

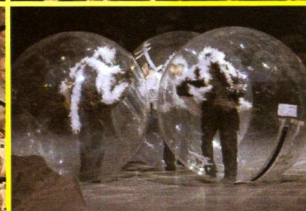
# bridges

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july/august 2010

LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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## A Long Lasting Memory

When a well respected political leader passes on, his life works can only be reflected in the current face of his country. Algirdas Brazauskas has definitely left an immense legacy that will linger in Lithuania's political and social life for years to come. He is considered to have held a key role in the breaking away from the Soviet Union. As head of Lithuania's Communist Party, he formally severed ties with Moscow, a bold move which led to the Soviet Union's demise. As Lithuania began to restructure and rebuild after years of Soviet reign, Brazauskas kept leading the country. In 1992, he took on the role of Speaker of the House and a year later was elected as the First President of the Republic of Lithuania. Brazauskas chose not to seek reelection in 1998 after serving his first term as President and instead decided to retire. His retirement, however, was short-lived. He felt a pull to serve the country he loved and in 2001, made a return to politics, this time as Prime Minister. He left office in 2006, and formally retired from politics in 2007 when he stepped down as the head of the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania. Yet, even till the day of his death, Brazauskas was considered to remain an influential leader in Lithuanian politics.



**Algirdas Mykolas Brazauskas**  
September 22, 1932 - June 26, 2010

Lithuania's quest towards westernization is partly due to the work that Brazauskas did. Just two years into his term as president, he sent a formal request to the General Secretary of NATO formally requesting that Lithuania be able to join. Requirement for membership still had to be met, however, and Brazauskas would steer the country through these changes. Lithuania also began taking steps towards EU membership under his leadership. While he was no longer serving as president when the country was granted membership into both organizations, he participated in both ceremonies, helping to represent Lithuania worldwide at the highest diplomatic level.

Brazauskas was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer in December 2008, and passed away June 26th, 2010. A long line of people circled the area around the President's Palace in Vilnius, just to place white flowers in front on his casket and express their condolences to the President and his family. Members of his family mourned beside him, as did all of Lithuania. Lithuanian American Community Student Internship Program students joined the mourners at the wake to pay tribute to the great life of President Brazauskas. It was an honor to give our respect to one of the greatest political leaders of Lithuania and silently thank him for all he has done for our country. The next day, students working at the Lithuanian Parliament had the opportunity to sign a memory book from all of the internship members to express in words this immense loss for Lithuania. The memory of Algirdas Brazauskas will stay with all of us for a very long time and all that he has accomplished throughout his life will never be forgotten. Algirdas Brazauskas will always remain an inspiration and a role-model for what it means to be devout to one's country and actively participate in shaping it.

*Aldona Gintautaitė, Eglė Gintautaitė and Ieva Smidė*



*Ieva Smidė, Aldona Gintautaitė, Eglė Gintautaitė and hundreds of Lithuanian citizens paying their respects to President Brazauskas whose body was lying in state at the Rotunda in the Presidential Palace.*

*Photo by Tadas Stonkus*

*The students are part of the LAC Student Internship Program. They are serving their internship at the Foreign Ministry and at Seimas.*



## A MAN AND AN ERA COMES TO AN END: ALGIRDAS MYKOLAS BRAZAUSKAS

*Birutė Bublienė*

Throng of mourners gathered outside the Presidential Palace in Vilnius the morning of the 29th of June, patiently waiting to get inside the Presidential Gate to pay their last respect to the former Lithuanian president and prime minister Algirdas Brazauskas. The former Communist bureaucrat who helped Lithuania through a stormy and difficult Political era for his country to gain its independence, passed away June 26th, in his home at Turniskiai, outside of Vilnius, at the age of 77. It was this day that the former President finally was released from pain, after years of battling with lymphoma and prostate cancer.

Lithuania's people stood for hours to wish him farewell and to acknowledge their thanks to a Man that had done so much for his country and its people. So, that day, I also joined my fellow Lithuanians to say good bye to a Man, who in December of 1989, led the governing party to sever its ties with the Soviet Party, and declaring Lithuania's independence from Moscow in March of 1990.

Dr. Paulius Saudargas, Member of Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, invited me to the Parliament and I joined him and other Parliamentarians, who that day were leaving in a government caravan of buses to the Presidential Palace to pay their final respects to A. Brazauskas.

At Parliament we are all given a beautiful white, long-stemmed rose to place at the coffin. In a long procession of white roses, we entered the Presidential Palace by private entrance and were led by security people through the beautiful inner courtyard of the Presidency and into the Hall, where A. Brazauskas was laid out for mourners to bid him a final good bye.

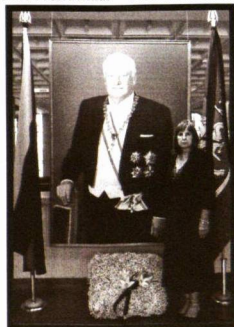
Before entering the Presidential Hall, all the Parliamentarians were told that only two people were allowed to get close to the casket, to pay their last respects and then be able to express their condolence to the widow Kristina Brazauskas and the family. To my surprise, the Parliamentarians chose me as one of the two members, having decided that among

themselves, that I, as Executive Vice President of the Lithuanian-American Community, would be one of the two representing the Lithuanians in the States. It truly was an honor, for now I was able to officially take the opportunity to express a joint condolence on behalf of all the Lithuanian-American Community.

As I approached the casket, I realized what a powerful, large, elegant and strong persona he had about him – even in death. As I said my prayers and placed the rose next to his coffin, I bid farewell to A. Brazauskas and wished him to rest in peace after a life of stormy living. I proceeded towards the family, and the widow Kristina got up from her chair, very graciously took my hand, as I expressed the LAC's condolence to her and her family. Mrs. Brazauskas expressed how appreciative she was with the LAC's presence here today, and gave me a warm hug when accepting the written LAC condolence. I continued down the line in expressing our sympathy to the rest of the family, who also stated that they were happy to see us there to express our respect to their Father.

As I was leaving the Memorial Hall, I looked back one more time at the casket, and nodded a final adieu to the Man and an Era that had come to an end.

\*\*\*\*\*



*Birutė Bublienė standing in front of a photograph of President A. Brazauskas in the Rotunda Hall of the Presidential Palace where the President's body was lying in state.*

Hundreds of Lithuanians attended the Funereal Mass at Vilnius Cathedral the following day. Thousands more lined the streets in a final farewell to their former leader. The Lithuanian Military with all the formalities of a state funeral, led A. Brazauskas to his final resting place at Antakalnis Cemetery. There, surrounded by the Lithuanian people, thousands upon thousands brought white flowers, which were laid out in the surrounding hills overlooking the gravesite,--- the Former President and Premier A. Brazauskas found his final resting place July 1, 2010.

*Birutė Bublienė is the Executive Vice President of the Lithuanian American Community and the Director of the Lithuanian American Community Student Internship Program.*

*Letter from the Editor*

*In this month's issue you'll find a great variety of topics. I am always so grateful to the people who take time out from their busy lives to provide us with articles and photographs. So once again, many thanks to each and every one of you. A very special thank you to Kazys Razgaitis not only for providing the excellent photographs for the covers and Photo Album, but for the many hours he spent getting them ready for Bridges.*

*I am not going to do my usual ramblings because I have some very exciting news to share with you. I received the following email from Sister Margaret Petcavage, SSC. For me this issue is rather personal. My grandparents were married by Mother Maria's brother in Scranton, PA in 1900. Later my great-uncle became pastor of the same church for more than forty years. Finally, Sister Margaret, who worked so hard on the documentation for the Vatican was raised on the same street where I lived in Scranton. I guess events really do come in threes.*

*Jeanne Shalna Dorr*  
Jeanne Shalna Dorr



*Mother Maria Kaupas*

## Sisters of St. Casimir

### **GOOD NEWS - and we thank God for it.**

We received word on July 1, 2010 that Mother Maria was raised to the level of

#### **VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD**

Now the doctors could start studying the proposed miracle materials sent to them back in 2004. If they approve the miracle then the Pope would declare her "Blessed". Ceremonies for that- Beatification - would take place in Chicago as this Pope only does Canonizations in Rome.

*Here is a copy of what was in the Vatican newspaper that day.*

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)** Pope Benedict XVI recognized the heroic virtues of a Lithuanian-born nun who went to the United States to found an order dedicated to St. Casimir, patron saint of Lithuania. The Vatican announced July 1 the first major step toward sainthood for Mother Maria Kaupas, who established the Sisters of St. Casimir order in 1907 in Scranton, Pa. Casimira Kaupas was born in Ramygala, Lithuania, in 1880. She traveled to Scranton to work as a housekeeper for her brother who was serving as a parish priest there. She soon became attracted to the religious life and sought to participate in it. She was asked to form an order to sustain Catholic education among Lithuanian immigrants, and the Sisters of St. Casimir was established. She took the name of Sister Maria, and later Mother Maria. In 1911, the order moved their headquarters to Chicago, where there was a large Lithuanian population. There they established schools and hospitals over the years.



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**\* Covers and all photos of the "Lithuanian Song Festival"  
by Kazys Razgaitis of Rosemont, PA.**

## ANSWER TO TRIVIA QUESTION

Trivia Quiz on page 7

Source: *THE POLISH WAY* by Adam Zamojski.

"The population of the Commonwealth in 1600 was at ten million, equal to that of Italy and the Iberian Peninsula, twice that of England, and two-thirds that of France. Only 40 percent were Poles and they were concentrated in about 20 percent of the area. The settled peasantry was made up of three principal ethnic groups-Polish, Lithuanian and Ruthene-and its lifestyle varied considerably across the country. The free, land-owning peasantry of Wielkopolska nourished themselves mainly with pork, fish and vegetables...mutton, veal and beef...both wheat bread and wine. The increasing burdened rural proletariat of Mazovia ate less well, while the primitive serfs of Lithuania and Belorussia survived on black bread, gruels and vegetables and what ever mushrooms and fruit they can gather."

