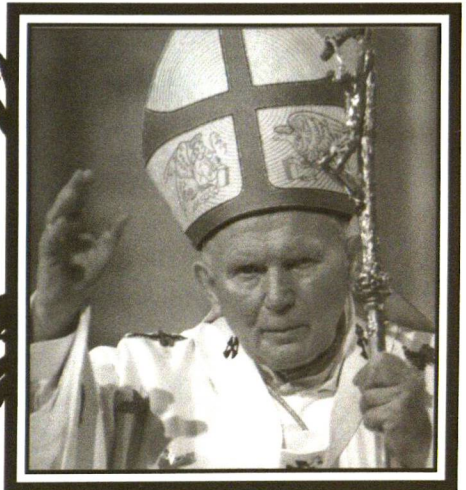


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bridges

may 2005



Pope John Paul II
1920 - 2005

Letter from the Editor

I just started to feel quite smug with myself about the May issue. It was the very beginning of April and the May issue was just about finished. It seemed Gema and I set a new speed record for finishing ahead of time. Those thoughts were short lived with the death of the Holy Father. We immediately started to take apart the May issue and started searching for material on Pope John Paul II. Since so much was covered in the national media we focused on what he had done for Lithuania. We probably will never know the real extent of his influence on the Lithuanian people or how much faster independence came to Lithuania because of his prayers and support. I would like to welcome new writer Barbara Bilsky who was in Lithuania at the time of the Pope's visit. She shares her emotions as well as the emotions of the people around her during this historic visit. Our gratitude to Father Peter Burkauskas who helped us with his own photos, books and other materials.

A very happy Mother's Day to all women who love and care for children. During my many trips to Lithuania I had many eye openers. I saw the best and worst of child care and I also realized that giving birth to a child does not automatically guarantee you will be a good mother. I met so many grandmothers, aunts, foster mothers, teachers, caregivers and others who gave all they had to support the children not only physically, but emotionally as well. We often receive requests about adopting children from Lithuania. Ruta Kalvaityte-Skuciene has written an excellent article about her own experiences. There are many references for those who seek help in this area and Ruta has included her own email address for further questions.

I find such joy when BRIDGES readers contact me. This was the case of Dorothy Minkus- McKenna who sent excerpts of family letters. How strong these Lithuanian women have proven themselves to be; those who left their families knowing they would probably never see them again and those who remained behind wondering if they would ever touch or hold their beloved children again. Rimgaudas Vidziunas touches the soul in his poem about the beauty of Lithuanian women. Gloria O'Brien translated the heartwarming story of "The Portrait". I've added my own touch with my personal photos of Lithuanian children and the women who care for them. I urge you to continue your support of Lithuanian Orphan Care. Your generosity has been overwhelming. Poverty does not take a vacation. It is with these children three hundred and sixty five days a year.

We also need to stop and think about our family members and friends who are no longer with us this Memorial Day. Henry Gaidis has written a very informative article about Staff Sgt. Stanley Bender and his bravery beyond the call of duty.

Terese Gecys brings to light the remarkable accomplishments of one hundred year old Ona Mikulskiene as well as important dates and interesting websites. Rasa Brittain has written the inspiring "Preservationists at Work in Vilnius" article and you will also find the conclusion of Gloria O'Brien's translation of the "The White Witch".

One of our goals was to bring an international flavor to BRIDGES. Vytautas Volertas, the author of fourteen books, has written a review of a Letters from the Outside: The History of the Friends of the Prisoners. The book was sent to me from Tasmania. BRIDGES also received "Ecos de Lituania" written by JUAN IGNACIO FOURMENT KALVELIS who lives in Argentina. We are beginning to reach our goal of bringing you international news.

I hope you enjoy this month's copy of BRIDGES.


Jeanne Shalna Dorr

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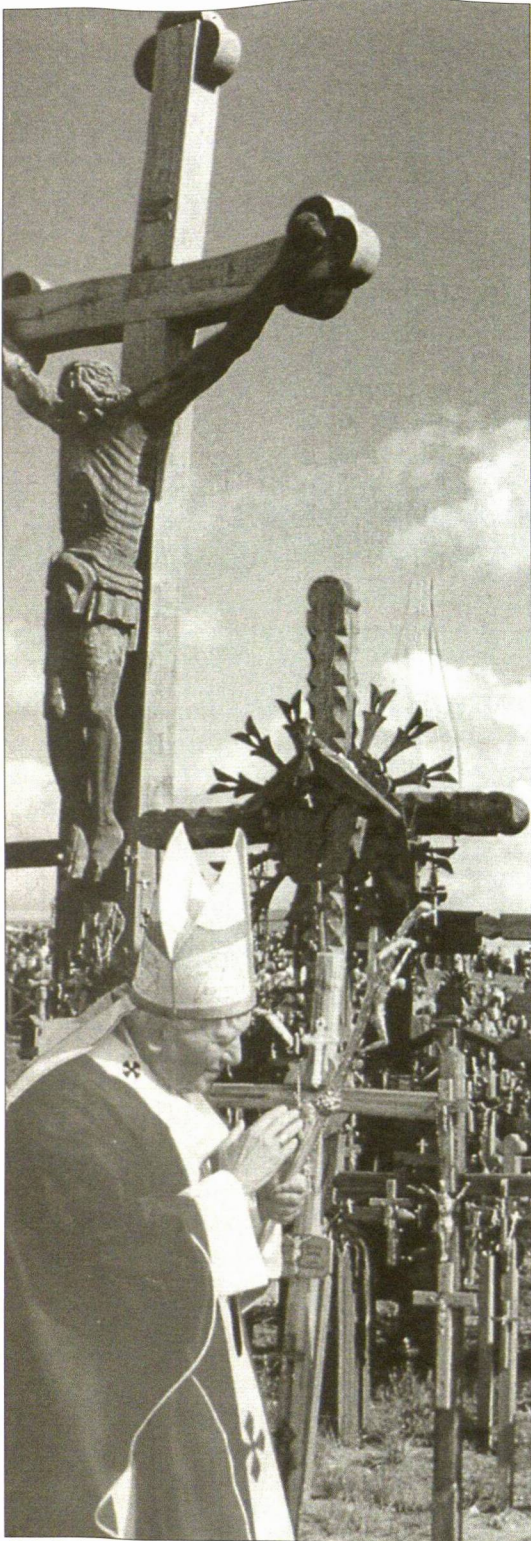
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The cover:

** Illustration of Mother and Child by Sister Mercedes, SSC.*

** This Photo of the Pope is from book "Pope John Paul II" - Gramercy Books.*



Holy Father at the Hill of Crosses in Lithuania on Sept. 7 1993

** This Photo is from book "Jonas Paulius II Lietuvoje", Vilnius 1994.*

Lithuania's Noble Legacy of Human and Gospel Values

VATICAN CITY, DEC 6, 2004 (VIS)

Algirdas Saudargas, the new ambassador to the Holy See from Lithuania, presented his Letters of Credence today to Pope John Paul who, addressing the ambassador in his native tongue, recalled his 1993 visit to Lithuania, and said he prayed daily for Lithuanians "to whom I am linked by cultural and spiritual ties."

"It is part of the mission of the Successor of Peter," said the Pope, "to sustain believers in every part of the world and, at the same time, to constantly remind them of those universal values on which it is possible to build a just and salutary society. Supported by the centuries-old conviction that the universal moral law is a sure path for civil coexistence, the Holy See never tires of defending the rights of peoples to present themselves on the stage of history with their own characteristics, in respect for the legitimate freedom of each one."

Underscoring the Christian roots that have inspired Lithuanians for centuries, the Holy Father said he hoped that "the representatives of Lithuanian citizens, continuing to draw upon the noble legacy of human and Gospel ideals that mark Lithuania's history, will commit themselves with a sincere spirit to building a free society on solid ethical and moral foundations." He exhorted Catholics "to collaborate with all persons of good will to see that Lithuanian society avoids being strongly influenced by the secular hedonistic model of life with its fallacious seductions."

He said he hoped believers would "walk side by side with all those... who promote the defense of the family and of life, from its conception to its natural end."

In closing remarks, John Paul expressed pleasure that Lithuania has been inserted "into the assembly of Nations of a united Europe. ... May the continent know how to find the ways and means to build peace and prosperity in a climate of fruitful collaboration, respecting cultures and the legitimate rights of everyone and pursuing the objective of the good of the person and of all of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals."

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April 2, 2005

Papal Nuncio to Lithuania
 Archbishop Dr. Peter Stephan Zurbriggen
 T. Kosciuškos g. 28
 LT-01100 Vilnius
 Lietuva/ Lithuania

Your Excellency,

Joining in prayer with all Lithuanian Catholics living outside of Lithuania and with all Catholics throughout the world, we ask Almighty God to grant eternal rest to His Holiness Pope John Paul II together with all the saints.

We thank the Lord for granting Pope John Paul II the opportunity to lead the Catholic Church for XXVI years; he was a missionary with an apostolic charisma, who evangelized as he travelled to so many different countries. He touched the hearts of many, especially the young, the suffering and prisoners of conscience. By proclaiming the Gospel he stressed the importance of human dignity and the culture of life.

In a fatherly way he often met with Lithuanian pilgrims visiting the Vatican, especially in 1984 when Lithuania celebrated the 500th anniversary of St. Casimir, its patron saint; and again in 1987 when Lithuania celebrated 600 years of Christianity. He always took the opportunity to extend his greetings to Lithuanian communities during his apostolic journeys around the world.

On a personal note, I am also very grateful to His Holiness Pope John Paul II who ordained me to the priesthood twenty years ago at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

Respectfully yours in Christ.

Msgr. Edmond J. Putrimas
Lithuanian Bishops' Conference Delegate
for the Apostolate of
Lithuanian Catholics Abroad

Remembering Pope John Paul II

Lithuanians eagerly awaited his arrival. Advance publicity had been organized weeks beforehand and all the pupils and students were talking about this incredible event. Not only would they be the first of their generation to see any Pope, but this particular Pope, a very special personality. The year was 1993 and it was early September.

I had just begun my teaching assignment at Vilnius University's new department, the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, located then at the top of Didlaukio gatve in Baltupiai. The faculty was in a building that was a component of many buildings in that red brick complex, in front of the police academy and just across the short walkway from the nine storey residential hostel. Classes were in session. Instructors and students were busy getting settled.

A few days later, as I was strolling back to the residence from the faculty, I glanced ahead in the direction of my destination and was very surprised to see so many police Ladas in the car park. I wondered if the constabulary was having a special seminar. All was quiet otherwise, so I was not concerned about safety issues. My room was on the 6th floor and when I entered the residence building the concierge greeted me rather officiously informing me that my room was now on the 9th floor and would I be so kind as to take my belongings there. She handed me a new key with the regulation wooden knob attached. I asked why, that I was happy with the 6th floor and had no desire to change. No, no. No explanation just, "Prasom, Panele!" Right. Off I went. Well, the 9th floor had a better view anyway I thought.

The next morning, I hurried to the faculty and did not notice anything different in the car park. But that afternoon I did. Every space in the park was filled and some spaces had two cars very cleverly parked together. All were police Ladas! I wondered what was going on and telephoned a friend asking if there was something I should know about but hadn't been told. My friend called me back much later that evening and informed me that the security forces for the Pope's visit were being lodged in my building and wasn't it exciting, I would be very well protected! I thought this could be a terrible inconvenience if the police decided to make the building a cordoned off zone.

