuanian Youth Association.  
Information: 215-938-0783  
[gecysta@verizon.net](mailto:gecysta@verizon.net)

### April 10, and 24, 12:30 pm

Roman Catholic Mass  
Celebrated in Lithuanian  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel  
located on 55th Ave.  
one block south of Glendale Ave  
Glendale, Arizona  
The Mass is followed by  
coffee, snacks, and fellowship.  
For information regarding the  
Arizona Lithuanian Mission  
Contact: Algis Kvedaras  
623 - 974 - 1860  
[kvedaras@earthlink.net](mailto:kvedaras@earthlink.net)

### April 10, 2005

Putnam Classical Music  
Benefit Concert.  
Benefit Neringa.  
Hosted by the Sisters'  
Benefactors Committee.  
Convent 2:00 pm  
Violinist Edita Orlinyte and  
pianist Golda Wainbergaite  
Tatz will perform.  
[www.neringa.org](http://www.neringa.org)

### April 16, 2005

Knights of Lithuania  
The Supreme Council  
Annual Spring Meeting in  
Pittsburgh, PA  
Wyndam Airport Hotel  
Council 19 will be our host.  
For more information:  
[www.knightsoflithuania.com](http://www.knightsoflithuania.com)

### April 23, 2005

Bus trip to St. Jude Shrine &  
Baltimore's Inner Harbor  
Knights of Lithuania Council 3  
St. George Church  
Edgemont & Venango Sts.  
Philadelphia, PA  
Departure 9 am,  
Returns - 8:30 pm - 9:00 pm  
Cost - \$35 per person  
April 9, 2005 is deadline for  
reservations. Tickets or more  
information: Lillian Greymas  
215-426-6762

### April 24, 2005 - 3:00 pm

Lithuanian Opera Co.  
Morton H.S. Auditorium  
2423 S. Austen Blvd.  
Cicero, IL  
will present Mascagni's  
Cavaleria Rusticana.  
Ticket information:  
773-925-6193  
[www.lithoperachicago.org](http://www.lithoperachicago.org)

### April 24, 2005

New England  
District Spring Meeting.  
NED will meet in Hartford, CT.  
The meeting will be  
hosted by Council 6 .  
[www.knightsoflithuania.com](http://www.knightsoflithuania.com)

### April 30, 2005 - 8:00 pm

DATE CHANGE:  
New York Rock Benefit  
Neringa's favorite rock band,  
Small Farm Animals  
Neringa's benefit.  
Bohemian Hall,  
29-19 24th Avenue,  
Astoria, New York 11102  
Details will follow shortly.  
[www.neringa.org](http://www.neringa.org)

## MAY

### May 1, 2005

Mother's Day Program  
At the Lithuanian School  
Poway, CA  
Information:  
[www.lithsd.org](http://www.lithsd.org)

### May 1, 2005 - 4:00 pm

"ZUVEDRA" ballroom  
dancing ensemble from  
Klaipeda, Lithuania.  
Four time European  
champions will give  
one performance only  
Morton H.S. Auditorium  
2423 S. Austen Blvd.,  
Cicero, IL.  
Sponsored by LAC, Inc.  
Cultural Council, "Bicilyuste"  
Weekly Newspaper, and  
American Lithuanian TV.  
Ticket reservations:  
630-620-9904 or 630-910-6803.

### May 8, & May 22, 2005 - 12:30 pm

Roman Catholic Mass  
Celebrated in Lithuanian  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel  
located on 55th Ave.  
one block south of Glendale Ave  
Glendale, Arizona  
The Mass is followed by  
coffee, snacks, and fellowship.  
For information regarding the  
Arizona Lithuanian Mission  
Contact: Algis Kvedaras  
623-974-1860  
[kvedaras@earthlink.net](mailto:kvedaras@earthlink.net)

### May 14, and May 15, 2005

11am - 6 pm  
33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Lithuanian Festival  
Catonsville Armory  
130 Mellor Ave.  
Catonsville, MD  
*Voted Best Little Ethnic Festival  
in Maryland*  
Many vendors,  
Lithuanian music, Lithuanian food  
Admission \$2 per person  
Information: 410-646-0261

### May 20, - May 22, 2005

Mid-Central District Spring  
Bowling & District Convention.  
Members of the Mid-Central  
District are pleased to  
announce that Council 96 will  
host, Dayton, Ohio  
Beautiful Port Clinton, Ohio.  
Port Clinton is centrally located  
on Lake Erie, between Toledo,  
Ohio and Cleveland, Ohio.  
All district members and members  
fond of bowling everywhere

are encouraged to mark their  
calenders now for this annual  
spring district event. Stay tuned  
for upcoming details, they will be  
published as they become available.  
[www.knightsoflithuania.com](http://www.knightsoflithuania.com)

## JUNE

### June 5, 2005

Council 26 annual "Picnic"  
Maironis Park,  
Shrewsbury, MA.  
Lithuanian dinner 12:30 pm  
Baked goods, games, etc.