Edward Shakalis is a retired Electrical Engineer and a ham radio operator. He and his son Rick run "The Lithuanian Open" golf tournament.

## We came, We saw, We conquered

The IX Lithuanian Song Festival in Toronto on the 4th of July, 2010. We even sang!

Rasa Brittain

In any Lithuanian festival, the primary objective is to be festive, and how we do it – by celebrating song, dance, art, mushroom-picking, or any other unique aspect of our culture – is just the excuse for a serious tribal throwdown. In the case of this Dainų Šventė, the music-making managed to hold its own against the merry-making.

But make no mistake, the party is a magnet. Lithuanian choirs across the continent swelled last fall, or were created outright, by folks who decided to legitimize their trek to Toronto by learning the repertoire and actually participating in the concert. And the event may be billed as a North American song festival, but welcomed all comers in the final roster of over 1,100 singers and 50 choirs from the United States and Canada, the British Isles, Poland, and of course, Lithuania.

Everyone spent at least a year learning the repertoire of newly arranged "standards" and new compositions, scattered among choirs of children, students, and adults. Many Lithuanian or blended families participated together – I'll admit it gave me warm fuzzies to wail in the soprano section next to my teenaged daughter – but most had friends and family who came along as part of the entourage.

Our Lithuanian-Canadian hosts hit the ground running the day after the 8th song festival in Chicago four years ago, clearly using every available minute of that time to meticulously plan 3+ days of entertainment and the Big Show itself for the hordes of Lithuanians that descended on the airport hotel area for the weekend. The White House Situation Room has nothing on the team assembled by co-chairs Paulius and Rasa Kuras and Artistic Director Dalia Viskontienė.

The boots on the ground and behind the scenes in Toronto have raised the bar very high for the next big fly-in of Lithuanians on the continent. (Sorry, Boston, the heat is on now for that dance festival in two years!)

Photos and even videos from the weekend were available online mere days after the last chords echoed through the Hershey Centre, and a DVD is on the way, so allow me to share some thoughts from inside the soprano section instead of a detailed timeline. As for the Friday night

concert and cocktails, the Saturday "street party" at the Marriott (more cocktails) and the final banquet and dance (hic!) It was all a hearty and heartfelt blur of Lithuanians playing catchup over loud music and conversation and admiring how well our kids are growing and the rest of us are aging, and joining in impromptu song and dance wherever and whenever possible.

On to the IX Dainų Šventė performance itself. As many highlights as my editor here will allow, not play-by-play! My thoughts only; your mileage may vary.

The visual centerpiece of the concert was a giant sacred fire pit ("aukuras") that blew smoke and flickered evocatively to heighten the drama of various musical pieces.

The special effects – lighting, fog, choreography and costumes – went off seamlessly to take the audience back

through the mists of time to Lithuania's nature-worshipping roots. A pagan priest surrounded by vestal virgins and boys dressed as oak leaves (yes, you read that right) intoned ancient incantations at times throughout the program to introduce different sections that organized the songs into day parts: Morning, day, evening and night.

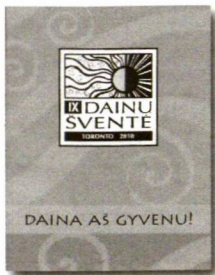
The slogan of the festival was "Daina Aš Gyvenu," loosely translated as "I Am The Song." Which is, coincidentally, the title of a rare English-language piece composed by the late Jonas Govedas and performed by the children's choirs. The

rousing title anthem in Lithuanian (composed by Rita Klionienė of Cleveland to lyrics by Nijolė Benotienė of Toronto) was lustily sung by all the singers.

The adult choirs' menfolk took full advantage of their isolated lines to belt out stirring stuff in Jurgis Juozapavičius' arrangement of "Linai," Nijolė Sinkevičiūtė's folkloric "Ei, Jovar Jovar!" and the jazzed-up "Šių Naktelių" medley by Giedrius Svilainis. (The sentimental "O Atsimenu Namelį" featured a very fine boy soprano, Aras Puodžiūnas, who is Canada's heir apparent to Justin Bieber.) We women had ample opportunity to match the guys in those songs and more and for the sopranos, there was even an optional high "c" in Rita K.'s arrangement of "Palankėj, Palankėj!" Personally, my work is not done unless a glass has cracked.

The singing by Chicago's Darius Polikaitis of the Bernardas Brazdžionis poem "Esi Dangau" had a gospel choir moment that captured the cultural influences of our new country so naturally and effortlessly I can only shake my head in admiration. Say Hallelujah!

The student choirs had a few designated songs and alternately joined in on others with the adults and kids, so were seated in the center of the group, which



also maximized them as eye candy for the videographers. Fresh-faced and attractive and with so much stamina they're obviously mainlining Red Bull. How else to explain how they nailed Faustus Strolia's frenetically arranged folk song "Mylėjau Mergele?" But they dialed down the energy with a restrained and wistful delivery of "Pajūrio Vaikai," a lovely piece composed by Loretta Sungailienė to lyrics by Vytautas Mačernis. It was conducted by its arranger, Saulius Kliorys of Cleveland to old photos from the albums of these kids' grandparents blown up on the big arena screens.

There were lots of sweet confections for the littlest singers to warble, and as much as older folks love to hear young voices raised in song, I just don't think kids are as enthused about the pretty pieces as we are. They really perked up for "Drum Drum," a folkloric counting rhyme arranged and directed with brio by Rita Kliorienė, and choreographed with clapping, stomping and all kinds of energetic gestures. The kids totally raised the roof with that one.

The exuberant Alexandre Stankevičius of Montreal conducted his composition "Pavasaris ir Vaikai" (lyrics by Henrikas Nagys) as behind him boys dressed as giant daisies swayed in an imaginary breeze and a giant butterfly floated around them. In my group we referred to that one as Butterfly Boy, and if Lady Gaga gets a gander at him, she'll hire him on the spot. Movable wings, light-up antennae! He was a sensation.

Truly, is there a people on this planet that loves owls as much as Lithuanians do? Another Dainų Šventė, another owl song. And the effects to the adult choirs' rendition of "Didel Galva Pelieda" were freakishly inspired. Three young'uns covered in feathers ROLLED in, in giant hamster balls, no lie! And then HATCHED from them! Can you imagine the late-night planning committee meeting where that idea was suggested?! But they made it happen and my spy in the audience reports the littlest culture cultures were particularly thrilled by the spectacle.

Another dazzling idea was the controlled distribution of chemical "glow-sticks" to all the singers. On cue near the end of the program, we snapped them, the lights went down, and the audience was treated to a shimmering Lithuanian flag as we waved our lights in descending rows of neon yellow, green and red. (Of course, some of the less-evolved felt the need to hurl their glow-sticks onto the arena floor during the closing ceremonies as parents in the audience bewilderingly allowed their pre-schoolers to run down to get them. Honestly, mūsų žmonės!)

Lithuania has always been known as a land of singers, so it's natural that our community outside our homeland's borders also benefits from a brain trust of Lithuanian choral leadership that would impress in any symphony

hall in any major city. It's all the more remarkable because for most it's not a full-time job – these people all excel in their outside (and often unrelated) careers.

Artistic Director Dalia Viskontienė consulted with American-, Canadian-born and native Lithuanian choral musicians to select the repertoire, prepare the choirs and conduct at the concert. Some also composed, arranged or even wrote lyrics for new works that made up a third of the concert program. It was varied, inclusive and accessible (OK, perhaps the modern, edgy "Nebuvo Tai Žemė," created specially for this concert by Nijolė Benotienė and Rimas Biliūnas, went over a few heads.)

Lithuanian singer-songwriter Marijonas Mikutavičius performed in concert Friday night at the International Center, and joined in at the concert for his boisterous "Pasveikinkit Vieni Kitus." Think Neil Diamond wannabe. People kept referring to him as a rock star. Um, sorry, but no. Saulius Kliorys and Kęstutis Daugirdas are rock stars. Young, energetic, inspired conductor-composer-singer (and in the soprano section at least, sigh-evoking) triple threats that will be running the top Lithuanian choirs on the continent not very far down the road. Each contributed works and owned the podium at the festival concert with authority and style!

It's too bad that so many able directors weren't able to attend or to conduct – as a singer, I like working under different batons and as a singing community we're blessed to have so many talented people prepping us. I wish more of them were in Toronto this time. (You know who you are! And Philly's indomitable leader Ilona Babinskienė gets her own shout-out – mes taves pasiilgom Kanadoje!!!)

How about that official garb. On the record, all participants say the oatmeal-colored shawls and shirts were comfortable and becoming. Off the record, meet us at the bar and we'll talk.

But otherwise... as Dalia Viskontienė predicted at the beginning of the rehearsal, we rocked it. And IX Dainų Šventė rocked us. We're Lithuanian – we sing! We do it on a small scale – a small gathering of a few families, a campfire, a bus trip. And we do it BIG – filling a third of the seats in a major arena with singers with a top-notch wind orchestra and human hamster balls. Song connects us, it joins us, it bonds us.

No matter what stands out among our memories of this weekend in Toronto, it all started, and continues... with song.

### See y'all at the next one.

*Rasa Britain wears her Philadelphia Laisve Chorus T-shirt even when she's not singing. Listeners to Philly and New York City CBS Radio news stations know her as Rasa Kaye, but her daughter's friends have been known to call her "Awesome Mommy" while her husband's cronies like to call her The Warden. Because they are SO-O-O amusing.*

reflections

# Christmas in July

Jeanne Dorr

Once again I was tempted not to write this article this year because I have nothing new I can tell you about the young man about whom I am writing. However, you the readers, again came through with your generosity last year although I had grave doubts that you might be bored to tears after reading the same thing year after year.