But, the police were on a mission elsewhere. Most of them were young, from out of town with a care-free air. In the evenings they were more interested in watching the Pope's various visits around Lithuania than in performing any kind of ultra security measures at their dormitory.

As it turned out, the police brought with them a special privilege that we regulars at the hostel would not have had otherwise and that was having the building's heat turned on in our rooms for a little while each day and hot water every morning for showers. Lithuania had been in the midst of practicing stringent measures against the use of electricity for heat and hot water.

When Lithuania declared independence from the Soviet in 1991, all connection to Moscow was severed. Even though transition from the Soviet generated fiscal policy had been implemented, the transformation had come with a thorn. Lithuania had been cut off from resources and had no funds. The new government was struggling with the problem. This was also the period of the Talonas, the new currency replacing the Rouble, when a rather large stack of paper money was required to buy a rather small meal in an ordinary café. Yes, Lithuania was an independent country now, and Moscow was gloating. Additionally, it was not just being without heat and hot water or the usual lack of basic consumer items that angered the people, it was the presence of the Soviet troops still marching around.

Into this environment, Pope John Paul II arrived. The first thing he did when he descended from the plane was to kneel down and kiss the ground. People who were at the airport were amazed. Watching that moment on television later in the evening, I stood off to one side, the community hall packed with the Lithuanian police guards. They were absolutely mesmerized. The room was silent, as though we were all in church. It was such a remarkable sight. The Pope had given Lithuania a great blessing in that act. He had restored dignity to the country. No one moved or said anything for a long time afterward. Such an uplifting wave of emotion filled the atmosphere.

Each evening, after finishing my classes, I would run back to the residence to watch the day's proceedings on the big television, standing with the police guards to see where the Pope had visited. He went all over the country giving especially great attention to the Hill of Crosses at Siauliai.

I have been to the Hill many times during those years I spent in Lithuania and each time was different, each time I saw things that I had missed before, such as worshippers on their knees making the arduous pilgrimage up those long wooden steps. There is a path just on the down slope of the Hill, on the other side overlooking the meadow. At that place, the wind is very strong, catching the thousands of rosaries hanging on the arms of the giant crosses. As the wind moves among the rosaries, swinging

them back and forth, they touch each other emitting a symphonic melody. It is a sound almost as if they are whispering out the names of the villages and persons who suffered in the awful decades. To stand there and see and hear it all is a riveting experience. Without a doubt, Pope John Paul II was personally deeply touched by his own visit.

Wherever he went, Lithuanians and visitors to the country lined the streets, the crowds being kept orderly by waist high partitions and rows and rows of police guards. I had the chance to see the Pope from afar when he motored to the Cathedral in Vilnius, Katedra ir Pilies. It seemed as though the entire populace had come to that square, there were so many people. The Cathedral and the clock tower had been newly painted in advance of this occasion and a permanent wide ramp had been installed to accommodate his vehicle from the roadway directly to the main Cathedral doors. That famous Cathedral has seen powerful history and it endured the indignity of being used as a weapons storehouse during the Soviet period as well as losing its three saints who had stood over its crown. The saints were later restored with great celebration to their original places during President Adamkus' first term in office.

For most Lithuanians, John Paul's visit was an affirmation that spirituality lived; resurrected, in fact, from death. Since 1991, the churches had been reopened to the public for worship, and they were well attended. But there was a distinct sense, an odd feeling that prevailed among some people that going to church was a quaint thing to do, or that it no longer mattered any more, attitudes that had been fostered by the Soviet regime and the Communist hierarchy. Weren't there still uniformed Soviets still on the streets? Maybe it wasn't safe after all.

To that aggregation of Lithuanians who had lost their spiritual belief, the Pope addressed several of his sermons. His speeches were simple and appealing. He was a teacher of the faith and he urged the people to remember the lessons of Christianity. His message to the Lithuanians was very specific. Lithuania was coping with the fallout from Communism and this new time of independence was especially unsettling for many older people, particularly for those of that generation who had known only Communism from birth, with its guaranteed bread and shelter routine but godless tenets and hypocritical demagoguery. For the Pope, those dispirited ones were the lost sheep that he had come to embrace.

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski knew the Pope well. In a discussion on the PBS News hour, April 5th, 2005, he remarked succinctly regarding the Pope's legacy to the world. When asked if the Pope deserves all the credit for the downfall of Communism, Dr. Brzezinski replied that,

"Certainly the Pope deserves some credit for it, but not in

the way that has been expressed in the American mass media... the Pope did not collude with the U.S., nor the CIA or any other group... to overthrow Communism; it didn't work like that."

Dr. Brzezinski emphasized that the Pope had two natural qualities that he was able to utilize in the very best way.

"One of these was fundamental: faith with charisma... He was confident and serene. The second was instrumental: his ability to communicate. He knew how to reach out to people... He bonded divinity with humanity and these qualities were felt especially by the young people."

Dr. Brzezinski is certainly correct in his assessment of the fall of Communism and he put the proper stamp on that assessment when he stated:

"What the Pope achieved in Poland was not a political victory, but something very different, a spiritual victory. He was not a politician but through his spirituality he showed the opposing political sides that they shared the same things in common, civil rights and human rights and a resentment of the totalitarian government that was in control and the people were universally against that control. The Pope stripped Communism of its myth of invincibility and he demonstrated that the appearance of unanimity in Communism was a sham. The Pope's belief in Christianity, and its teachings, was his contribution to the fall of Communism."

Through his teachings, the Pope was successful in helping the people recognize in themselves the right to strive for spiritual freedom.

"In this way, Pope John Paul II influenced the politicians to take those concepts of civil rights and human rights and promote them," Dr. Brzezinski added. In effect, the Pope taught the politicians without himself being political.

Pope John Paul II seemed truly innovative with a fresh style. But, his approach to the spiritual liberation of people all around the world was not new. It was the way that Christ had practiced the faith, traveling everywhere to preach, "Remaining above politics and speaking across borders, trans-denominationally," Dr. Brzezinski pointed out.

Pope John Paul II really did follow in Christ's path. And his trip to Lithuania in 1993 was in every way as an emissary of the Lord.

Barbara Bilksy

Barbara Bilksy lived and worked in Lithuania for eight years. She currently lives in CA. Barbara was a regular contributing writer for "Lithuanian Weekly" and also contributed to "Lithuania in the World" which is the flagship journal for Lithuanian Airlines. She was a frequent contributing writer for "Baltic Newsletter" published in Berkeley.

Old Letters:

Messages across Time
For BRIDGES

About 20 years ago in my parent's home on Cape Cod, I saw a packet of letters written in Lithuanian dated from the early twentieth century. During the years, the letters got lost in the house, my parents passed away and time continued to go by. Last year I was determined to find the letters. I was on a quest. Whenever I went to the old home-stand, I would search for the letters. Going through boxes. Looking in drawers and closets. Many interesting mementoes were discovered along the way, but it wasn't until I decided to look in the attic last spring that I found them. There were a total of 14 letters dating from 1919 to 1923.

Having found the letters, the problem now was how to translate them since I cannot read or even speak Lithuanian. Luckily, I have a very dear friend living in Kaunas. I photo copied the letters and sent them to Ilona. In her spare time, she translated them and e-mailed the translations back to me.

The content of the letters was not necessarily profound or historically important but they have a profound effect on me. The letters were from my great-grandmother, on my father's side, to his mother and my grandmother. Because my great grandmother was illiterate, the letters were dictated to some one who could write. The topics covered were why some relative didn't write to her, what her friends were doing, the weather and economic conditions, growing old and, always, the blessings.

A couple of things do stand out. Tevas (Father): In one letter dated 1919, it said, "Thank you for your letter written Oct. 3..... Now the news about your father's death. He died in 1917. "Given the numerous letters that were sent in the interim, why didn't my great grandmother mention that her husband had died? It certainly is news.

Dovana (Gift): "Thank you for being so kind, thank you for the shoes you have sent me, my old shoes were so worn out that I could not go to church wearing them. I had my father's shoes but somebody had stolen them."

Current events (I do not know the Lithuanian translation.) Feb 15th 1921: "I was very sad as everybody

was saying that it was so bad in America and all my children are in America so I was very worried about you. I have heard that there were fights on the roads in America, was worried... Although American history is not my forte, what was so bad in the US in the early 1920's? Were these early cases of road rage?

Senas (Old one): "When I was taking care of you when you were little I always wondered who will take care of me in my old days, but now I am happy as you take care of me, and though I miss you so much as you are so far away but I have means to live thanks to you my dear daughters. I am crying but those are the tears of joy."

Geneticists may disagree, but I firmly believe the ability to readily cry is genetic. I inherited that trait and now I know from whom. I never knew this woman as she died in 1923 and I was not born for several more decades. But from reading these letters, I feel so close to her. She lives in my tears across time and space. Thank you for writing the letters and to my Mom and Dad for keeping them.

Dorothy Minkus- McKenna

Dorothy Minkus-McKenna, a BRIDGES reader, graciously shared these letters with us.

The Beauty of a Lithuanian Woman

*The beauty of a Lithuanian woman,
is not in the clothes she wears,
The figure that she carries,
or the way she combs her hair.*

*The beauty of a Lithuanian woman,
must be seen from in her eyes.
Because that's the doorway to her heart,
the place where love resides.*

*The beauty of a Lithuanian woman,
is not in a facial mole,
but true beauty in a woman,
is reflected by her soul.*

*It is the caring that she cares to give,
the passion that she shows,
And the beauty of a Lithuanian woman,
with passing years, only grows.*