### June 17 - August 12, 2005

Baltic Studies Summer Institute  
(BALSSI) at Indiana University,  
Bloomington, Indiana  
offering courses  
\* First and second year Estonian  
\* First year Latvian  
\* First year Lithuanian  
\* Baltic Cultures course  
More information on Balssi 2005  
homepage:  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~iaunrc/balssi/>

### June 18, 2005

Annual LAC Picnic  
San Dieguito County Park  
1628 Lomas Santa Fe Dr.  
Del Mar, CA 92014  
Information: [www.lithsd.org](http://www.lithsd.org)

### June 24, and June 25, 2005

Annual New England  
District Retreat.  
Franciscan Monastery,  
Kennebunkport, Maine.  
Make your reservations now.

### June 3, and June 5, 2005

Annual "Talka" Work Weekend  
Help Neringa prepare for its  
36<sup>th</sup> camping summer.  
The mechanically-inclined and  
people with considerable elbow  
grease surpluses are urged to  
attend this fun and gratifying  
weekend. If you plan to attend.  
Contact: Vida Strazdis  
Information:  
[www.vida@neringa.org](mailto:www.vida@neringa.org)

### June 25, - 29, 2005

Neringa Family  
Camp in English  
Information:  
[www.vida@neringa.org](http://www.vida@neringa.org)



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Brone Barakauskiene.....tel: 708-403-5717 e-mail: [mamabar3@aol.com](mailto:mamabar3@aol.com)

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**All VYTIS representatives speak English and Lithuanian!!**



*The White Witch*

He had often visited the smith, and was familiar with the house, but now it looked very different. Darkness prevailed, all windows having been covered with some dark, heavy material. He immediately noted an unaccustomed neatness: the table and benches had been washed and polished, the floors had been swept, and everything tidily arranged. But no one was there. Perhaps someone was in the small ante-room? He was about to call out, when he saw two shining eyes watching him from a corner of the hearth. In the darkness he could see nothing more than those brightly shining eyes, which followed his every move, and as he took one step backward, a large black cat leaped toward him with its back hunched, its fur standing on end. The beast glared and showed its teeth in a hostile display, hissing like a snake.

His courage gone, he rushed out the door, through the yard and out the gate. The raven rose from the linden and, beating his wide wings, made as if to land on Raciūs' head! This was entirely too much! Swinging his stick in defense, he ran toward the village as fast as his legs could carry him. The bird flew several rings around him as he ran, then finally returned to his perch in the tree. Raciūs, his fear receding, stopped running and returned to the village at a more dignified pace. This episode convinced him that a witch had truly made herself at home on the smith's sodyba (homestead).

What to do? A witch is not a person, but all the same, this was a stranger, an outsider, so wasn't it his duty

to inform the authorities about her presence? After discussing the situation with one of his neighbors, he decided to go to the police station in Eišiškes the very next day.

The police superintendent, a Russian, didn't understand Lithuanian, and the seniūnas Raciūs didn't speak Russian, so they conversed through an interpreter, a Jewish man who spoke a little of each language.

"A white witch has taken up residence in our village smithy", said the seniūnas in one quick uneasy breath.

The interpreter repeated this information in Russian.

"I have enough work to worry about with your rebellious people, and I am not concerned about your so-called witches! If there is one living in your smithy, then let her be, that must be the place for her", answered the superintendent.

The interpreter repeated the superintendent's answer in Lithuanian.

"So, let her be ..... well, may I leave, then?"

"Get going, take yourself off! ..... and don't trouble me with your superstitious nonsense!"

Part 2 - Continued next month.....

By Genrikas Songinas  
English translation by Gloria O'Brien

Gloria Kivytaite O'Brien is a frequent contributor to *Bridges*.

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