What can I tell you about a young boy I met only one time, hugged twice and sent me two notes?

I can tell you that after all these years the meeting is as fresh in my mind as if it happened yesterday. As for the notes? They are safely tucked away in an album along with the red rose he handed me when we met.

The young boy was Arturas and he came from a small village about a half hour from Kaunas. He was diagnosed with leukemia when he was in second grade. He was in the sixth grade when we met. Arturas lived with his widowed mother and toddler brother in a typical small wooden house. His mother is a beautiful woman but you could see the fear and worry in her eyes. She was trying to keep her spirits up for Arturas while at the same time knowing his time on this earth was limited. She was consumed with worry that her younger son was being passed from neighbor to neighbor while she spent days and nights at Arturas' side when he was hospitalized. There were times it was too expensive for her to take the bus home at night and return in the morning.

I first heard about Arturas from his school principal who worried about the entire family. My visit with him was postponed a few times because he was in the hospital. When the day finally came we met at the school. His mother was embarrassed by her house. If only she had seen the things I saw while traveling in Lithuania she would not have blinked an eye about her house.

They were both very nervous about meeting an American for the first time. I was nervous about meeting Arturas because I knew this would be a one time visit. He was in sixth grade and I was a sixth grade social studies teacher who over the years lost several students through death. I wasn't great at handling the situation. Arturas was small and rail thin and wore a cap because of his hair loss. He and his mother were sitting on a sofa in the principal's office. I told him I was glad he was here meeting an American rather than being in the principal's office for doing something wrong. I could never imagine him being in that position and the principal later confirmed that he had never been in trouble. It served as an ice breaker. Arturas smiled, slowly rose to his feet, hugged me and



Arturas (Right) and a friend enjoy the Christmas tree in their village school.

handed me a red rose.

What do you talk about in this situation? I kept the conversation geared along the lines I would talk to my own sixth grade students. First on the list was school. Arturas enjoyed it but for much of the past year he was tutored at home because he was too weak to attend school. Of course, sports were next and the topic was American and Lithuanian basketball. He was surprised to learn that many American NBA players paid to have their heads shaved. He wanted to know why, but I didn't have an answer. He began to relax and took his cap off. We also agreed that little brothers could be pests from time to time, especially when they get into your things.

I knew there was no chance for recovery but there is always that slim chance of a miracle. I have always believed, "Where there's life, there's hope." I asked Arturas what he would like for Christmas. His face lit up and he told me would love to have a *used, blue* bicycle and that he would fly down the country roads as fast as he could. He emphasized the word *used*. Lithuanian children are aware of their parents' financial problems and are not shielded from everyday realities. I told him if he was well enough to ride in December the bike would be waiting for him. He was beginning to tire and our visit was over. He rose, with assistance from his mother, and hugged and kissed me. We both knew this was our first and final visit. I could feel his bones through his shirt and when I looked at his mother she had tears streaming down her cheeks. I stayed at the school, shaken to the core, while the principal drove them home.



The visit bothered me for the rest of my of time in Lithuania. At the same time both Mrs. Grazina Landsbergis and Dr. Regina Svoba worried about helping children whose parents or grandparents would be unable to give their children even one small gift at Christmas. Lithuania was having a financial crisis as it is today. Their funds did not have money for even the smallest gifts. I couldn't promise them anything but told them I would talk to Lithuanian Orphan Care in Chicago about taking on the added responsibilities of receiving financial gifts to ease this problem and sending the money to Lithuania. I also could not promise either woman how the Bridges readers would react.

Arturas sent me a photo taken with his sixth grade class. He was carried to school that day and his classmates held him up on both sides. You can't see it in the photo but the principal told me he was too weak to stand. That photo was his pride and joy. It was his final class picture. The same students who held him up carried his casket to his grave the following May.

Christmas in July was an immediate success, thanks to the Bridges readers. You are the only people who support this cause and you have never disappointed the children of Lithuania. After Arturas died I decided to dedicate this article each year to the boy who wanted to have a *used, blue* bicycle but never lived to receive my gift.

Your donations will be divided between Mrs. Landsbergis and Countryside Children's Fund administered by Valstieciu laikrasciu in Vilnius. Both are an integral part of Lithuanian Orphan Care.

We are like a ripple in a lake started by a small stone. Arturas was that stone and you are the ripple that became wider and wider. No one receives any bicycles but rather very modest gifts. In one case, when Mrs Landsbergis was visiting a village family she was shocked to see that neither the parents nor the children had adequate bedding. She returned a week later with pillows, blankets, and linens. They were sleeping in their winter coats and were thrilled to have real bedding. The ripple grew because she was visiting a family in their house to distribute Christmas gifts which you so generously provided.

Why am I writing about Christmas in July? We are all volunteers both here and in Lithuania. Money has to be collected and sent to Lithuania. The volunteers in Lithuania need to know how many families they can expect to help, the gifts have to be bought, wrapped and delivered.



One of the final times Arturas (front with white shirt) was with his classmates.

When I started to write this article one dollar bought four litas. This year one dollar buys 2.8 litas. While writing this article I checked the Lithuanian unemployment rate and it was near 15%. It seems many children will have a bleak Christmas.

If you can possibly brighten a child's Christmas please send your tax deductible checks to:

**Lithuanian Orphan Care**  
2711 W. 71st St.  
Chicago, IL 60629

You must write **CHRISTMAS GIFTS** on your checks.

\*\*\*

*Unless we make Christmas an occasion to share our blessings, all the snow in Alaska won't make it "white".*

\*\*\*

*Bing Crosby*

*Jeanne Dorr is the Editor of Bridges and is a member of the Board of Directors of Lithuanian Orphan Care, a branch of the Human Services Council of the Lithuanian American Community, Inc.*

## TRIVIA QUESTION

(No. 37)

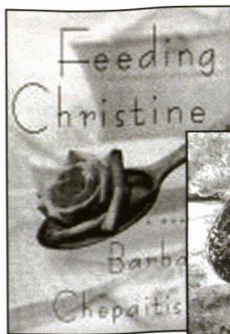
(1600)

What was the population of the Lithuania-Poland Commonwealth back in 1600?

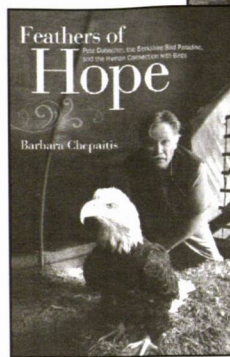
(A) Four Million (B) Ten Million (C) 875,000

Answer to Trivia Quiz on page 5

## Meet the Author, *Barbara Chepaitis*



Barbara and her little friend enjoy the outdoors.



Interview with  
Barbara Chepaitis

Jeanne Dorr

**Q: Can you tell us what motivated you to write?**

**A:** I'm not really sure what started me as a writer, because I started writing well before you

ask yourself questions like that. In second grade I wrote the "Christmas play" for the Catholic school I went to. It had to do with the animals being able to speak on Christmas Eve, something I found out much later is a Lithuanian tradition. From there, I just kept writing – poems, stories, essays, anything at all. Over time it became clear to me that I'm one of those writers who writes because they breathe. Even my son says he can't imagine a world in which I'm not writing.

Of course, that writing has taken many forms. I started writing professionally for Public Relations and Advertising, then went to graduate school for a Masters degree in literature. After that I began teaching and seriously writing novels, which led me to a Creative Writing program and a doctorate. While I was getting my doctorate I not only wrote

a lot more. I also started a storytelling trio, "The Snickering Witches." Our motto is that we tell the old stories and make up the new ones.

That, for me, became connected to the science fiction novels I've published, since science fiction uses the archetypes of mythology placed in a futuristic world. My sci-fi series, though, is really more of a series of mystery novels set in the future, where the characters happen to have telepathic powers. My primary character, a woman named Jaguar Addams, rehabs criminals by making them face their fears. First, she has to figure out what those fears are. Since folktales and myths were often about helping people face and deal with fears, the connection is inevitable.

I continue to tell folktales from all over the world, and learning those stories greatly enriched my writing. As I explored the old stories from different cultures, I also began to see how they can be translated into contemporary terms. Lately I've been particularly interested in how ancient tales continue to live in our times, in just the same way our distant personal ancestry still lives. My latest novel, "The Amber", uses Lithuanian mythology as it acts on my contemporary characters.

And my first nonfiction book, "Feathers of Hope" is out this year through SUNY Press. It's about an amazing bird sanctuary, Berkshire Bird Paradise, and the way humans connect with birds. I included a great deal of bird mythology and folktale in it, relying once again on that ancient form to tell the new stories.

**Q: Where do you get your ideas?**

**A:** Ideas are everywhere. I find them in folktales, as I've mentioned, but I also find them in the people we meet casually in a store, in the man who takes the tickets at a toll booth, in the trees and the bees all around us. Then, one of those ideas will suddenly connect with an emotion, and turn itself into a story.

One example of this was a very strange interaction I had with a man in line at the supermarket. He was loading lots of peanuts from his cart, and he saw me watching and wondering about this. He started telling me stories about the animals he feeds in his yard, but that became a rather unusual story about speaking with extra-terrestrials. Though the conversation was fantastic, he was a very polite old man, and I wondered about the difference between his reality and mine, and about how you can believe so thoroughly in a fantasy. That conversation was repeated almost verbatim in my novel, "These Dreams", which is all about searching out the difference between our most heartfelt dreams, and illusions we nurture about our reality.

Another example is my relationship to cooking. I've

always loved to cook, but that love only became the basis for my novel "Feeding Christine" after a conversation I had with my storytelling group about how food is language all its own.