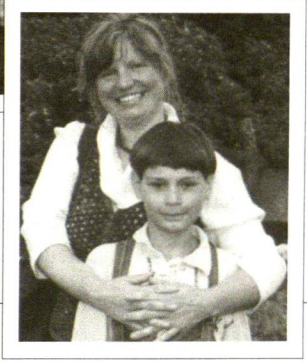
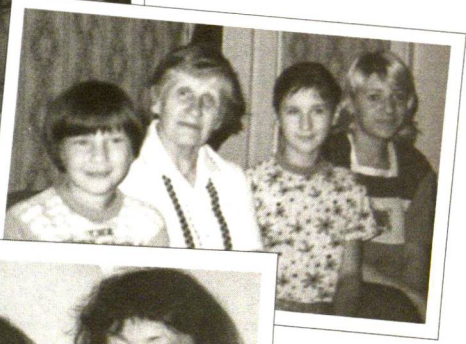
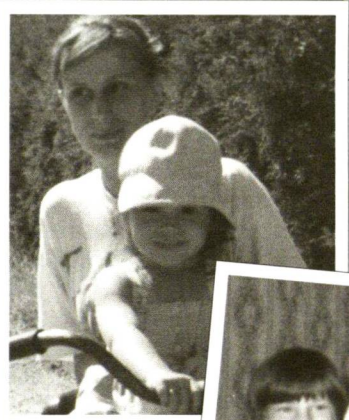
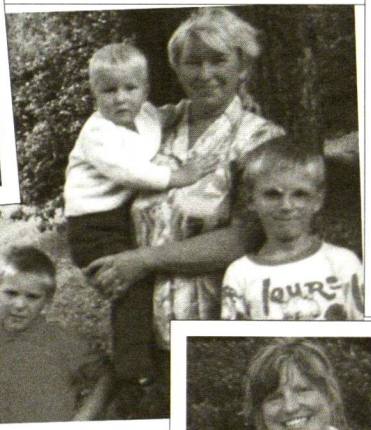
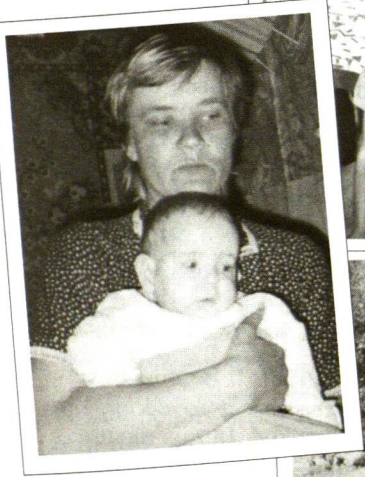
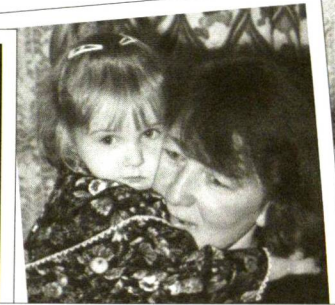
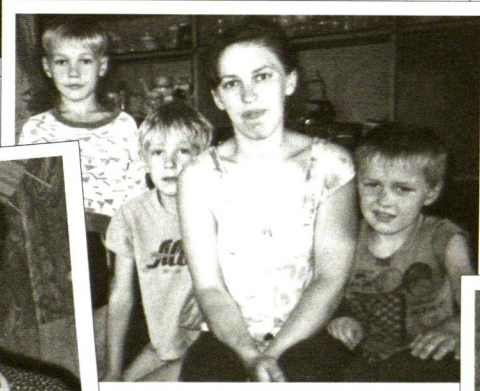
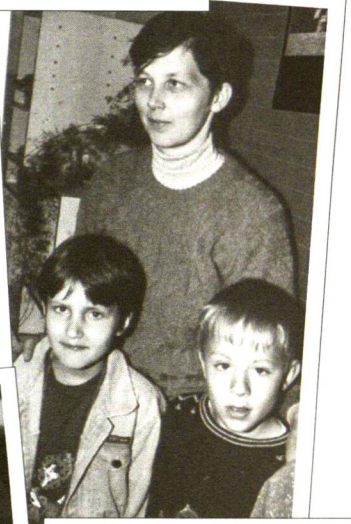
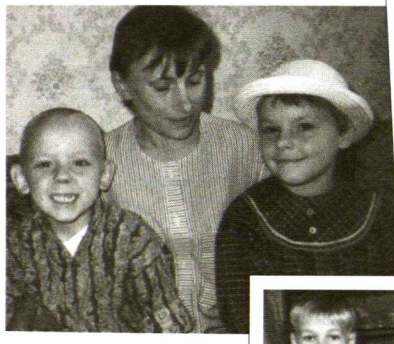
*From my heart to yours,
Rimgaudas*

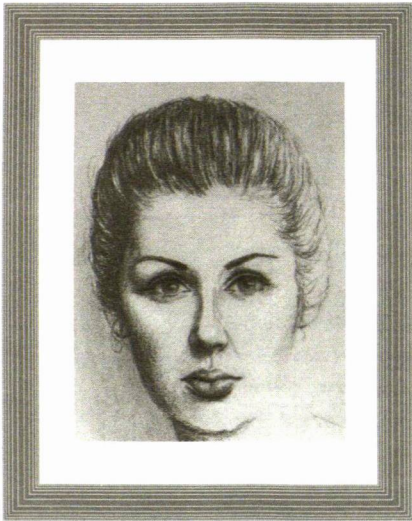
*Rimgaudas Vidziunas lives in Arizona.
His many interests include writing poetry.*



*On behalf of the
Lithuanian Orphan Care
Committee
we wish a happy
Mother's Day
to mothers, grandmothers, and
all women who have cared
for children.*

Jeanne Dorr





Portretas THE PORTRAIT

Rima Augaitiene is on her way home from work, every muscle aching with weariness. Her head aches, and melancholy, hopeless thoughts, like plagues flies, continually torment her.

--- How much longer will I be able to continue this heavy factory work? Can I bear it? Will my health hold up?

--- I must bear it! – she thinks, but doubtfully, because as she continues her difficult, hard work at the factory, she can feel her strength waning daily, like an advancing darkness. Each day as she leaves work she feels exhausted. Her head spins, and it seems as if the sky and land merge, whirling, swinging....

Rima with her husband and children came to America about ten years ago. That very first year, her husband perished in an automobile accident. She was left alone with three small children. Andrius was then eight years old, Laima, four, and Vida, just two years old. The poor mother knew hardship. She worked hard at difficult jobs, so that her children could grow and be educated. And now, her heart and mind were burdened by troublesome thoughts.

Andrius had recently graduated from high school and wanted to proceed to higher learning. His dream was to be an atomic engineer. He was clever, able and hard-working. But how to arrange for study? Where would they get the money? Education was expensive.

Rima walks slowly, deep in sorrowful thought. Suddenly it begins to rain, and she is still several blocks from home. Taking a short-cut, she hurries down a nar-

row side-street. She trips over something heavy and just saves herself from falling.

She looks down at an old framed portrait being washed by the rain. A pair of lovely blue eyes looks at her from the surrounding dirt. Rima, recovering from her fright, looks all around, and sees a pile of old, used, discarded items – and the portrait. The eyes, full of grief, attract and draw Rima's pity. Glancing around once more, she picks up the portrait, and carries it home.

Reaching home, and stepping onto the porch, she gently wipes the dirt from the face of the portrait, and sees an elderly, gray-haired woman, her pleasant features marked with wrinkles, and her remarkable eyes, imploring, as though brimming with unshed tears, her sorrow unknown yet heart-wrenching.

Her children were surprised, when their mother, having brought this discarded, old, faded picture home and cleaned it up, hung it in her own bedroom. They didn't see anything special about it: it was just an old, deteriorated oil portrait, not at all interesting. But Rima saw a living something in the portrait, and couldn't bring herself to throw it out again. The picture spoke to her, drew her in. But Andrius, especially, seemed to be almost ashamed, that his mother would actually pick up a worthless discarded object from the street, and bring it home. All three children appealed to their mother that she should allow them, under cover of darkness, to return the picture to the place where she had found it. She was about to give up and accede to their wishes, but she looked once more at the face, with eyes so alive and grieving. The woman in the picture was saying something to her, something she did not understand, but which she could not ignore.

So she kissed each of her children, and firmly told them:

--- Do not dare to touch this portrait! It is going to stay right here, and when I have some money saved up, I'm going to place it in a fine, new frame. In this picture, I see a living person, full of pain.

The children backed off, and saw that they would have to accept their mother's whim. And so the old lady's portrait remained in the mother's bedroom. Sometimes, when the children didn't see, Rima would look at the old lady's face, and, in her thoughts, she would speak to her, telling her all her problems. The unknown lady became familiar to her, like a dear relative. Perhaps Rima was reminded of her own dear old mother who was left in Lithuania?

The years passed. Andrius was now a college student, Laima had finished grade school and had applied to a

Catholic high school, and Vida was in the fourth grade. But now, an unexpected misfortune: a heart attack sends Rima to bed. Now, there is no bread-winner, no one to pay for education. Andrius has to leave college and take his mother's place. Rima lies in bed, downcast and worried.

Spring in all its decorative beauty – with blossoms and birdsong – trod the earth. Tulips bloomed, and narcissus. Lawns sprang into bright green life. Joy came to all of nature. But Rima's cheeks were pale, exhausted by illness. Her eyes often bathed in tears, seeing her children's hardships. And the lady in the portrait, her friend in grief and trouble, seemed to see and understand, and send her sympathy.

Sunday morning. Church bells ring in the distance, calling people to the Lord's sanctuary, to distance themselves, at least once weekly, from earthly troubles, and through prayer, join themselves to the Almighty. Rima somehow felt better that day, and sat up in bed. Her door suddenly opened, and all three children entered, bearing flowers, wishing her a happy birthday, with hugs, kisses and loving compliments. Ah, those children – they were her life's good fortune. Rima's heart basked in the glow of happiness. She felt enlivened, healthier, refreshed by her children's love. They draped her in a new, soft, white shawl, put new, warm slippers on her feet, and her younger daughter placed the flowers in a vase. She disappeared into the next room, and quickly returned, hiding something behind her back, laughing:

--- And here, Mama, is something for your friend – she said, and handed her a handsome frame.

Rima was surprised and delighted. Andrius took the portrait down, and everyone gathered to help. When they removed the yellowed paper from the back of the old frame, they were astonished to find a large, thick, worn envelope stuck to the back of the portrait. Almost breathless with excitement, Rima opened it, finding 20,000 dollars and a letter. And such a letter! All four read it in amazement.

"I wish you the Lord's blessings, and leave you all my hard-earned money. All I ask is that you pray for me. My children all wait for my death: my two sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. They never loved me. All they cared about was my property. I signed my house over to them, and they allowed me to live with them, though not truly as a mother, but as an unwelcome tenant. I loved them all greatly, but they only waited for my life to end, so that they could have the last bit of my wealth. Only one of my grandchildren, my dear Antanas, loved and honored me. It was he who painted this portrait of me. But he died in the Korean War. May

the Lord give him heavenly peace, and grant that we may be together upon my death. I have decided to put all my money in this envelope and hide it within my portrait, as a test of my children's loyalty and respect. I believe that when I am dead, they will scorn my memory and discard this portrait in the trash with the rest of my small possessions. And so I leave this money to you, who have found my portrait and recognized the heartache so well captured by my dear Antanas. I wish you much happiness, my good friend, you who pulled this unhappy old mother's picture out of a trash-heap. I ask for your prayers, and thank you."

That lady's gift came to Rima and her family as a true miracle. Rima was able to consult the best cardiologists, and her health returned. Andrius went back to the university, and after a few years, reached his goal, becoming an atomic engineer. Laima finished high school and then nursing school. Vida, the youngest, attended a prestigious art school.

Several times each year, Rima requests that Holy Mass be celebrated for her unknown benefactor. And the portrait, restored and magnificently framed, hangs in their comfortable parlor. The deep blue eyes look upon that fine family with loving kindness and endless blessings.

Vanda Tomasauskaite-Vaitkeviciene was born in Lithuania in 1909 and was a teacher in Lithuania, Germany and the United States. She was a well-known prize-winning author of many books of stories and legends, as well as a textbook used in teaching pupils in Lithuanian Saturday School. She now lives in honorable retirement in Florida.

Vanda Vaitkeviciene

English Translation by Gloria O'Brien

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

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Our Journey to Adopt

Part IV

For previous articles, please refer to Bridges
Part I - June 2003, Part II - October 2003, Part III - April 2004

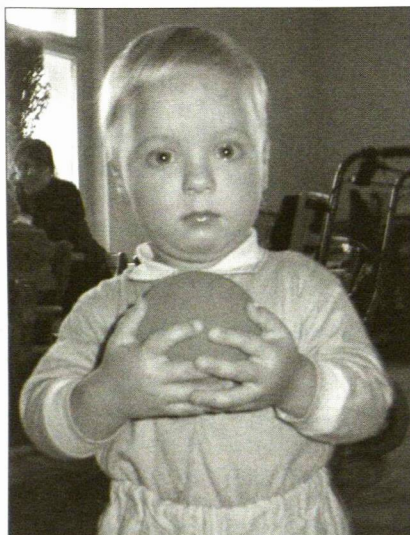
This is another – and final piece – in a series of articles regarding my family's journey to adopt a child from Lithuania. We began the process in August 2001. After several months spent completing our home study and applying for pre-approval from the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services ("BCIS", 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 ("Ivaikinimo 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. On October 3, 2003, we officially adopted Daumantas in Vilnius District Court and then returned in November 2003 (following a mandatory 40 day waiting period) to bring him home. This installment of the series is a post-script, discussing our life since Daumantas' arrival, as well as thoughts and resources for those considering adoption.

THE FIRST MONTHS AT HOME

We returned to the U.S. with Daumantas on November 23, 2003, only days before the Thanksgiving holiday. The first weeks and months of our time at home involved extensive adjustments by Daumantas to his presence in our family. Daumantas had seen very little of the world during his short life. Until we picked him up, he had never left the orphanage! The world was a scary and unfamiliar place to this little guy, who was unaccustomed to many of the things making up the daily life of an "average" two-year-old. For example, going to the food store or a playground was scary at first: the sight of too many unfamiliar people was overwhelming to him.

We spent much of the early days slowly exposing Daumantas to new things, allowing him to become accustomed at his speed and keeping him in a safe and limited environment until he was ready to explore some more. This not only meant limiting our trips out – such as to food stores or playgrounds – but also limiting

visitors coming to see us, since too many people at once could also be scary to him. Daumantas did adjust to new experiences relatively quickly and a year later, he is comfortable in most places, though large crowds still make him uncomfortable (which is not uncommon in three-year-olds).



Daumantas at Lopselis, Sept., 2003 (age 2)

EARLY INTERVENTION

Shortly after his arrival in our home, Daumantas was evaluated by our county's Early Intervention Program, which is run through the local public schools. He was found to have significant delays in speech, gross motor skills and fine motor skills. As a result, he qualified for weekly speech therapy plus several consultations with a physical therapist. A year later, we are seeing significant improvement – and have learned much about how to encourage Daumantas to choose speech over other non-verbal forms of communication (such as crying and pointing to express a desire for something). Early Intervention is a wonderful resource for any child with delays. Any family in the process of adopting is strongly encouraged to begin the Early Intervention evaluation process as soon as possible, so that the child is given every opportunity to catch up to his age-level

before school begins.

POST-PLACEMENT

Like most countries, Lithuania requires adoptive families to send "post-placement reports" on a regular basis to provide information about how the child is doing in his/her new home, and how the family is adjusting to the new addition. Currently, the Ivaikinimo tarnyba requires a total of 6 reports: a report every six months for the first two years that the child is in the family, and then a report annually for the second two years. The reports, completed by either a social worker or the family, discusses basic aspects of the child's and the parents' adjustment to one another. As part of the initial dossier of documents, usually the agency performing the home study includes a letter committing to perform post-placement reports for the family. Subjects include the child's physical development, emotional and social relationships, general health, language, living conditions, discipline and relationships with adoptive parents and siblings.

ADOPTION RESOURCES

There are many resources available for families considering adoption, and Lithuania in particular. The following list is not exhaustive; it is meant to give interested families a place to start. My inclusion (or exclusion) of any entity in this list is not an endorsement of such entity. A family interested in beginning the adoption process must decide two things initially: (1) select a home study agency, and (2) select an adoption agency or other representative to assist in the placement of the child. The two can be the same entity, but do not have to be. A lot of information is also available on the internet: through adoption-support groups, websites and the like.

1. Home Study Agency

The agency selected by potential adoptive parents to perform their home study must be one licensed to perform such studies by their state of residence. It can be any licensed agency. For example, it can be an adoption agency which provides adoption-related services, but does not offer a program for adoption from Lithuania.

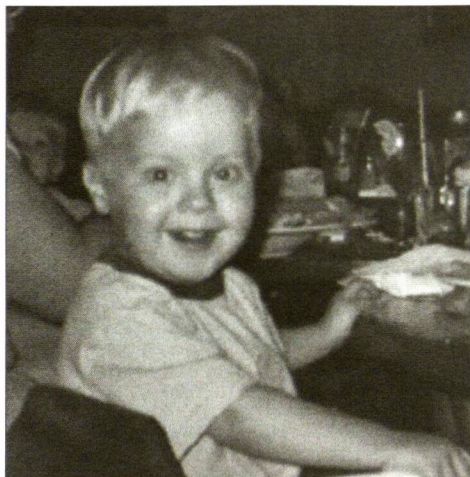
2. Placement Agency or Representatives

Placement agencies or representatives can be informally divided into three groups: (1) full-service, U.S.-based adoption agencies, (2) Lithuania-based adoption service providers and (3) Lithuanian attorneys offering adoption assistance. There are benefits and drawbacks to using each type of provider. Full-service U.S.-based adoption agencies provide excellent services, but are the most expensive option. Lithuania-based adoption service providers also provide excellent services for a lower price, but can not provide support in dealing with U.S. agencies, such as the BCIS (former INS). Local attorneys may be more versed in the legal aspects of adoption rather than psychological and developmental issues, particularly in evaluating a referred child, but may be the least expensive option. Plus, locating and interviewing providers located in Lithuania may prove daunting to someone with a lesser degree of comfort in Lithuania. All three types of providers will complete tasks related to the adoption on behalf of the family, including the following:

- Help the family prepare and submit a dossier to Ivaikinimo tarnyba;
- Serve as intermediary between the prospective adoptive parents and Ivaikinimo tarnyba;
- Help the family collect information about the child once Ivaikinimo tarnyba gives the family a referral. This may include going to take photographs or videos of the child, helping the family ask follow-up questions regarding information in the child's medical history or other information in the referral.
- Prepare the prospective adoptive parents' petition to the Vilnius District Court;
- Provide legal representation to the prospective adoptive parents leading up to, and including, the court hearing on the adoption before the Vilnius District Court; and
- Assist in obtaining and preparing the child's documents once the adoption is final. This includes obtaining a new birth certificate and Lithuanian passport, preparing translated and notarized

copies of the final decree of adoption, as well as preparing the package of documents required by the U.S. Embassy for visa processing.

Note that the role of representative does not include actually finding a child for the prospective adoptive parents. It is up to *ivaikinimo tarnyba* to locate a suitable child from the roster of children available for adoption, and refer that child to the family.



Daumantas September 2004 (age 3)

In determining which representative would be most appropriate, prospective adoptive parents need to consider their needs and comfort levels with international travel, bureaucrats and unknown situations. Someone with a good command of the Lithuanian language, helpful relatives and general comfort with travel may be best served by a provider who allows them to do much of the process on their own. Someone who does not speak the language, has fewer relatives and does not feel comfortable battling bureaucrats may wish to consider a provider who offers more of a full-service approach.

A. Lawyers Practicing In The Field of Adoption

The U.S. Embassy in Vilnius maintains a list on its web site of attorneys which practice in a variety of fields, including adoption. Although the list is not exhaustive and several competent attorneys practicing adoption are not listed, it is a place to start.

<http://www.usembassy.lt/Text/Docs/Consular/lawyers.htm>

B. Adoption Service Providers In Lithuania

I am aware of two adoption service providers in Lithuania. Both of these organizations employ attorneys and social workers, who provide full representation throughout the adoption and can assist with translation and in-country support if needed.

Seimos Teises Centras
(Family Law Center)
Elona Vilkaitiene, director
Tel. (370 5) 272 39 24
Email info@familylc.com
Website www.familylc.com

Pasaulio Vaikai (Children of the World)

Silva Jurate Savickaite, director
Email silvajurate@yahoo.com Email

C. Adoption Agencies With Programs In Lithuania

A number of U.S.-based adoption agencies offer adoption programs in Lithuania. One of the most critical questions to ask when interviewing a U.S.-based adoption agency is "who is your representative in Lithuania?" It is important to make sure that the representative who will actually represent you to Ivaikinimo tarnyba is professional, qualified and available to answer any questions you might have. The second question to ask is "how many adoptions have you completed recently from Lithuania?" Experience is significant; an agency which has not done any adoptions in Lithuania recently may not be up-to-speed on recent developments. This list is not exhaustive, but gives a sense of the agencies which work in Lithuania.

Adoptions Together
Baltimore, MD
www.adoptionstogether.org

Bethany Christian Services
Grand Rapids, MI (plus other offices)
www.bethany.org

Main Street Adoption Service
Lancaster, PA (plus other offices)
www.mainstreetadoption.com

Continued on page 17

cultural (and other) tidbits

Mikulskiene - 100

January 30, 2005 in Vilnius Ona Mikulskiene, the “Queen of Kankles” celebrated her 100th birthday. Her entire adult life was devoted to the propagation of the musical art of *kankles* and Lithuanian folk music. During the weekend of her jubilee, O. Mikulskiene was greeted by *kankles* musicians who came to Vilnius from all regions of Lithuania and feted her with a concert by a *kankles* trio under the direction of Lina Naikeliene with solos by soprano Gintare Skeryte. On Sunday, January 30, in the Cathedral of Vilnius, a Mass of Thanksgiving was offered in her honor. During the Mass, the renowned Ensemble “Lietuva” sang “Mass for Suffering Lithuania” composed by her late husband Alfonsas Mikulskis.

Ona Mozeliauskaite Mikulskiene was born in 1905 in a family of exiles in Omsk, Russia. Her parents Adomas and Elena Mozeliauskas had eleven children. From the youngest age Ona was drawn to music. In school she learned to play the guitar, balalaika, and mandolin.

The family returned to Lithuania in 1922. In Kaunas she lived for a time with her sister, who introduced her to composer Stasys Simkus, who had great influence on her future musical development. Ona joined church choirs and in 1924 participated in the first Lithuanian Song Festival in Kaunas. She continued her musical studies in Klaipeda where she met and married her husband composer Alfonsas Mikulskis. He taught her to play the Lithuanian national musical instrument *kankles*. In 1933 she organized a *kankles* orchestra. In 1940 in Vilnius Alfonsas Mikulskis established the Ciurlionis National Ensemble which included a *kankles* orchestra and a folk dance group. In 1944, at the onslaught of the second Soviet occupation, most members of the Ciurlionis National Arts Ensemble fled to Austria and at the end of the war almost all of them met in Germany. After the passage by the U.S. Congress of the Displaced Persons Act enabling immigration of World War II refugees to the United States, 65 members of Ciurlionis Ensemble, with their directors Alfonsas and Ona Mikulskis, settled in Cleveland.

Here Ciurlionis Ensemble reached its artistic pinnacle. Ciurlionis concert tours took them to Canada, Columbia, Venezuela, and other countries. In 1976 Ciurlionis Ensemble was featured at the Eucharistic



100 Years Birthday Jubilee for Mrs. Ona Mikulskiene was given in Vilnius by Conservatory Folklore Ensemble “Kadagys” on January 31, 2005.

Photos by Banga Grigaliunaite

Congress in Philadelphia, where it sang before the future Pope John Paul II, then Cardinal Karol Wojtyla. However, the most gratifying and emotional tour was to Lithuania to celebrate its 50th jubilee in 1991. During the artistic life of Ciurlionis Ensemble, O. Mikulskiene directed its integral *kankles* orchestra and was her husband’s untiring partner and assistant. With the Ciurlionis Kankles Ensemble O. Mikulskiene produced three records, she taught *kankles* at the Lithuanian Saturday School of Cleveland and organized a *kankles* orchestra for the 1963 Folk Song Festival in Chicago. She continued to teach *kankles* in Cleveland and often traveled to other Lithuanian communities to introduce the young and old to the ancient art of playing the *kankles*. Even after the death of her husband in 1983, she continued to assist the ensemble’s new director Rytas Babickas.