So you never know how an interest or an event is going to develop into story. As a writer, you just keep a large mental file, and wait for the spark that makes it grow.

**Q: What can you tell us of your childhood?**

**A:** I grew up in a culturally mixed household. My mother was Italian, and my father was Lithuanian, and our house was a typical extended immigrant family, with grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles all around. Because of that I was surrounded by a great wealth of language and culture, which I think enriched my interest in words and writing. My mother was a teacher, so my siblings and I grew up with lots of learning, and both my parents were musical as well. My mother was a singer, and my father, a renaissance man, was a chemist by profession, but also a violinist and a basketball coach. In fact, I remember watching the Lithuanian team in the Olympics and thinking how much he would have enjoyed that. His high school team won the state championship, so maybe that's an inherited talent after all.

We had music all around us, all the time, and at the dinner table we might talk about anything from hunting to Sibelius, or Shakespeare to Puccini. Of course, with the two different cultures, there were some interesting moments. An Italian marrying a Lithuanian was suspicious in those days, and my mother told us the story of the first year they had Christmas together. Her mother sat next to her and insulted my father in Italian ("Look at his eyes. They're like frog eyes."), and his mother sat next to him and insulted my mother in Lithuanian ("Why is she so skinny? Where are her breasts?")

There was a distinct difference in the cultures, and my mother always said I took after my father. I had his love of nature, always wanting to go out into the woods, and I had a brooding quality. I was a daydreamer, of course, because that's what writers do at any age, and it was years later that I read that you know a Lithuanian best when they're working or daydreaming. And I'm stubborn – well, persistent really. Like all good Lithuanians, right?

In looking back, I can see that the way my father lived reflected a great deal of the heritage left behind in 'the old country', as my grandparents called it. Though he was a hunter, and what he caught fed his large family, he was adamantly against sport hunting of any kind, and complained bitterly about the city people who would come to our rather rural county to hunt for sport. When I was researching for "The Amber", I found an old Lithuanian prayer that says, "May the blood of animals, fish or birds killed when I am satiated never soil my hands."

As I learn more about my own heritage, I'm often

surprised at how much of it was actually practiced in my family, without anyone ever naming it, as well as how much of it I practiced for years without connecting it to anything Lithuanian. For instance, whenever I moved to a new place the first thing I did was plant a tree. And I've planted trees to mark births and deaths and weddings as well. Then, another part of that ancient Lithuanian prayer says, "If you wed, plant a wedding tree. If a child is born, plant a tree. If someone beloved dies, plant a tree. Prayers will attain holiness through trees of thanks."

My tree planting, my careful scouring of the yard before I mow the lawn for snakes and toads that might be hiding there, my love of honey and home made bread – is that in my blood? It would seem so. In fact, it seemed all the ancestral imperatives continued to live in me, though I'd never been taught them with words.

And there's one example of how my Lithuanian heritage influenced my writing in a very direct and almost surreal way. That is, my novel, "The Amber", which began and ended with bees.

I'd been swarmed by bees and stung pretty badly three times within two years, and when I complained about this to a friend he said, "You're Lithuanian, aren't you?"

I admitted to it, and he told me that Lithuanians have a bee mythology. In fact, he said, there was a Lithuanian Catholic church near me with a stained glass window showing not saints or angels, but a honeybee. He suggested that maybe it was my ancestors trying to tell me something, and maybe I should write about bees. I thought that was a good idea, but no inspiration happened. A few years later my husband and I built a house in the country. In our first year there a swarm of honeybees stopped in our yard to make a new hive in one of our trees. That fall, a swarm of paper wasps built a nest in the space above the ceiling of our bedroom. "My ancestors," I grumbled, as I paid the exterminator who removed them.

But I went back to the idea of writing about them, and I researched Lithuanian bee stories and bee mythology. I found out about the bee goddess Austėja, and decided she'd have a place in the novel I'd write. There would have to be violins, too, because all the Lithuanians in my life were violinists. Then, of course, if it had violins it had to have devils.

That's as far as I got before other projects took my attention away. But a year later another swarm of honeybees went through our yard. I thought they'd find a tree, but a few days later, while I was working in my office I heard a buzzing sound coming from an electrical outlet. I got a screwdriver and opened the cover of the outlet to see what was going on, and immediately tiny wings and legs popped out. Lots of them.

*Continued on page 17*



*"Omnia Instaurare in Christo"  
remains a motto*

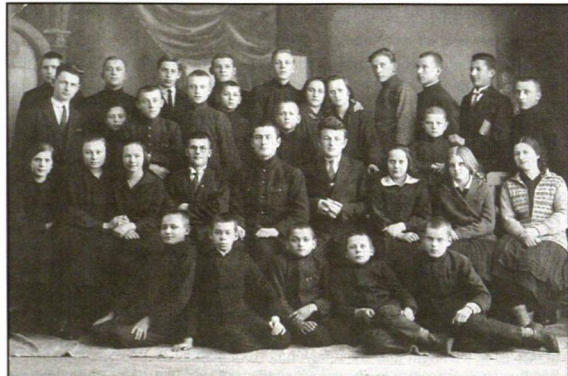
Some organizations are international, with divisions in many countries, including the U.S. and Lithuania. Two venerable Lithuanian Catholic organizations were actually founded by persons living outside of Lithuania. Knights of Lithuania (Lietuvos vyčiai) was founded in the Binghamton, New York, in 1913, and currently celebrating its centennial, is the *Lithuanian Catholic Federation Ateitis* ("Ateitininkų federacija"), founded three years earlier, in 1910, by Lithuanian students at the university in Louvain, Belgium.

"Ateitis" in translation means "the future", and "Ateitis" is also the name of the organization's journal, which in 2011 will celebrate its 100th anniversary. The organization's first larger centennial celebration took place February 19-20, 2010 in Brussels and Louvain, Belgium, where a group of students from Lithuania discussed the founding of a Lithuanian Catholic student organization one hundred years ago. "Ateitis" members will gather in Vilnius, Lithuania August 6-8 for the jubilee XVI Congress following a four day camp for "Ateitis" members of all ages, at Berciuonai, near Panevėžys. North American "Ateitis" members will celebrate the organization's anniversary in November 2010, during the U.S. Thanksgiving weekend, in downtown Chicago, with a planned schedule that includes a celebratory Mass at Holy Name Cathedral, symposia, lectures, a photography exhibit, and other events.

"Ateitis" members ("ateitininkai") often say that they don't want to be "praeitininkai", those who focus merely on the past. Throughout 2010, "Ateitis" members cannot help but celebrate their organization's historical successes. At the same time, members look

## LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC FEDERATION ATEITIS CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

*Ramunė Kubilius*



*"Ateitis" members from the Panevėžys region after an organization-sponsored seminar in Feb. 1928.*  
*Photo from the Laučka family archive.*

towards the future, seeking continued meaning and purpose for their Catholic organization, both in present-day Lithuania, and wherever else members' paths take them... Five guiding principles remind members to seek balanced and well-rounded lives- Catholicism, Lithuanian identity, family values, social activity/activism, and intellectual pursuits (katalikiškumas, tautiškumas, šeimininkiškumas, visuomeniškas, inteligentiškumas). Themes inspired by the guiding principles have provided a framework through the years, for planning congresses, meetings, retreats, lecture series, ideological (character building) seminars, and summer camps. The organization also established two publishing funds, one for non-fictional works (philosophy, organizational works), and one for literature and poetry.

The motto, "Visa atnaujinti Kristuje!" (To restore/renew all things through Christ, "Omnia Instaurare in Christo"), reminds "Ateitis" members to never forget their Roman Catholic central focus.

### ATEITIS THEN AND NOW

"Ateitis" was originally founded by and for young people. Later, divisions were established for children

and working persons (post-college). In pre-World War II years, the organization was extremely popular among Lithuania's high schoolers and students. "Ateitis" members were forced underground twice in the organization's history—once when many of Lithuania's ideological organizations, particularly Catholic ones, were forbidden by government decree (in 1930), and later, during the years of Soviet occupation.

Those Lithuanians who were forced to leave their homeland in the post World War II years, re-established "Ateitis" in the Displaced Person camps in Germany, then later in their new places of residence esp. Australia, Brazil, Canada, and the United States. "Ateitis" was re-established in Lithuania in 1989 and the organization's central leadership, "Ateitis" journal publication, and approximately 3000 active members are now based in Lithuania. Outside of Lithuania, organized members are still active in Germany (at the Vasario 16 High School), and in U.S. cities where many Lithuanians live—Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Washington, DC and Baltimore. Summer camps and courses draw attendees from other cities as well. North American "ateitininkai" have their own governing body that allows them the flexibility to develop themes, projects, and endeavors suited for organizational life outside of Lithuania, but the structure also ties them to the central leadership and fellow organization members in Lithuania.

Throughout the years, "Ateitis" members have strived to be good citizens in their communities. In Lithuania, members visit elderly organization members, fix up neglected cemeteries, invite locals, the elderly, and the physically disabled, to join them at celebratory Masses in communities where their traveling camps take place. One project involved travelling the routes of the partisans who fought against Soviet occupation of Lithuania. In the U.S., youth "Ateitis" groups have participated in "Habitat for Humanity", done fund-raising for cancer patients and terminally ill children, collected food cans for the poor, visited YMCA homeless shelters, sung Christmas carols for the elderly. Summer campers at Dainava (near Manchester, Michigan) have exchanged visits with Latvian-American youth campers. During the years Lithuania was under Communist rule, "Ateitis" members joined other organizations' members in writing petitions, and participating in protest demonstrations as well as Captive Nations parades. While visiting Soviet-occupied Lithuania, some "Ateitis" members met with Roman Catholic dissidents, while others corresponded with Lithuania's Catholic dissidents exiled to Siberia.



"Ateitis" presidents of the high school division (moksleiviai) - from left: Vladas Vilimas 1927-29, Juozas Laučka 1929-30, Adolfas Damučis 1930-31. (the last two later became "vadai").

Photo from the Laučka family archive.

### SOME MEMBERS OF NOTE

There have been many "Ateitis" members whose lives and achievements can be considered exemplary and inspirational. Many were "stars" not only to "Ateitis" members, but to anyone who read their poetry or novels, heard their philosophical insights, saw their artwork, followed their lead into political and religious activism. Here are a few examples.

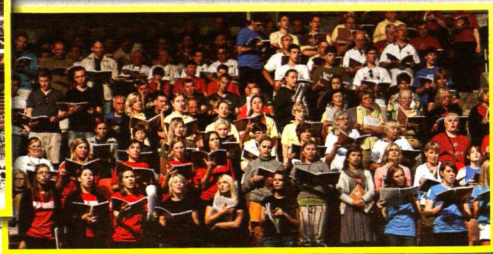
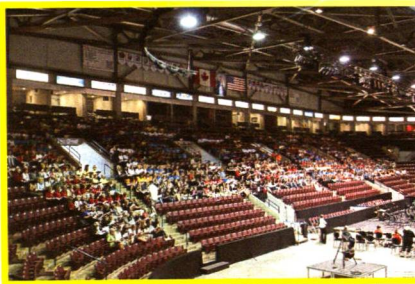
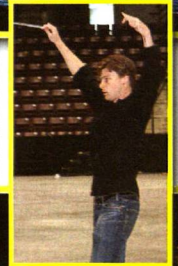
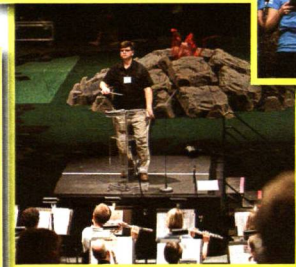
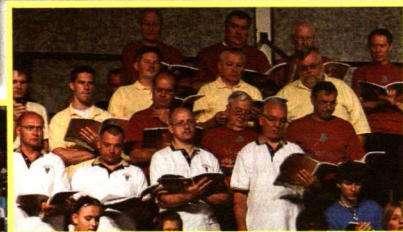
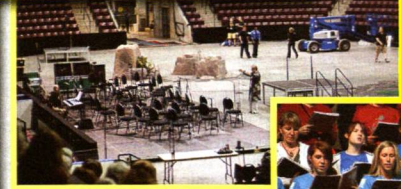
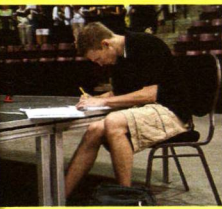
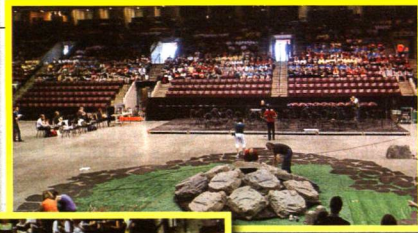
**Pranas Dovyduitis (1886-1942)**, an early "Ateitis" philosopher instrumental in outlining the goals of the organization, was also one of the signators of Lithuania's 1918 Act of Independence. **Adelė Dirsytė**, one of many activist "Ateitis" members exiled by the Soviets to Siberia, was a dedicated educator and prayer book author, who taught children about their Catholic faith, from the time she arrived in Siberia (1946) until her death (1955). Many are now working to petition for her beatification. **Rev. Stasys Yla (1908-1983)** was one of the "Ateitis" members sentenced to the Nazi concentration camp in Stutthof (Poland) for religious and political activism. He later wrote about his experiences in the book, translated into English, *A Priest in Stutthof: Human Experiences in the World of Subhuman (1971)*. **Rev. Stasys Yla** was a longtime "Ateitis" spiritual advisor, inspiring generations of "Ateitis" members, and his manual (*Ateitininkų vadovas*), first published in 1960, went through a third updated printing in 2006.

Members elected to serve as "Ateitis" leaders ("vadai") were successful in their chosen professions. For example, **Dr. Petras Kisielius** and **Dr. Kazys Pemkus** were physicians, **Prof. Dr. Antanas Macina** - a philosopher, **Dr. Adolfas Damučis** - a chemist, **Prof. Dr. Justinas Pikėnas** - a psychology professor, **Juozas Polikaitis** - an engineer. Current president, **Vygantas Malinauskas**, is a lawyer. Members in the diaspora ensured that

**PHOTO ALBUM**



**IX DAINŲ ŠVENTĖ**  
**REHEARSING FOR THE SONG FESTIVAL**





Advisor Marius Polikaitis (at microphone) relays best wishes to graduating high school senior "Ateitis" members at Chicago's annual academic year-end meeting (Seimos šventė - family day) June 3, 2007.

"Ateitis" to this day belongs to the international Catholic organization, "Pax Romana", and member, **Dr. Vytautas Vygantas** (1930-1998), served as its president from 1959-1965. He was a dynamic speaker at "Ateitis" seminars, camps, Congresses, and outside of "Ateitis", was a founder of the English language scholarly journal, *Lituanus*.

The life story of **Juozas Laučka** (1910-1993), lawyer, political activist, and journalist, serves as an inspiring example of the ties that bind Lithuanian-Americans with their ethnic homeland. The 100th anniversary of his birth was celebrated January 23, 2010. Juozas Laučka was born in Brockton, MA and died in Bethesda, MD. The Laučka family, no different from many Lithuanian American families of the time, moved to Lithuania between World Wars I and II. Juozas Laučka took on various "Ateitis" leadership roles and at Vytautas Magnus University (Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas), was a founder of the "Ateitis" legal frat-

nity, "Justitia". Upon his return to the U.S. in the 1930's, he continued his studies and his activism. He chaired the Lithuanian Day committee as Lithuanian-Americans prepared for participation in the World's Fair (New York, 1939), participated in the Lithuanian Delegation that visited President Roosevelt (1940), and was one of the founders of the Lithuanian American Council (ALT-as). Active in various capacities over many years in the volunteer organization, United American Lithuanian Relief Fund (BALF-as), professionally, he worked in the U.S., Germany, and other countries, for "Voice of America" and "Radio Free Europe". Juozas Laučka served as president ("federacijos vadas") of "Ateitis" from 1979-1983".

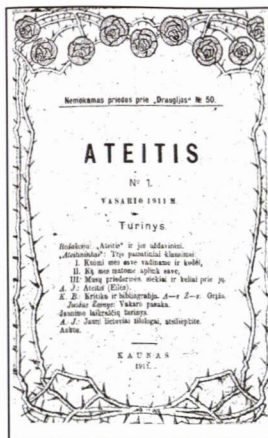
After Lithuania re-gained its independence, some Lithuanian-American "Ateitis" members went to live and work in Lithuania. For example, Rev. Dr. Arvydas Žygas went to Lithuania as a Fulbright scholar (in biochemistry), became actively involved as "Ateitis" was revived in Lithuania, in the those early years following the re-establishment of Lithuania's independence. He completed his seminary studies in Lithuania, later returning to the United States for further theology doctoral studies. Lithuania's current Ambassador to Canada, based in Ottawa, is U.S. born "Ateitis" member and member of its board ("taryba"), Gintė Damušis, who, during the years of Soviet occupation, worked in New York with Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid, also serving as Lithuanian Information Center Director. "Ateitis" members active in the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. include current president Vytautas Maciūnas, a N. American division of "Ateitis" board member, and Juozas Polikaitis, president of the LAC board of directors, who served as "Ateitis" president ("vadas") from 1985-1997.

### CONCLUSION

As a one hundred year old organization, "Ateitis" has celebrated milestones and undergone challenges through the years. Different generations have had differing viewpoints, seeking a consensus in various matters, and a balance among the organization's five guiding principles.

*Center (in dark shirt), "Ateitis" president, Vygantas Malinauskas, on visit from Kaunas, Lithuania to an "Ateitis" seminar weekend at Camp Dainava (Manchester, Michigan) in Sept. 2007. With him are then North American division chair, Danguolė Kuolas (in white blouse) and officers of the adults division (sendraugiai).*





Cover of the organization's journal, "Ateitis" - 1st issue published 1911.

In some ways, modern society is not all that different from the world that founders and members saw around them one hundred years ago. There still are members of society who do not see a need for

religion, ethics or moral values. In Lithuania, a lackluster interest in ideological or religious organizations continues to be observed among many young people. Outside of Lithuania, there are challenges attracting new "Ateitis" members and maintaining the "Ateitis" traditions of Lithuanian language, religious and organization customs, with each succeeding generation. What provides the most optimism for the organization's future is that fact that "Ateitis", like many ideological organizations, has existed for so many years because its ideals have provided each succeeding generation of members with a sense of purpose and belonging, as well as a role to play in the world beyond the organization itself.

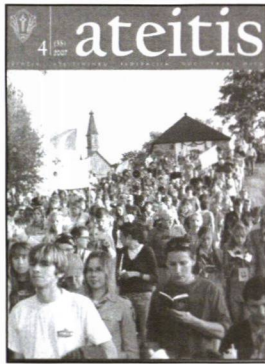
Websites:

[www.ateitis.lt](http://www.ateitis.lt)

(maintained by organization members in Lithuania)

[www.ateitis.org](http://www.ateitis.org)

(maintained by organization members in North America)



Cover of "Ateitis" a more recent issue.

*Ramunė Kubilius is an academic medical librarian by profession. She has served in the Lithuanian-American Community's Executive Committee in the past, is currently active in several other Lithuanian organizations and she dances with the Lithuanian folk dance ensemble, "Grandis". She writes for the Lithuanian language press in North America and has contributed to "Bridges" over the years.*

### Continued from page 11 "Meet the Author, Barbara Chepaitis"

I slammed the cover back on, screwed it down tight. The bees had moved into the walls of our house and made their way to, of course, my office.