Sadly, at the end of 1991, the Ciurlionis Ensemble decided to fold. O. Mikulskiene, however, was determined to keep alive the legacy of Ciurlionis Ensemble and its founder Alfonsas Mikulskis. In 1992 she presented “The Golden Book”, an archival history of Ciurlionis Ensemble and all of its instruments to Lithuania. Through her persevering efforts the music of Alfonsas Mikulskis and the comprehensive history of Ciurlionis Ensemble, “The Song of Native Land” by V. Kavaliunas, was published in the United States in 1991.

In 1994 O. Mikulskiene brought the urn of Alfonsas' ashes for burial in Lithuania. Since 1995 she lives in Vilnius. In 1996 she had the music of the monumental "Mass for Suffering Lithuania" by Alfonsas Mikulskis published in Lithuania.

Throughout her life she received numerous awards and medals in recognition of her artistic endeavors. The first in 1928 was Lithuania's 10th Anniversary of Independence Medal and the most recent in 1996 Lithuania's Duke Gediminas medal. Ona Mikulskiene does not rest on her laurels. She has written another book to be published in celebration of her 100 years of a very creative and productive life.

"Ilgiausiu kurybingu metu, gerb. Ona Mikulskiene!"



Ona Mikulskiene was honored by many dignitaries. Shown above Ambassador Stephen Mull, United States Ambassador to Lithuania.

Briefly...

Paintings of Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis for the first time on view in the United States. From February 13 to May 23, 2005 in Los Angeles at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in show entitled "Visual Music (1905-2005)" among the works of 75 world renown artists the triptych "Kibirkestys" (Fire sparks) by M.K. Ciurlionis was on display.

June 17-September 11 in Washington, D.C. at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden M.K. Ciurlionis two part "Sonata Nr. 6" (Sonata of the Stars) "Allegro" and "Andante" will be on display.

During fifteen years of restored independence of Lithuania, the art of M.K. Ciurlionis has been shown in most of Europe, in 1992 in Tokyo, Japan, in 1999 in Montreal, Canada, and in 2000 at the Musee d'Orsay in Paris marking the 125th anniversary of the birth of Ciurlionis. This year Lithuania and the world commemorate the 130th birthday of composer and artist M.K. Ciurlionis.

.... if you plan to travel to Lithuania in the summer or any time, several very useful web sites to find festival, concerts, theater, art shows and much else:

- 1) www.bilietai.lt (Lithuanian "Ticket Master" in Lithuanian and English)
- 2) www.teatras.lt (Drama theater)

A fabulous web site with a calendar of just about all events throughout Lithuania in both Lithuanian and English languages. Just click on the Lithuanian or English flag. It is called **Entertainment bank (Pramogu informacijos bankas)**.

<http://www.eb.lt/lt.php3?vid=75&cid=0&date=1112761939&search=1>

Notable dates to look forward in June

June 13, 1994, death of Stasys Lozoraitis, Jr., first ambassador of Lithuania to the United States after restoration of independence. Previously, he served as *charge d'affaires* of Lithuanian Embassy, while still was under Soviet occupation (not recognized as a Soviet Republic by the U.S. government).

June 14, 1941, the start of mass deportations of Lithuania's citizens to Siberia by the occupying Soviet Union.

June 15, 1940, Day of Mourning and Hope in Lithuania to mark the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union.

June 21, the first day of summer

June 23, St. John's Day and ancient Lithuanian feast of Rasos.

June 29, 1932, death of Jonas Maciulis-Maironis, priest, poet, and "Minstrel of Lithuania". His poem "Lietuva Brangi", set to music by composer Juozas Naujalis, became the second anthem of Lithuania during Soviet occupation.

Terese M. Gecys

Terese M. Gecys is Fourth term member of LAC Board of Directors, 2000-2003 secretary of LAC National Executive Committee and past as well as current president Philadelphia Chapter of LAC



Staff Sergeant Stanley Bender, U.S. Army Lithuanian Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient

The recent dedication of a National Memorial to the Veterans of World War II was long over due. The quickly passing years have decimated the ranks of our greatest generation. Like the national memorial, it is now a fitting time for Bridges to give thanks to those great heroes who fought in World War II. Due to the large number that served and many who have since passed away, we can not thank each personally. The author's own father and two uncles are among the list of these heroes. As a result, the author has taken the liberty to single one Lithuanian American World War II veteran, from among the ranks of countless thousands who fought and many who died for their country, to symbolize the story of all who served. The author was blessed to have had the opportunity to talk and correspond with this great man before he passed on.

The Congressional Medal of Honor was instituted during the American Civil War as the nation's highest award for valor. The decoration is conferred in the name of the Congress of the United States upon the recommendation of the President. Its recipients are officers and enlisted men who have distinguished themselves by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty, in armed combat with the enemy.

The first Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded, on July 12,

1862, in the middle of the Civil War and by the end of World War II only 2,199 American soldiers had earned the honor of wearing this decoration. The decoration itself is a gold five pointed star superimposed on a laurel wreath of green enamel. The center bears the head of the goddess Minerva the emblem of righteous war and wisdom. The center medallion is encircled with the words "United States of America". The decoration is worn from a light blue neck ribbon studded with thirteen white stars and hands from a horizontal bar bearing the word "Valor".

Many Lithuanians have served in the armed forces of the United States and these veterans are aware of this honored decoration. Yet few are aware that this, the highest decoration of the United States of America, was awarded to a Lithuanian American. Lithuanian American Staff Sergeant Stanley Bender was honored with this decoration for his service during World War II. Bender was born to Lithuanian immigrants, Andrew and Eva Bendoruis, on October 13, 1909, in Carlisle, West Virginia. The family name was later changed to its present Americanized form of Bender. He was the youngest of seven children. Stanley's early years were spent in West Virginia, but he later moved to Chicago, Illinois, to live with a sister after his father died.

Due to the economic conditions at the time, Stanley was out of work, broke, and disheartened. He decided to give his life to his country and enlisted in the U.S. Army, on December 9, 1939, at the old Post Office in Chicago, Illinois. When asked by the recruiter where he would like to serve, Stanley said "just send me as far as you can!" The army

complied with his request and Stanley was quickly sent to the Van Cover Barracks in the State of Washington and also sent on a short detached assignment to Salinas, California. The displayed photograph of Sergeant Bender was taken at Salinas, California, during that assignment. He considered this photograph to have been the best ever taken of him. His military service during World War II would eventually lead him to the shores of France. While serving as a Staff Sergeant with Company E, 7th U.S. Infantry, 3rd Division, Bender would win the Congressional Medal of Honor.

How Stanley Bender earned our nation's highest honor can best be told in the words of the President of the United States. The following is taken from the official U.S. Government citation, which accompanied Bender's Medal of Honor.

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. On 17 August 1944, near La Londe, France, Staff Sergeant Bender climbed on top of a knocked out tank, in the face of withering machine gun fire which had halted the advance of his company, in an effort to locate the source of this fire. Although bullets ricocheted off the turret at his feet Staff Sergeant nevertheless remained standing bolt upright in full view of the enemy for over two minutes. Locating the enemy machine guns on a knoll 200 yards away he ordered two squads to cover him and led his men down an irrigation ditch, running a gauntlet of intense machine gun fire which completely blanketed 50 yards of his advance and wounded four of his men. While the Germans hurled hand grenades at the ditch Staff Sergeant Bender stood his ground until his squad caught up with him; then advanced

alone in a wide, flanking approach, to the rear of the knoll. He deliberately walked a distance of 40 yards, without cover, in full view of the Germans and under a hail of both enemy and friendly fire, to the first machine gun and knocked it out with a single short burst. Then he made his way through the strongpoint, despite bursting hand grenades, towards the second machine gun 25 yards distant whose two man crew swung the machine gun and fired two bursts at him, but Staff Sergeant Bender walked calmly through the fire and reaching the edge of the emplacement, dispatched the crew. Signaling his men to rush the rifle pits he then walked 35 yards further to kill an enemy rifleman and returned to lead his squad to the destruction of the eight remaining Germans in the strongpoint. His audacity so inspired the remainder of the assault company that the men charged out of their positions, shouting and yelling, to overpower the enemy roadblock and sweep into town, knocking out two anti-tank guns, killing 37 Germans and capturing 26 others. Staff Sergeant had sparked and led the assault company in an attack which overwhelmed the enemy, destroyed a roadblock, taking a town, seizing intact three bridges over the Maravenne River and capturing commanding terrain which dominated the area."

Signed Franklin D. Roosevelt

Since Sergeant Bender's award was received while the war in Europe was still raging, his Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded on January 22, 1945, by Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch, Jr., commander of the 7th U.S. Army, in a ceremony near the army's headquarters in France. Stanley was later promoted to Technical Sergeant and was briefly assigned to another replacement unit.

In the post war period, Bender returned to a prosperous civilian life with his family in Fayetteville, West Virginia. Though he would be honored at various dinners and functions

in his later life, Stanley was very humble about his great achievements during the war. When he returned home after the war, he was so modest that he did not even tell his fiancée about what he had done until sometime after they had been married. When anyone asked him what he did to deserve the honor, Bender would quietly say he did what anyone else would have done under the circumstances

The State of West Virginia also honored Stanley Bender, on September 21, 1954, by naming a bridge along the West Virginia Turnpike in his name. After a long and productive life, Stanley passed away at age 84, on June 22, 1994, like so many of veterans of our greatest generation without ever seeing the World War II Memorial constructed in their honor.



He was laid to rest with full military honors at High Lawn Memorial Park Cemetery, Oak Hill, West Virginia. Stanley was survived by a wife and daughter who have always been extremely proud of his military service. I am extremely proud just to have been given the opportunity of briefly having known this hero. Stanley Bender was an outstanding soldier, loving husband and father. Bridges Magazine and the author are proud to honor this Lithuanian American hero as a representative of all of our World War II veterans. They were truly America's finest generation.

Henry L. Gaidis

Henry Gaidis is a contributor to Bridges. He is a member of the Board of Directors of JBANC and among his

many interests is military history.

Editor's Note: Staff Sergeant Bender's widow recently donated the Congressional Medal of Honor to the Balzekas Museum in Chicago.

to Adopt *Continued from page 13*

Adoptions From The Heart
Cherry Hill, NJ (plus other offices)
www.adoptionsfromtheheart.org

Ilien Adoptions
Atlanta, GA
www.illienadoptions.org

3. Other Resources for Potential Adoptive Parents

Numerous resources exist for families considering adoption. This list provides some places to seek information about adoption.

- Yahoo! groups of parents adopting from Lithuania.
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LithuanianAdoptions-General-Info/> and
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lithuanian-adoptions/>.

Both of these groups are open to families considering adoption from Lithuania, and consist of adoptive families—those waiting for children, and those who have completed their adoptions. One of the groups allows adoption professionals to join, and the other is limited to families only.

- FRUA. <http://www.frua.org>.

FRUA is an advocacy and support group of families who have adopted from Eastern Europe.

- Ivaikinimo tarnyba.
<http://www.ivaikinimas.lt>.

This the official Lithuanian state adoption agency, a division of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

In summary, I would encourage every Lithuanian family which has room in their hearts and financial means to consider adopting a child from Lithuania. So many children spend their lives in orphanages, hoping and dreaming of having a family of their own. Although the process was long, arduous at times and time-consuming, its result – the addition of Daumantas to our family – was worth every hassle, every tear, every heartache. I only need to compare the pictures of Daumantas taken in Lopselis 18+ months ago to those of him today to see the profound impact the love of a family has had on him.