"My ancestors," I groaned. Again.

Over the next three days I figured out a complicated way to use a plastic container, duct tape, and pieces of cardboard to set at least some of them free. And each time they flew away I said, "Okay. I'll write the book. Leave me alone, would you?"

That week I began writing "The Amber", and it shaped itself with no problems or hesitancy under my hand. It became the story of a man who sold his soul to the devil thousands of years ago in what is now Lithuania. He sold it to control a woman, but she escaped him and he'd been trying to get her and his soul back ever since. Lithuanian history is intermingled with the story of a modern young Lithuanian-American woman who has left her heritage behind, and who needs to refind it just as surely as my soulless man needs to regain his soul.

Right after I typed in the last sentence I went outside to stretch and get some air. As I stood on my front porch, a swarm of honeybees flew close to my house, paused, and turned into the woods, flying away.

"My ancestors," I called out to them. "Thank you."

Now that may be a pretty unusual way to either write a book or find your heritage, but to my mind it's typical of the persistence I mentioned earlier. Those bees were not going to leave me alone until I got the job done. And they were right.

My agent at Fine Print is in the process of finding the right publisher for "The Amber", and I'm hoping to write at least three more using these same characters, dealing with Lithuanian stories and mythologies. This kind of work is the natural culmination of my work, combining the old stories with the new.

*For more information on Barbara and her work, you can visit her website, [www.wildreads.com](http://www.wildreads.com)*



## Part II

# IN THE DEATH-CAMPS AND BANISHMENT REMINISCENCES

Author: JONAS KREIVENAS

**Editor's Note:** *In Part I Mr. Kreivenas wrote of his life before his arrest and the early days he was held in prison. This bone chilling testimony should never be forgotten. It happened to thousands and thousands of innocent people.*

The next night I was awakened and called for interrogation again. I was brought to the same room. Mr. Smirnow was alone. This time he showed his true nature and was very arrogant. He demanded that I sign a statement admitting the guilt of working against the interests of the Soviet Union. After my refusal, Smirnow shouted and swore at me, held his fist in front of my face, and finally stepped out to the adjacent room, leaving his revolver on the table.

I knew that this trick was only a decoy to lure me into grabbing the unloaded gun and thus creating a very clear case against me. After many hours of nerve-racking interrogation, I was returned back to the chamber before 6 p.m. As usual, no sleep or rest was allowed.

Eleven p.m. was called the "hour of rest", but I learned that in this prison no name was more misleading. All prison activity began at this hour: the regrouping of prisoners, calls for interrogation, etc. Some of the prisoners returned from the interrogations with bleeding noses, swollen eyes or knocked-out teeth.

During the third consecutive night of interrogation, Smirnow accused me of belonging to the "fifth column" and spying for Germany. He suggested that I collaborate with him and keep him informed about any enemies of the Soviet Union. In return, he promised monetary compensation and release. Again, I denied all fictitious charges and refused to be an informer.

On the fourth night he accused me of belonging to a subversive Trotskyist international organization. He threatened me with the death penalty or 25 years in prison. Before 6 p.m. I was taken to a solitary cell.

The cell was approximately 10 ft. by 6 ft., and was damp, cold and very depressing. Daily meals consisted of 400 grams of bread, a half-liter of lean soup, and some water.

After spending three lonely weeks in the cell, one



*Remnants of a roadside cross erected on the spot where Mr. Kreivenas and his wife Ona said good bye to each other before he was arrested on the night of September 1, 1940.*

*Photo taken by daughter, Gema Kreivenas, on her first visit to Lithuania in July 1972.*

dark night Smirnow came with two other politruks and offered me the last chance to admit my guilt. Afraid, I refused. Then they took me to an uninhabited area in the outskirts of the town and pretended that I would be shot. Later I was brought back to the cell, where I spent another two months.

Shortly before the New Year, I was taken back to the interrogation room. This time Smirnow was more polite, and did not swear or shout. After I signed a statement confirming my innocence, I was returned to the 42nd chamber.

Many fellow prisoners whom I knew in this chamber were transferred to other chambers or prisons. There were also many new faces. The chamber was overcrowded and many prisoners had to sleep directly on the floor. Their faces looked pale and exhausted. Some prisoners were still spiritually strong, but others were already desperate. Many called for God's help and prayed constantly.

On the first floor, right under our chamber, was a

chamber for female political prisoners. For some unknown reason, every night around midnight the poor women would start screaming for help, and this horror would last until early morning. We guessed that they were raped or otherwise tortured. Our efforts to communicate with them and to find out the reason were fruitless, because these women did not know the Morse signals.

By the end of March I was taken for the last interrogation. Smirnov informed me that my case was closed and that he would send my file to Moscow for review and decision by the NKVD.

On the first of April Smirnov called me again. He read to me Moscow's NKVD decision, which sentenced me to eight years in hard labor concentration camps. He permitted me to write a letter to my wife and to ask her to bring some warm clothing and shoes.

When my wife came I was warned to talk to her about family and personal affairs and nothing else. While talking to her, I carelessly mentioned rumors about a possible confrontation between the Russians and the Germans, and our conversation was abruptly terminated.

On May 14th, 1941, 16 prisoners from our chamber were loaded into a "black crow" (a black-colored windowless truck, built for the transportation of prisoners) and taken to Marijampole's railroad station.

The train took us to Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, and we were transported to Lukiskiai prison. There, in chamber 36, we found two other Lithuanians from the district of Vilnius, and a colonel of the former Polish army. Two days later 18 of us, with the exception of the Polish colonel, were taken back to the railroad station. The last car of the train was the famous "stolypin", which was identical to other passenger cars from the outside, but inside had heavy steel lining and four steel bar cages for prisoners.

After several hours of travel, our Stolypin stood parked for four days in Minsk and was replenished with 20 Bielorusian prisoners. They told us that such long delay was caused by the trains moving to the west and carrying Soviet troops and armaments in the anticipation of war with Germans. We were almost dying from thirst and hunger, and only on the fifth day we did get a bucket of stale water, some bread, and salty fish.

In Orsha we waited for another two days and our Stolypin was replenished with another 30 prisoners. On May 25th we arrived in Moscow. Three "black crows" took us to the central distribution prison. In the prison's yard I saw trucks, painted in various colors and misleadingly identified with names "bread", "meat", "shoes", "groceries", etc. All these trucks were used for transportation of prisoners only, and were camouflaged to fool

the Muscovites and make them feel happy.

In this prison we were formed into groups of 90, undressed naked, and given physical examinations, haircuts, and steam baths. Our clothes were disinfected. In our group were 20 Lithuanians, some Latvians, Estonians, Ukrainians, and a few Russians. All had been sentenced by par. 58 (political offenses) of punishment code of the Soviet Union.

In two days we passed through ten different chambers, without any sleep or rest. The entire prison was like a conveyerized factory, operating 24 hours a day and geared for prisoner distribution to various Soviet KZ camps and prisons.

On May 26th we were loaded on a train consisting of approximately 60 box cars. The windows of the cars were boarded up, doors were locked, and the cars were wrapped up with barbed wire.

We passed the cities of Jaroslavl, Kirow and Kotlas. Our food ration was some bread and salted, partly rotten fish, but no water. When our train stopped for coal and water, we also received some food and water, but this happened only three times during the whole trip. No water was allowed to be taken inside the cars. Suffering from unbearable thirst, some prisoners drank their own urine or sucked their own blood. Several prisoners in our car died.

On June 17th, when we passed Kotlas city, our train suddenly stopped. The surrounding area was still covered with a thick layer of melting snow. Not one living soul or home was in sight. From the adjacent car four elderly ladies and three young girls disembarked for so called "free" exile. These poor creatures had no chance of survival, and most likely died a few days later.

On June 19th our train stopped in Koshva on the bank of Petschora River, where the railroad tracks ended. Our trip from Moscow to Petschora lasted 24 days.

### *In the Camps of Death*

In Koshva we found another five trains, all loaded with prisoners. The day was sunny and beautiful; the ground was still covered with snow. We were lined up into rows, with our few belongings lying in front of us. Moving around and loud speaking were prohibited. For our meal, each of us got a piece of bread and a ladle of soup. We spent the night directly on the snow, while being watched by armed guards and trained dogs.

The next morning another five trains arrived, each consisting of 50 to 60 box cars, and holding approximately 5,000 prisoners in each train. Together with yesterday's arrival, we were an army of about 50,000 prisoners, all in the prime of our lives.

Four groups, each composed of 90 men, were separated from the rest of the crowd and lined up into three rows. Each of us received a meager ration of bread and fish, which was supposed to last for five days. The convoy leader explained the rules of the march. Those disobeying the rules were to be shot without warning.

We walked northeast through the taiga fields and forests, following a path in the snow and markings on the trees. There were no roads, no sleighs and no horses. Those unfortunates who were too weak to walk, were shot on the spot. We carried our little belongings on our shoulders. Considering that most of the prisoners had spent a year or more in prisons without adequate food, physical exercise, and fresh air, this journey was quite a task.

After two or three days of walking, most of the prisoners grew weak. Five prisoners were shot and, to make sure they died, the guards pierced their bodies with a dagger.

On the third day we came to an area scattered with dead human bodies. On one tree a board was attached, bearing the inscription that on the 20th of April, 1941, an entire convoy, consisting of 180 prisoners and 15 guards, froze to death on this spot.

On the fourth day of our march we came to a valley and a creek.

After crossing a narrow foot-bridge, one of the prisoners fainted and, shaking violently, fell on the ground. His coat, suit and shoes were of a high quality, not available in the Soviet Union. The chief of the guards, an ugly individual, who gave the impression of a criminal, undressed the victim and pierced his chest with a dagger. When we continued marching, he remained with the victim's body. When we were resting the next night, he caught up with us. Most likely he had hidden the victim's belongings somewhere in the woods.

We spent the nights sleeping on tree stumps, branches, or directly on the snow. Drinking water was no problem because there was plenty of melting snow. The real problem was food.

On the seventh day of our trip we came to a daring in the woods. One of the trees bore a sign: "This is camp No. 23". This was the end of our seven-day journey.

We had walked approximately 120 miles. Everyone was exhausted and a true candidate for the guard's bullet.

About 100 new guardsmen came the next day. They were equipped with automatic weapons and trained dogs. A day later another 600 prisoners arrived.

We started building our camp No. 23. One group cut trees, dug holes and erected a barbed wire fence around an area of 25-35 acres. Above the fence, some 300 ft. apart, were built booths for guards. A three-foot wide strip along the fence was called the "dead zone", and any prisoner entering this zone was to be shot without warning. On the outside of the fence, wires were stretched out for guard dogs.

Another group was putting up large canvas tents. Each tent was to house up to 200 inmates. We built wooden bunk beds along the walls. There was no luxury of straw mattresses, and space on the bunk beds was scarce. Some of us had to sleep directly on the ground.

Within the first month another 3,000 prisoners arrived. Among them were former soldiers of the Polish army, and Soviet soldiers who had become prisoners of war in Finland during the 1939-40 winter war.

From round logs we built barracks, which lacked floors or partitions, and had only small windows in the walls. In each barrack slept up to 300 prisoners. For stoves we used perforated steel barrels, and for illumination we burned splinters or birch-barks. In the barracks it was just as cold as it was in the tents.

We worked 12 to 14 hours a day. Our daily food ration was 400 g of bread, a cup of coffee in the morning, some lean soup for lunch, and only warm water for supper. Service dogs were treated much better: they received 400 g bread, 400 g meat, and rich soup three times a day.

We were completely isolated from the rest of the world. We had no books, no newspapers or radio, no letters, and no writing materials.

*Continued next month.....*

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*Labas Rytas,*

*My mom, Ann Berzanskis Zarach, who was Lithuanian, passed away March 2, 2009. My parents and I had an opportunity to go to Lithuania in September, 1991 and in September of 2008.*

*We have many fond memories of our family's forty plus cousins who are spread throughout Lithuania. The pictures and articles in Bridges are wonderful and they bring back wonderful memories of our trips.*

*We love the magazine and you will be receiving a renewal in the mail shortly.*

*Actu,*

*Nancy Zarach, Illinois*



Lithuania American Community, Inc.  
Public Affairs Council

June 30, 2010

Mr. Robin Reed  
President  
National D-Day Memorial Foundation  
P.O. Box 77  
Bedford, VA 24523

Dear Mr. Reed:

On behalf of the Lithuanian American Community, Inc. Public Affairs Council, I am writing to condemn the National D-Day Memorial Foundation for displaying a bust of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. Displaying the bust of Joseph Stalin is an insult to Americans of Lithuanian heritage, a great number of whose families have been directly affected by the mass deportations and crimes of Stalin. It was under Joseph Stalin's regime that my grandparents were deported in boxcars to Siberia where my grandfather perished. I would liken this to placing a bust of Hitler at the Museum.

I firmly believe that displaying the bust to honor Stalin at the National D-Day Memorial Museum, a museum that should make all Americans proud, is not only wrong but a gross distortion of history. Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union did not participate in the D-Day invasion, and the presence of the bust at the museum insinuates that they did. Paying tribute to the contributions and sacrifices made by troops of other nations on D-Day such as Australia, Canada, France, Netherlands, Norway Poland, and others should be a priority over honoring the Soviet dictator.

This issue is deeply personal and disturbing to many Lithuanian Americans. I urge you to take down the bust of Joseph Stalin, and stop honoring a murderous dictator. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or the Council's Executive Assistant Trevor Dane at [trevordane@gmail.com](mailto:trevordane@gmail.com), to further discuss this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "J. V. Prunskis" followed by a flourish and the number "182".

J. V. Prunskis, MD  
Public Affairs Council

## Unique Mythology Museums in Lithuania

Eugenija Misevicius



There are times when you realize that you miss something so much only when you no longer have it. I moved to the United States six years ago and every single day I miss Lithuania more and more. But on the other side it is so ironic that I started to learn about my motherland more being overseas. Every time I go back to visit my family I like to go to new places I've never been to and explore the country I grew up in. Probably most of you who went to Lithuania had a couple of days at the Baltic Sea shore and explored majestic views of this incredible part of the country. Everyone who goes to Klaipėda, Palanga or Neringa learns a lot about the treasure of the Baltic Sea - amber. Some even visit the amber museums. But how many of you heard of had a chance to visit a unique Hill of Witches (in Lithuanian "Raganų Kalnas")

located right outside the Juodkrantė (literally: Black Shore - another beautiful seaside resort village located on the Curonian Spit (in Lithuanian "Kursių nerija")? It's a shame, but even I, who was born and lived in Lithuania for 23 years visited this unforgettable region for the first time just a couple of years ago while visiting my family. It left such an impression on me so I am trying to tell everyone I know to visit it if they get a chance.

The Hill of Witches is not only an extraordinary park to spend time in but also a storyteller about the past and the mythology of the country. Even though a majority of the people in Lithuania are Catholic it was the last country in Europe to be baptized. For a long period of time people were pagans and believed in mythological creatures and gods. Lithuania became Christianized between the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century, but the pagan religion survived for another two centuries, gradually losing its cultural influence and coherence. Today we have a couple of very interesting museums established to preserve and remind us

about the uniqueness of our country.

One of those is Lithuania's Devil Museum in Kaunas (M. K. Čiurlionio Vėlinių muziejus). They say it is one of a kind in the entire world. It was opened in 1966 starting with the collection of 260 figures donated by the artist Antanas Žmuidzinavičius. Today it contains about 3000 horned creatures and masks brought there from all over the world. Contributions from countries as diverse as Mexico, Japan and Cuba are all on display alongside the Slavic artifacts, as is folk art from the indigenous peoples of Siberia. The

museum contains a stunning array of devils in all shapes, sizes, colors and materials. Although most are purely works of art, others have been grafted onto everyday household objects: pipes, ashtrays, nutcrackers and plates all feature in the exhibition. The statues are made from stone, pottery and wood, but devils are also painted on silk or canvas. Some of the beasties have horns, others pointy tails, while still others are hairy. Visitors are invited to donate their own pieces to the collection, too. In mythology a devil is a male character, so let's not forget females as well and return to the Hill of Witches I was writing about before. It is a unique exposition in the open air. The park is located on a forested sand dune about 0.5 kilometer west of the Curonian Lagoon, on the Lithuanian Seaside Cycle Route. It consists of more than 70 oak sculptures produced by Lithuanian (mostly Samogitian) carvers when spending their summers in Juodkrantė between 1979 and 1981. The topic of the sculptures is the world of witches, devils and other characters of Lithuanian legends and fairy tales. In the summer of 1988, the collection was supplemented with 12 more sculptures, mainly of entertaining character such as swings, mountains and chairs. The sculptures are renewed and restored every year because it is very important to preserve these treasures for the future generations.





The Hill of Witches (formerly called the Hill of Jonas and Ieva) keeps the memories of St. Jonas' Festival (Joninės) celebrated here since early days. In those midsummer nights burning pitch barrels would roll down the hill one after another into the sea. The hill is grown over

by the beautiful pines, the route leads up to the 42 meter high hill. Walking along the forested path of the hill, we encountered a unique collection of old wooden sculptures that were skillfully carved by local artists. Each figure comes from Lithuanian legends and folk tales. Witches and devils are numerous here. The sculptures are playful, fascinating, mystical and creepy. The old stories relate that this particular place was enjoyed not only by human but also mystical creatures who would organize their own parties and rituals there. This hill is special and it feels like you are in a different world and at other times mysteries and tales surround you. The sight seeing is just breathtaking, especially when you reach the peak of the hill from where you can see the sea. You may enter the world of demons, witches and other mythical creatures at no charge. As you see the pagan influences are still strong in Lithuanian culture and traditions. So if you want to feel the real pagan spirit, come and visit the Hill of Witches



- the unique collection of wooden carved figures (many of them human-sized or bigger) which are collected on a forested hill in beautiful Juodkrantė.

*Eugenija Misevicius is a graduate of the University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT. She serves as the secretary of the Lithuanian Journalist Association. Eugenija freelances as a court interpreter. She belongs to the Lithuanian Sports Club of Connecticut and enjoys participating in amateur sports such as martial arts. She and her husband, Laurynas, participate in many Lithuanian events.*

*Photos by E. Misevicius  
Photos: 1, 2, 5 - Hill of Witches  
Photos: 3, 4 - Devil Museum*

*Some of the beautiful and magical people who put their bodies and souls into making the festival a success! The conductors!*



## LITHUANIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY FILM COMPETITION TO COMMEMORATE THE BATTLE OF ŽALGIRIS WITH CASH PRIZES AND DISTINGUISHED JUDGES

**PHILADELPHIA, 6/29/2010** – Professional filmmakers and amateur videographers should get their cameras out this summer for an international film competition to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Žalgiris (Grunwaldin Polish, Tannenberg in German), one of the most important events in Medieval Europe. In November 2010 in New York City, the best film less than 15 minutes in length will be awarded the Grand Prize of \$2,500 and a specially commissioned medal commemorating the pivotal battle that stopped the eastward expansion of the Teutonic Knights and ushered in centuries of prosperity for Lithuania and Poland. The runner-up will receive the Silver Prize of \$1,000.