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.

Ruta Kalvaityte-Skuciene

News and Views

Please visit the website of St. Peter's parishioners at www.savestpeter.org

Anne Wargo is Honored

Anne Wargo of St. Clair, PA recently was the subject of a billboard on Route 61 in Pottsville, PA. Anne was the ideal hospital patient during a recent stay and the hospital PR department selected her to grace several billboards in the area.

Anne is the President of the St. Casimir Guild of the Pontifical Lithuanian College in Rome and is also a past national President of the Knights of Lithuania.

Congratulations, Anne!

VERSLO ZINIOS

Furniture Maker Expands

Following a year of prospecting the market, the British furniture maker Christie Tyler chose Alytus as a site for manufacturing. The agreement concerning the lease of a 20,000-square-metre area is to be signed this week. The building now belongs to UAB Svenheim, a producer of furniture. The new furniture plant will employ 400 people, but eventually expand its workforce to 1,000.

Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians

Resolution requesting Russia recognize occupation of Baltics to be submitted to U.S. Congress

Riga, (LETA-ELTA) - U.S. Congressman John Shimkus plans on submitting a resolution to the U.S. Congress this week, requesting that Russia admit the occupation of the Baltic countries.

The draft resolution says Russia must release an unequivocal statement that it acknowledges and condemns the illegitimate occupation and annexation of the Baltic countries by the Soviet Union, as well as the terror, repression and death of innocent people between 1940 and 1991.

As the May 9 events in Moscow draw nearer, where Russian President Vladimir Putin will mark the end of World War II, honouring Stalin's regime, Shimkus stresses that it is important to state unequivocally that the U.S. Congress should not honour or pay respect to Stalin's government.

The draft resolution states that the annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania by the Soviet Union was an aggressive act against sovereign nations that resulted from the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

The draft bill stresses that the United States' unyielding position, in not recognizing the annexation of the Baltic countries, and the fact that Russia is a successor to the U.S.S.R.

Shimkus's draft resolution says that the terror, murders and

deportations to concentration camps in Siberia, carried out by the Soviet occupation regime, brought intolerable suffering for the Baltic people. The Balts also engaged in armed and political resistance to the Soviet aggression.

The document says that the occupation and annexation of the Baltic countries is one of the most important oppression acts in Russia's history that still has not been recognized.

Acknowledgement of the fact of the occupation would help improve relations between the Baltic and Russian people, become the basis for better relations between these nations' governments and consolidate stability in the region, believes Shimkus. The truth is a strong factor that prompts rehabilitation, forgiveness and unity, whereas falsehood causes distrust, fear and hatred, says the draft resolution.

At the same time, Russia deserves to be commended on starting to acknowledge grave and regretful incidents in its history, for instance, the slaughter of Polish soldiers in Katyn Forest in 1939, stresses Shimkus.

Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians

KAUNO DIENA

Lithuania and the Euro

"Euro may prompt consumption boom," another headline read. Lithuanian experts say that the ungrounded panic over the potential price growth may end in inflation increase before the shift from the litas to the euro.

On Wednesday, the opposition parliamentary group of the Liberal-Centre Union had a second round of discussions concerning the introduction of the euro. The potential jump in prices was pointed out as the most realistic threat. The experts recommend focusing on efforts meant to combat the fear that citizens feel about the introduction of the euro. They also say that the nation lacks an in-depth study of the potential impact of the euro on the national economy and the everyday life of ordinary people.

Rumours that can be heard that the introduction of euro may provoke a boom in consumption; Lithuanian residents are already prepared to stock up on salt and non-perishable food.

According to Margarita Starkeviciute, a Lithuanian representative in the European parliament, the shift from the litas to the euro will have negative effect on society. To reduce this, the government needs to curtail taxes or increase wages, leading to the growth of real income and avoiding a shock.

"I am surprised that everyone is so calm. In the first two months of the year, the deficit of Sodra (the nation's social insurance fund) expanded to a threatening 100 million litas. No reforms have been launched in the educational, scientific research, or cultural sectors. An analysis of government expenditures in these fields should be carried out. Also, the bank of Lithuania must be requested to work out an impact study on the introduction of the euro. How one can make decisions that will touch upon the life of every resident without such a study?" the lawmaker asked.

Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians

Rasa Brittain

Preservationists at Work in Vilnius

I had a routine visit to the doctor the other day, and was actually disappointed to have only moments to cool my heels in the waiting room. Poking through the magazines among the chairs, I'd just noticed the headline on the cover of the December 2004 Smithsonian Magazine, "Vilnius: Lest We Forget", when the nurse was calling me to the examination room.

After settling my co-pay, the receptionist was only too happy to swap the Smithsonian for the current fashion magazine I'd brought, and I was free to peruse the article in a publication generally only available in libraries, by subscription, at high-end newsstands, (or through barter in a doctor's office.)

"Vilnius Remembers" is written by Prague-based freelance writer Vijai Maheshwari, with additional material from Vilnius journalist Liudas Dapkus (whose by-line you've likely seen on Associated Press reports from Lithuania over the years.) The piece details the efforts of preservationists to restore the Jewish ghetto of Vilnius, once the foremost center of rabbinical learning in Europe and, according to this article, home to some 100-thousand of Lithuania's 240-thousand Jews at the outset of World War II.

In the years between the two World Wars, the Jewish community of Vilnius supported more than 100 synagogues, six daily Jewish newspapers, and a broad array of Jewish theatres, schools, guilds and political groups.

The Nazis liquidated the Vilnius Ghetto in September of 1943. The Soviets kept a boot on its rebirth with their Russification agenda and leveled many structures in the Old City, including the 1630s-era Great Synagogue. In Vilnius today, there are perhaps 200 survivors from the

once-thriving pre-war Jewish community. Many of them are actively involved in an ambitious program to reconstruct parts of the destroyed Jewish Quarter and salvage a culture that spanned 700 years. Artifacts are already on display at the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum on Pylimo Street, and at the Tolerance Center, founded by former Parliament member Emanuel Zingeris with major funding from the European Commission.

Zingeris is the driving force behind a plan to rebuild parts of the ghetto, inspired by his mother's stories and by his own research. He sees it as restoring a civilization.

He's supported by Justas Paleckis, former deputy foreign minister and current member of the European Parliament. While Paleckis calls the project an attempt to "right the wrongs of the past," he sees a practical side to the program as well: a way to boost tourism and bring in foreign revenues.

Lithuania's government is formally backing the plan, but relying on investors to fund it. The article states that several American and Israeli entrepreneurs have agreed to put up the cash to rebuild the Jewish houses over the existing basements of the original structures. (During reconstruction, the Soviets apparently took some shortcuts and simply demolished buildings, leaving cellars and many artifacts intact.) The ground floors would be transformed into replicas of the artisan studios and shops that once lined the streets.

The investors want to build hotels, office space and restaurants on the upper floors. The plan involves reconstructing 30 buildings, at an estimated cost upwards of \$150 million dollars.

And not everybody is happy about

it. While the article includes no comments from non-Jewish residents, it does quote the president of the Jewish Community of Lithuania, Simon Alperovitch, who feels the emphasis on buildings stirs up lingering resentments. "The dialogue between Jews and Lithuanians is still very painful," he says.

American Rabbi Sholom Krinsky, who's spent the last decade in Vilnius as the head of the orthodox Chabad Lubavitch Cultural Center, sees the building program as misplaced priorities. He thinks energies should be directed instead toward a religious and cultural revival. "Our goal is not to rebuild lifeless buildings but to bring people closer to Judaism," says Krinsky. "...many of the surviving Jews know little or nothing about their religion."

It's an interesting article, and available at your local library (or perhaps your doctor's waiting room), and on-line at <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/>, although the PDF file does not contain the photos and maps that bring much to the piece.

(To access, click on "SEARCH" on the field under the title in the upper left corner. A google search bar will appear. Make sure you've checked smithsonian.mag underneath it, then type in "Vilnius Remembers" in the search bar and click on the word "search" to the right of it. A page will come up with only a topic or two; find the one with "Vilnius Remembers" in boldface and click on it. A Smithsonian page will come up with assorted texts to buy; scroll down until you find "Vilnius Remembers" and click on it. That finally takes you to the article, which you can bring up to read in a PDF file at no cost.)

Rasa Brittain

"Letters from the Outside: The History of the Friends of the Prisoners"

by K. E. Gross and D. J. Rozentals

The most distant point from Lithuania is perhaps Tasmania. That's a sizable island south of Australia. It was discovered by Dutch sailors in 1642. In 1948 a group of Lithuanian refugees fleeing from the terrors of communism found a home there. Their community's activity is very well known, particularly in the University of Tasmania. In 1987 an academic group, the Lithuanian Studies Society, was established. Under the leadership of A. Taskunas, Lithuania has greatly benefited from the activities of this institution.

During Lithuania's occupation by the SSSR, Lithuanians in Australia discovered some creative means to help their native country. They were very successful in getting valuable help from their Australian friends. In this area Mr. Taskunas was a person of great importance. His main area of activity was the Lithuanian Studies Society and a yearly publication, the Lithuanian Papers. The Lithuanian Studies Society also published Letters from the Outside: The History of the Friends of the Prisoners.

Who are these Friends of the Prisoners?

This group of people was started by A. Taskunas, Fr. Greg Jordan (a Jesuit priest), and half a dozen others. Its purpose was to look for specific ways to help the unfortunate people from the occupied Baltic countries who were banished to Siberia by the Soviets. The specific ways were letters, small parcels and prayers. It was established that those prisoners who had some contacts with the Western world were dealt with a little more caution by their captors. Many Australians and other nationals participated in the activities of this group (Friends of the Prisoners). Therefore, it was also a very

good opportunity for A. Taskunas to familiarize those people with the cause of occupied Lithuania.

Letters from the Outside: The History of the Friends of the Prisoners contains 122 pages. It is very well written, illustrated and neatly printed. Its authors are: K. E. Gross and D. J. Rozentals. It is reported that the first meeting of the Friends took place on August 7, 1980, after the visit of Simas Kudirka to Tasmania. Only eight people got together, all of them invited by Mr. Taskunas. In 1984 this organization had 1,962 members in Australia and 162 elsewhere

Letters from the Outside: The History of the Friends of the Prisoners narrates a very interesting story. It is one of many publications of the Lithuanian Studies Society. It is also surprising how much can be accomplished by one person. For his activities A. Taskunas was awarded the Order of Australia Medal.

Reviewed by V. Volertas

Mr. Volertas is a resident of New Jersey and is the author of fourteen books.

The book "Letters from the Outside" is available from the publishers. The cost is \$19.95 plus \$5.05 airmail postage, in US or Australian currency. It may be paid by personal check, bank check or international money order.

Lithuanian Studies Society at the
University of Tasmania
(abbreviated: LSS),
Post Office 777,
Sandy Bay, Tas. 7006, Australia.

or it may be ordered by
E-mail: A.Taskunas@utas.edu.au



This photograph was taken during the reception. From left to right are Vladimiras Prudnikovas - LR Minister of Culture, Algirdas Brazauskas - LR Premier and Alfonsas Dzikas - Lithuanian American Community Executive Vice-President.

Tuesday, March, 2005

President Valdas Adamkus hosted a reception celebrating the anniversary of Lithuania's induction into NATO. The reception was held at the Presidential Palace in Vilnius. It was attended by over 100 military and government officials of Lithuania as well as other NATO member nations.

The Lithuanian American Community was represented by Alfonsas Dzikas, LAC Executive Vice-President.



Ecos de Lituania

A very important aspect of Argentina's Lithuanian community is to focus its efforts on maintaining Lithuanian language, culture, and traditions. It is for this reason that two years ago, in the city of Berisso we created the radio program "Echoes of Lithuania" ("Ecos de Lituania", FM DIFUSION 98.1 Mhz). Every Sunday from 19:00-20:00 we broadcast news of current Lithuanian events, recount important aspects of Lithuania's history, teach traditional Lithuanian recipes, etc. We also play traditional and modern Lithuanian music.

We collect our information from publications and magazines which come from Brazil, Australia, Canada, United States, Germany, Belgium, Denmark. An example of a publication we reference is "Pasaulio Lietuvis" (The Lithuanian World).

Current members and staff include: Alejandra Cagliardi Semenaite, Ana Lujan Gedzeviciute, Cesar Gruce, Fabián Meschini, Isabel Kalvelyte Fourment, Juan José Fourment and the Director of the radio program Juan Ignacio Fourment Kalvelis.

All members and staff are active in the Lithuanian communities "Mindaugas" and "Nemunas" (both in the city of Berisso), the Argentinean Lithuanian Community (ALOST) and in the Argentinean Lithuanian Youth Community (ALJS). We also collaborate with the communities of Buenos Aires and Rosario.

In Argentina, our greatest problem is that the Lithuanian language has faded over the years. It is very important for us to send our youth to the Lithuanian high school "February 16" in Germany so that they can learn the language and rejuvenate it here in Argentina.

We would like to be able to broadcast "Echoes of Lithuania" over the internet, so that the radio program

could be listened to anywhere in the world. This is our dream. However, currently we are in a very difficult economic situation, and all of our efforts and budget are focused upon maintaining the radio program we have.

We are very proud that our efforts have not gone unnoticed. This past year we entered an annual radio competition, "Faro de Oro" (Lighthouse of Gold) which is based out of Mar del Plata. It is a competition in which different ethnic communities may enter their radio programs. It was a pleasant surprise that we made it to the final round of the competition, since this was our first time participating. We are currently in the final round, having been chosen among 100 other Argentinean radio programs.

We had a special live broadcast during the 8th annual South American Lithuanian Youth Conference, which occurred in Argentina (Buenos Aires, Rosario and Berisso) from January 15-22. We had a special opportunity to have foreign guests on the show and wanted to share their knowledge with Argentina's Lithuanian community.

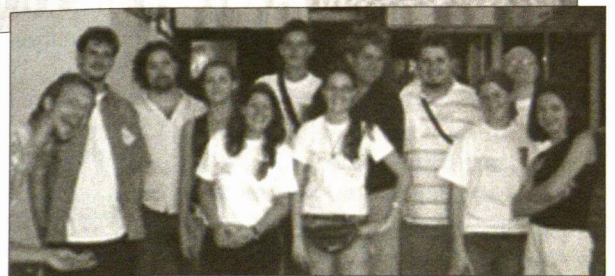
We can be reached via e-mail
at: ecosdelituania@yahoo.com.ar.

E-mails can be written in Spanish, Lithuanian or English.

Integral Organizing Committee "Suvaziavimas 2005"

Director "ECOS DE LITUANIA"

Juan Ignacio Fourment Kalvelis



7th World Lithuanian Games

We all strive to bring together people of Lithuanian heritage, because being part of a group makes it easier and more fun to stay Lithuanian.

Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Poland, Israel, and some other countries have been using sports to attract and keep the young of their Diaspora attached to their heritage. This year we'll do the same!

From June 30 to July 3, Vilnius, Lithuania, will host the 7th World Lithuanian Games (Pasaulio Lietuviu Sporto Zaidynes, PLSZ). The Games are financially supported by Lithuania's Department of Physical Culture and Sports and will be hosted by President Valdas Adamkus.

These Games are turning the spotlight on young Lithuanians outside Lithuania, starting with boys and girls age 12 and up. But participants of all ages and both genders are invited to compete in sports that Lithuanians enjoy.

Dear Chairs, how many Lithuanians Americans participate in the Lithuanian Games depends to a large extent on you and on your executive committees. You know who is involved with sports in your district. Please inform them about the 2005 Lithuanian Games. Urge and persuade them to participate. Point out to them that they will not only have the excitement of competing in sports events but will also make friends with athletes of their own age from Lithuania, tour the country of their heritage, and attend many interesting events.

Lithuanian American participation

in the Games is coordinated by the 2005 Lithuanian Games U.S. Committee of the Lithuanian Athletic Union of North America (SALFASS). The Lithuanian American Community, Inc., fully supports these Lithuanian Games.

Let us all do whatever we can to send all our sports-minded young people to the 2005 Lithuanian Games in Vilnius this summer. Excited by their interactions with the land and people of their heritage, they will infuse a welcome wave of energy into our Lithuanian American life upon their return.

Rimantas Dirvonis
Chair of the 2005 Lithuanian Games
U.S. Lithuanian
American Committee
SALFASS

Vaiva Vebraitė
President of the Executive Committee
American Lithuanian Community, Inc.

Information

7th World Lithuanian Games
Vilnius, Lithuania,
June 30 to July 3, 2005

- Games organizers (in Lithuania) are inviting participation in Basketball, Volleyball, Beach Volleyball, Tennis, Olympic Shooting, Swimming, Golf, Bowling, Billiards, and Soccer. Competitions will be conducted in men's and women's open classifications and in classifications for boys and girls 12 years and older.
- Participation of Lithuanian athletes from U.S. and Canada is coordinated by the U.S. and Canada Committees of the North American Lithuanian Physical Education and Sports Association (SALFASS) in cooperation with the Lithuanian Community of each country.
- The U.S. Committee is chaired by Rimantas Dirvonis, 20 Kane Court, Willowbrook, IL 60527. Home: 630-789-0529, Office: 312-681-3947, Fax: 312-681-3895, Email: rdirvonis@hotmail.com
- Assistant Chair of the U.S. Committee is Lithuanian American Community, Inc., Vice President for Sports Laurynas Misevicius, 218 Pastor's Walk, Monroe, CT 06468-1006. Home Phone and Fax: 203-452-5208, Mobile phone 203-895-7147, Email: larrykaunas@yahoo.com
- Parents are strongly urged to register their children ages 12 and older as participants in the Lithuanian Games.
- Officials and volunteers involved with Lithuanian sports activities in the U.S. are urged to work for an impressive participation by Lithuanian American athletes in the Games in Vilnius (Games organizers are expecting a great turnout by our sports clubs and individual athletes).
- The organizers in Vilnius will extend their world-renowned Lithuanian hospitality to the visiting athletes by providing housing and meals not only during the Games but also a day prior and a day after, June 29 through July 4.
- Organizers in Lithuania will offer visiting athletes many opportunities to tour interesting sites and to get acquainted with Lithuania's people and culture.
- Initial registration for the Games should be submitted by Monday, April 11, to the contacts listed in #3 and #4.

SALFASS U.S. Committee

Genrikas Songinas

The White Witch

THE WHITE WITCH - PART II

BALTOJI RAGANA

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

In the spring of 1851, Lithuanians rose in rebellion against the Russian oppressors.

The village smithy, Petras Balcius, disappeared and his house was padlocked. 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 Darunas, a poor but educated man who traveled from place to place, had stopped visiting them.

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.

It appears his house is being occupied by a stranger and the problem must be dealt with by the village seniunas.

THE WHITE WITCH – Part II

The seniunas went home with a clear conscience, knowing that he had done his duty and need fear no consequences. His neighbor, hearing about this later on that day, shook his head in disagreement.

“The Russians go hand-in-hand with the evil one”, he said, “but for us, good people, there could be problems. What if this witch conjures up some kind of illness for the people, or our animals? Then it will be too late. Something must be done now. The pastor must be informed, and he will resolve the situation.”

“Well, then, why don’t you go ahead and tell him? I myself would rather not visit the rectory,” answered the seniunas.

“Oh, you don’t have to go to the rectory if

you’d rather not. Just tell the pastor, the next time you go to confession, that a witch has moved into the smithy, and he’ll know what to do.”

The seniunas thought this over, and decided that next Sunday he would walk over to the church and go to confession.

At that time, the pastor of the Eisiškes church was a Pole, who did not know the Lithuanian language, but understood several individual words, and had learned a few sentences which he found useful in meting out penances. The few words he understood helped him to know what sort of transgressions the penitents were talking about, and he answered them in his own way. He wasn’t much bothered that the people didn’t understand him. He was very energetic, however, in battling superstition and sorcery, still left over in the villages from the old days, severely scolding and punishing those who believed in it.

Having found the old pastor hearing confessions in the church on Sunday morning, Raciuis waited his turn, then knelt at the grated window and whispered,

“A white witch is living in our village smithy.”

Having said this, he waited for the pastor’s reaction.

“That’s all?” asked the pastor, having understood only two words, “smithy” and “witch”.

“No, answered the seniunas, “also a black cat and a raven”.

“That’s all?” asked the priest, having reached the conclusion that the villager was a believer in witches and black cats.

“Yes, that’s all” said Raciuis, greatly relieved.

“For your penance you will say five prayers, and give five kopeks toward the repair of the church’s roof”, said the pastor.

The seniunas left the confessional very disappointed and irritated. It would be easy enough for him to say five prayers, but five kopeks weren’t so easy to come by, and would leave a big hole in his budget. He would have to sell a chicken. All the way home, he considered why the

pastor had given him this penance, and came to the conclusion that he must have been offended by his mentioning a witch. This made him angry with his neighbor, who had sent him to the priest in the first place.

This neighbor visited him that evening, and they walked outside, to discuss the situation without witnesses.

"Did you tell the pastor about the witch?"

"I suppose I didn't tell him in the right way, and he didn't say anything about the witch", complained the seniunas.

"So what kind of seniunas are you, then, if you don't know how to inform the priest about what has happened here? If you can't do the job yourself, you should ask someone else to do it, someone who knows how. If I had gone, I would have told the pastor everything he needed to know, and the next day, the pastor would have come and driven out the witch."

"Well, then, why don't you go and do that?"

"Alright, I will, and you'll see, the next day, the pastor will come".

The following day, the neighbor went to the church. But it wasn't as easy as he had imagined, to impart his news. In his own village, amongst his own people, he was bold and able to say whatever he wanted, but now, finding himself amid the church's tall columns he began to hesitate. He thought he would with pleasure turn around and go home, but then he would be ashamed. What would the seniunas say, what would the people say, when they found out that he hadn't even approached the pastor? In that same instant, the pastor came to the confessional and seated himself, ready to hear confessions. The villager found himself kneeling at the grate, just then opening.

"A witch with a black cat and a raven has taken up her abode in our village smithy!" he announced in one long breath.

"That's all?" he heard the pastor's calm voice.

"That's all." he replied.

"Then for your penance you will say five prayers and donate five kopeks toward the repair of the church's roof."

When the villager returned early from his church visit, the seniunas hurried to ask him if he had informed the

priest about the witch.

"Yes, I certainly did, but the pastor forbade anyone to speak about it. He said she was there as a punishment, and no one is permitted to speak about it. Evidently, he knows all about it."