“The Lithuanian-American Community wanted to raise awareness of this battle that took place on July 15th, 1410,” says Aldona Page, chair of the cultural affairs committee of the Lithuanian Community. “When plans in Lithuania to create an epic film were delayed because of the economic crisis, we thought a competition to create a small independent film to celebrate the 600-year anniversary would be a way to have this important event immortalized in film. We hope it will also give aspiring filmmakers an opportunity to have their work seen, and to possibly lay the foundation for a larger film project to develop out of this short film competition thanks to the publicity this award might bring.”

Films will be judged based on historical accuracy and creative expression by three expert judges. Laurence Kardish, Senior Curator in the Museum of Modern Art’s Department of Film, who has organized about a thousand film exhibitions since 1968, including the MoMA retrospective “Lithuanian Cinema: 1990 – 2009” screened in December 2009. Tomas Krasauskas, co-founder and co-director of the Prague Film School, where he supervises the training of students from over 30 countries and the production of over 200 short films annually, ranging from documentary and drama to experimental films. Rimvydas Petrauskas, a professor at Vilnius University, where he is on the faculty of the Ancient and Medieval History Department. He is the vice-president of the Lithuanian National Committee of Historians, a member of the Lithuanian Science

Council and the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. He is the author of several books including, in 2009, *The Grand Duchy of Lithuania 1386-1529* (with Juratė Kiaupienė).

### **RULES**

- \* Films should be no longer than 15 minutes in duration
- \* They may be shot either on film or video but must be transferred to digital media and uploaded to a video hosting website such as Vimeo or YouTube for consideration
- \* Live action, animation, computer-generated, realistic, or abstract films will be considered but please keep in mind that all submissions will be assessed for historical accuracy, research, and understanding of the events and key figures in the battle.

### **SPONSORS**

The LAC Film Prize competition, its management, and all prizes, are sponsored by the Cultural Committee of the Lithuanian-American Community, in its efforts to strengthen the awareness of Lithuanian heritage and to build communication and interchange between Lithuanian communities around the world through cultural events.

### **AWARDS**

The best film, as chosen by our three distinguished judges, will be awarded the Grand Prize, which comes with a cash award of \$2,500 US, as well as the presentation of a unique commemorative medal specially commissioned by the Lithuanian-American Community to mark the 600th anniversary of Žalgirio mušis. The award will be presented at a special ceremony in New York City on November 13th, 2010 during which the top films will be screened. The runner-up will receive the Silver Prize of \$1,000.

*For more information:*  
See the official Website at [www.zalgiomusis.com](http://www.zalgiomusis.com).  
Contact Aldona Page, chair of the cultural affairs committee of the Lithuanian Community at [kulturostaryba@gmail.com](mailto:kulturostaryba@gmail.com).

# Calendar of Events for July, August and September 2010

Please verify all events as places & times are subject to change.

## July

**July 2-4, 2010**  
**IX Lithuanian Song Festival**  
Toronto, Canada  
[www.lithuaniansongfest.org](http://www.lithuaniansongfest.org)

**July 2-4, 2010**  
We are offering the possibility of a **BILINGUAL INTRODUCTION TO NERINGA** camp for families, to be facilitated by Sr. Igne Marijosius. Pending interest, families who have always wondered about Neringa will have a chance to become acquainted with her spirit, mission & beautiful landscape. Please see [www.neringa.org](http://www.neringa.org) if interested in this possibility.

**July 25, 2010**  
**Annual Potluck Picnic & Neringa**  
campers will perform as has been the tradition in the past. [www.neringa.org](http://www.neringa.org)

## August

**August 1, 2010**  
Lithuanian Rock/Pop superstar Andrius Mamontovas Performing at the legendary Black Cat club off U Street, Washington, DC. Tickets \$30 for this two hour program. Doors open at 8 pm & the concert begins at 8:30. Tickets will be sold in advance at [www.ticketalternative.com](http://www.ticketalternative.com)

**August 1-14, 2010**  
**Camp Neringa Heritage**  
Children's Camp in English (7-16 yr-olds)  
[www.neringa.org](http://www.neringa.org)

**August 5-8, 2010:**  
Knights of Lithuania  
**97th National Convention**  
Binghamton, NY  
Hosted by Council 72  
[www.knightsoflithuania.com](http://www.knightsoflithuania.com)

**August 14-21, 2010**  
**Camp Neringa Continuation of Heritage**  
Children's Camp in English (for ages 13-16)  
[www.neringa.org](http://www.neringa.org)

**August 15-16, 2010**  
**98th Consecutive "Lithuanian Days"**  
Schuylkill County is fast approaching!!!  
Saturday (14th) 12:30 to 5pm,  
Sunday (15th) 12:30 to 4:30pm.  
Food, dances, history, & the celebration of all things Lithuanian  
Schuylkill Mall, Frackville, PA  
Sponsor: Knights of Lithuania - Council 144

**August 20-22, 2010**  
**Enrichment Ethnic Festival**  
Over 50 countries have booths placed in a large circle around the Swope Park Pavilion in Kansas City, Missouri.  
**Taste the World at**

the Festival!  
4701 East Gregory Boulevard  
Kansas City, MO  
Phone: (816) 871-5600

**August 28, 2010:**  
**European Festival 2010**  
Time: 10:00am - 10:00pm  
Admission: Free  
Location:  
Civic Green Park  
9370 Ridgeline Blvd.,  
Highlands Ranch CO 80129  
[www.coloradolithuanians.org](http://www.coloradolithuanians.org)

**August 29, 2010**  
**Annual Picnic** - Lithuanian American Club of Northern New Jersey 1:30 - 5 pm (Food served at 2:30 pm)  
Hedden Park (Covered Pavilion) Rain or Shine  
Randolph, New Jersey  
**"Potluck Picnic"** Bring your own culinary specialties!  
\$5.00 admission should be accompanied by a covered

dish to serve 6-8, \$15.00 per person if you do not bring a dish. Must know in advance what you will bring. Call Susan Savaiko (973) 328-2850. Children under 12 years are free. Soda will be provided. If desired, please bring Your own beer & wine! Charcoal will be provided for heating and grilling!

## September

**September 16, 2010**  
(Thursday) **Autumn Gala**  
Benefiting the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God  
3603 McRoberts Rd.  
Pittsburgh PA 15234  
Info: 412- 885-7232 or  
[info@osfprov.org](mailto:info@osfprov.org)

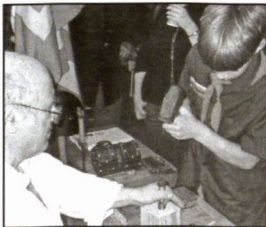
## Money! Money! Money!



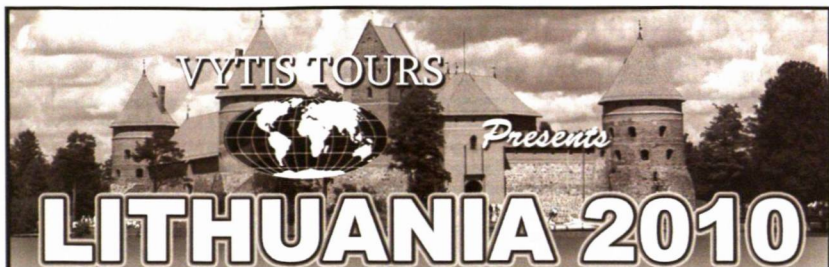
Aleksandras Radzius was invited to participate in the Scouts' Muge (Festival) which took place in Washington, DC.

He demonstrated to the attendees how the early Lithuanians made money. The participants then made the coins themselves. Ambassador Audrius Bruza also joined the Scouts in making the money.

*Mr. Radzius is an active member of the Lithuanian Numismatic Association.*







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## LITHUANIAN MARKET PLACE - Order from BRIDGES



29 - Baseball hat  
\$ 20.00



20 - Amber necklace &  
bracelet - \$ 30



27 - CD by Exultate / Rita  
Klirių, director - \$ 15



12 - "LIETUVA" scarf (4" x  
52" long) - \$ 25



5 - CD by Jurga  
"Instrukcija" - \$ 20



6 - CD by Jurga "Aukso  
Pieva" - \$ 20



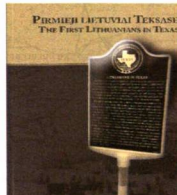
7 - CD by Vaivora (ethno-  
cultural music) - \$ 20



8 - Vytis decal approx (3" x  
3") - \$ 3



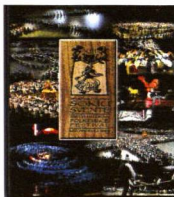
23 - Exploring Lithuania & Exploring Vilnius (2 set DVD with 3  
hour total viewing time) - \$ 45.



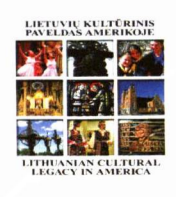
25 - The Frist Lithuanians  
in Texas, 116 p. - \$ 25.



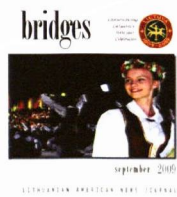
30 - Bear mug  
Druskininkai - \$ 15



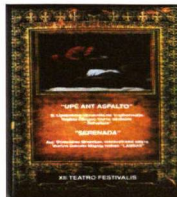
13 - DVD or 13th Folk  
Dance Festival at Galen  
Center of USC \$20.00



14 - Cultural Legacy Book  
(hardcover, 224 pages) \$45



15 - Bridges subscription  
\$20 for 10 issues



16 - Set of 6 DVD's of XII  
Theatre festival (in  
Lithuanian) - \$ 45



17 - Car license plate  
holder \$12



18 - LT sticker (4" x 9"  
approx) - \$ 4.



19 - LIETUVA decal (1" x  
2.5") - \$ 3

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# bridges

VOLUME 34 ISSUE 6

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Rimas Gedeika  
78 Mark Twain Dr., Hamilton Sq., NJ 08690