And in this way, the white witch became a recognized resident of the Bartautai village smithy, though the people never spoke of her. Only after a year had gone by, did Raciūs's neighbor admit to him, that the pastor had given him a penance, ordering him to say five prayers and donate five kopeks towards the repair of the church's roof.

"Well, that's the same thing that happened to me", said Raciūs, "and I had to take a hen to Eisiskes market, so I could sell it to get the five kopeks for the roof".

The tramp Darunas again appeared, and began to visit the village more frequently, not so much, it seemed, as to beg charity, but to keep company with the inhabitants. He would always visit the smithy, and one boy told of having seen him seated on a bench against the lean-to, feeding bits of bread to the raven, which had flown down from his tree to sit on Darunas's shoulder.

One day a child in the village became suddenly very ill, and Darunas advised the mother to seek aid from the witch, saying he was certain she could and would help. Though fearful, the mother carried the child to the smithy, where the witch examined him and gave them medicine; after three days the child was well. From that time, whenever one of the villagers happened to get sick, they would turn for help to the white witch, and she healed them. And even when one of the teenagers suffered a severe injury to his leg, which bled profusely, she stopped the bleeding, bathed the wound with some sort of liquid, and bandaged the leg. After three weeks, the wound had healed and only a small scar remained. When Raciūs's son broke his arm, the witch surrounded it with thin boards, tied it with bandages so that it couldn't move and fastened it all with a scarf around his neck. When six weeks had passed, the arm was straight, strong and well again.

In thanks for her help, the villagers brought cheese, butter, milk and other foodstuffs, though the white witch never ever asked them for anything. No one knew how she was able to live, or what resources she may have had.

The witch always wore the same big black hooded cloak, avoided people, and no one from the outside world ever visited her, except for Darunas, who sometimes even remained on the property for longer periods of time. No one wondered about that, as everyone knew him, and recognized his willingness to help and advise anyone who needed him. He was often seen cutting or chopping wood or fixing a garden fence. But most chores around the property were carried out by the villagers, in thanks for medical treatment or advice, or for the water they drew from Balcius's well. Without being asked, they ploughed the garden, weeded the flower beds, and even planted and harvested the vegetables. A close bond developed between the villagers and the witch, though the name remained unchanged. The people always called her the white witch, as no one knew her real name.

She treated her patients using herbs, roots and berries, supplies of which she always gathered from fields and forest during summertime. She also drew from a stock of other medicines, but where they came from, no one knew.

An influenza epidemic ran through Lithuania in 1840, killing many people in surrounding villages, but only one person from Bartautai died, and he, not from influenza, but old age. If illness visited any family in the village, the white witch would hurry to the house, to nurse and medicate the patients, and in this way, she prevented the epidemic from overtaking the village.

She lived on the Balcius homestead for ten years, and then disappeared in the same way she had arrived – unseen by the villagers. By pure chance, however, one person observed her departure, as he led his horses at the edge of the woods. He told everyone later, that about four in the morning, just as the sky began to lighten, he saw a handsome carriage drawn by fine black horses, with coachman and servant, approaching by the road from Valkininkai. The carriage followed a round-about path, avoiding Bartautai, and drove directly into Balcius's yard. He had never before seen such a fine carriage, and continued to watch with great curiosity.

A dignified, well-dressed gentleman with gray hair descended from the carriage and entered the house, where a light already burned. He soon came back out, and with him, a fine young lady with long white hair, carrying a bag with a black cat. They seated themselves in the carriage, while the servant and coachman climbed down, entered the house, and returned carrying a grand-

looking trunk and a large cage housing a raven. The coachman fastened the trunk in back of the carriage and handed the cage to the young lady inside, while the servant doused the light and closed the doors, hanging padlocks on both. As the carriage turned around and left the property, the servant closed the gates and took his place next to the coachman, and then the carriage took off with the horses at a quick trot towards Eišiškes. But as they reached the Lydos road, they turned towards Vilnius and passed over the horizon.

When word spread through the village, many didn't want to believe that the white witch was gone, and went to the Balcius homestead to see for themselves. All was quiet, the doors locked, the windows covered, and neither cat nor raven was to be seen.

vThe white witch had truly gone.

Three days later, residents woke to sounds long unheard. A hammer striking an anvil reminded the villagers that, ten years ago, there had been a smithy in that place. Clearly the smith had returned. The seniunas hurried over, and found Petras Balcius hard at work.

Balcius seemed much changed, looking stronger, with heavier arms, but one leg up to the knee, was of wood. Many questions were asked, but Petras maintained a strict reserve and answered all questions vaguely or with a deliberate joke. The seniunas asked where he had been all that time and Petras answered, "out in the world". Asked where in the world, he answered, "everywhere". When asked how he had lost his leg, he replied that bad things happen. He was asked about the white witch, and said he knew no witches and had no knowledge of anyone living in his house.

The villagers discussed, considered, made a few guesses and eventually calmed down. Petras resumed work at his smithy, but now with a more experienced hand, and was more contemplative. Darunas came to visit the smith, staying with him for three days, which was unusual, but when he left, he didn't return to the village for a very long time.

Talk about the white witch never quieted down. People would often remember her, and as time went by, they heard that, in truth, she was not a witch, but the daughter of a Lithuanian nobleman. She had studied medicine in France, and at the start of the rebellion, she had returned to Lithuania and joined the rebels as their doctor.

Continued on the back page

Calendar of Events for May - June - July - August

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

May

May 1, 2005

Mother's Day Program
At the Lithuanian School
Poway, CA
Information: www.lithsd.org

May 1, 2005 - 4:00 pm

"ZUVEDRA" ballroom
dancing ensemble from
Klaipeda, Lithuania.
ONE performance only
Morton H.S. Auditorium
2423 S. Austen Blvd., Cicero, IL.
Sponsored by LAC, Inc.
Cultural Council,
"Biciulyste" 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

May 14, and May 15, 2005

11am - 6 pm
33rd 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 14 - 15, 2005

Weekend with film director,
Vytautas Landsbergis Jr.
St. Casimir's Catholic Parish Hall
Sponsored by Los Angeles
Chapter of
Lithuanian American Community
Information:
www.losangeleslb.com
May 14: 2:00 - 5:30 pm
May 15: 4:30 - 8:30 pm
Information:
www.losangeleslb.com

May 20 - 22, 2005

Mid-Central District
Spring Bowling and
District Convention
Council 96, Dayton, Ohio
Port Clinton, Ohio
Upcoming details will
be published as they
become available.
www.knightsoflithuania.com

May 21, 2005

DCLAC Spring Picnic
Zubkus Farm
Poolesville, MD
More information to follow
www.dclac.org

May 22, 2005

Los Angeles "Sister City"
Festival Representing City of
Kaunas, Lithuania
The Page Museum
Los Angeles, Information:
www.losangeleslb.com

JUNE

June 3, and June 5, 2005

Annual "Talka" Work Weekend
Help Neringa prepare for its
36th 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

June 5, 2005 - 12:30 pm

Council 26 Annual "Picnic"
Maironis Park,
Shrewsbury, MA.
Lithuanian dinner,
Baked goods, games, etc.
www.knightsoflithuania.com

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/](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

June 24, and June 25, 2005

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

June 25, - 29, 2005

Neringa Family
Camp in English
Information:
www.vida@neringa.org

June 25, 2005

Saturday, - TBA
Lithuanian Country Club
Jefferson Hills, PA
Annual "Jonines" Celebration
All evening and night celebration
with plenty of food and drink.

We are looking for musician(s) to
play Lithuanian music and songs
www.pittsburghlithuanians.com

June 25, to 29, 2005

Neringa Family Camp in English
Information: vida@neringa.org

July

July 24, 2005 - 12 Noon

Picnic and Annual Meeting
with Elections
Sponsor: Lithuanian American
Community Waukegan/Lake
County Chapter Where:
Shelter A, Lake County Forest
Preserve, Half Day, IL
Information: 847 - 855 - 5294

August

August 6, - 7, 2005

91st Annual Lithuanian Days
Saturday, August 6, 2005 and
Sunday, August 7, 2005
Schuylkill Mall, Frackville, PA
Sponsored by the
Knights of Lithuania, Council 144
Information:
bermika@infionline.net

August 7, - 14, 2005

20th Annual
Lithuanian Language Course
Camp Dainava,
Manchester, MI
Information: Vytautas Jonaitis
1332 Sprucewood Dr. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
Phone: 616-453- 7549
Email vjonaitis@juno.com or
[http://lithuanian-
american.org/dainava_lang.php](http://lithuanian-american.org/dainava_lang.php).

August 7, 2005

Community Picnic
Details to follow.
Sponsored by: Colorado
Chapter of the Lithuanian
American Community
www.coloradolithuanians.org

August 11,-14, 2005

Knights of Lithuania 92nd
National Convention.
Hosted by Council 19,
Pittsburgh, PA
Wyndham Pittsburgh Hotel.
More information will be posted
as its available.

Information:
www.knightsoflithuania.com

Aug. 15, 2005

House of Lithuania
Lawn Program
Balboa Park
Sponsored by San Diego
Chapter of
Lithuanian American Community
Details to follow
www.lithsd.org

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baltic folklore

The White Witch

Balcius also joined the rebels, and when a cannonball shattered his leg, she treated him and hid him at her father's estate, where he passed ten years working as their blacksmith. She had been in great danger when the Russians beat down the insurrection, and at Balcius's suggestion, hid herself at his own homestead. Only when Russia finally declared an amnesty, was she free to return to her estate and Balcius to his own home and smithy.

Twenty-one years after Balcius returned to his home, in 1865, a Bartautai farmer stopped at Balcius's smithy, and found it again empty and closed, padlocked just like the house.

A second insurrection against Russian rule in Lithuania had spontaneously risen, and the Rudniku forest was again alive with rebel troops, often with small groups active far from their main units.

Petras Balcius was a rebel messenger, and, disguised as a tramp, gathered whatever information he could about Russian troop movements. As he escorted a Franciscan monk with important information from Gardinas to Vilnius, they were set upon near Valkininkai by a group of Cossacks. The Cossack leader wounded the monk with his bayonet, and was about to finish him off, when Balcius pulled out his pistol and shot him and one other. During the ensuing fight, the monk was able to get away and conceal himself deep in the forest, but the smith was overpowered and backed to death. The Cossacks dragged his corpse to Valkinikiai, where one resident recognized and identified the smith from Bartautai.

The following day, a group of ten Cossack police rode

out to search the Bartautai smithy. They did no harm to the people of the village, but looted and ruined the smith's property, finally burning everything down to the ground. The well collapsed, leaving no more than a small mound, to be known by later generations as the "White Witch's Hill."

The Cossacks, riding back to Valkininkai, were ambushed by a group of rebels near the village of Cebatoriai, and all shot to death. It was said that this had been an act of revenge for the destruction of Balcius's property, and had been carried out by a rebel group called "The White Witch's Unit".

The fate of the "white witch" was unknown for a long time afterward, but eventually, people learned that she had escaped to Paris immediately after the second insurrection failed. And Paris was where she died. Just before the First World War, in 1914, in the Montparnasse cemetery, one could find a moss-covered stone monument with this inscription:

"Here rests a daughter of Lithuania, who was forced to leave her enslaved homeland and here found peace - 1870".

There is no name inscribed on the monument, but judging from the date of death, this is believed to be the last resting place of Lithuania's "White Witch".

Author- By Genrikas Songinas
English translation by Gloria O'Brien

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

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