

bridges



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

\$5

November/December 2016

this month in history

November/December Anniversaries

510 years ago

December 8, 1506

Žygimantas Senasis (Sigismund the Old) was elected king of Poland and grand duke of Lithuania.



490 years ago

November 1, 1526

Birth of Kotryna Jogailaitė, youngest daughter of Žygimantas Senasis and Bona Sforza. Kotryna became the wife of Swedish King John III and mother of Zigmantas Vaza (Sigimund III Vasa), who became the Lithuanian grand duke, Polish king and, for a few years prior to being ousted, king of Sweden.

360 years ago

November 3, 1656

Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth signed the Treaty of Vilnius, signifying a truce during the Russo-Polish War and an anti-Swedish covenant during the concurrent Second Northern War. The treaty, which promised Alexis of Russia succession in Poland after John II Casimir Vasa's death, came to an end in 1658 when Russia invaded Commonwealth territories.



210 years ago

November 13, 1806

Countess Emilija Pliaterytė (Emilia Plater), Lithuanian rebel leader who is sometimes called the Lithuanian Joan of Arc, was born in Vilnius. She was raised in a patriotic household, and her interests included horseback riding and marksmanship.

During the November Uprising against Russia, Pliaterytė cut her

hair short, created her own uniform and assembled a volunteer army of 280 infantrymen, 60 cavalry and several hundred peasants. In April 1831, her army crossed the border from Latvia into Russian-controlled Lithuania, where unconfirmed reports say she seized the town of Zarasai. She later joined with Polish forces to fight at Prastavoniai and Maišiagala. She was made a commanding officer of the 1st company of the Polish-Lithuanian 25th Infantry Regiment, and then was promoted to captain.

In late June, as Pliaterytė tried to break through to Warsaw, she became seriously ill and died. She was buried in the small village of Kapčiamiestis near Lazdijai.

150 years ago

December 17, 1866

Birth of Kazys Grinius, third president of the Republic of Lithuania, and the last democratically elected president of inter-war Lithuania. He was in office only a few months, from June 7 to December 17, 1926, when the Lithuanian government was overthrown in a military coup.



145 years ago

December 4, 1871

Liudvikas Stulpinas, Lithuania's first sea captain, was born in Jomantai, in the Telšiai district. He began his sea career in 1886 as a cabin boy, later studied at nautical college, then joined the Russian East Asiatic Shipping Company. He received his first command in 1909 as master of the steamship Lithuania. In 1912, he

was master of the Birma, the first ship to receive the Titanic's SOS signal, but his attempt at aid was turned down by the Carpathia because he was from a rival steamship line.

In 1918, Stulpinas became the consul for newly independent Lithuania in Liepaja. In 1923, he became the first harbor master of Klaipėda, a position he held until his death in 1934.

115 years ago

December 10, 1901

Partisan resistance officer Juozas Vitkus, code name Kazimieras, was born in Ketūnai in southern Lithuania. Vitkus had been a lieutenant-colonel in the Lithuanian army prior to Soviet occupation in 1940. During the German occupation, unwilling to serve the Nazis, he went into civilian life, then joined the partisan movement.

Vitkus helped to organize the resistance, instill discipline and create the LLA, an underground military school. His unit seized the town of Merkinė in December 1945, but sustained heavy losses. About six months later, the MGB (Soviet secret police) stumbled across Vitkus while he was washing his clothes by a stream. He died of wounds sustained during interrogation.

90 years ago

December 17, 1926

The military right-wing opposition executed a coup d'état in Lithuania that deposed President Kazys Grinius and established a dictatorship under Antanas Smetona, who took office on December 19. Smetona, who was Lithuania's first president from April 4, 1919, to June 19, 1920, was also its last during the inter-war period, remaining in authoritarian control of the country until it was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940.

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Cover: The stirna, or roe deer, is a common sight in Lithuanian forests. The country is home to about 86,000 roe deer, identified by their characteristic short tails and bright white rumps. Photo: Vytautas Knyva

Back cover: The Christmas tree on Cathedral Square in Vilnius, which cast a net of 50,000 lightbulbs over the Christmas Market, was lit on the evening of November 26, 2016. Photo: Alfredas Pliadis, pliadisfoto.com

from the editor

So Long, Farewell, auf Wiedersehen, su Diev

I hope Rodgers and Hammerstein will forgive me for a little Lithuanian adaptation of their Sound of Music classic. As you'll remember from my letter in October, this will be my last issue as editor. Not surprisingly, I have a few thank you's to dispense.

First and foremost, thank you, dear readers, for your guidance, your wisdom, your patience and your abiding love of all things Lithuanian, which have sustained our publication—and me—over the years. Thank you for correcting us when we made an error, and for applauding us when we hit a home run. Thank you for ever challenging us to become better and better. I hope we've met the challenge.

More thanks go to Vytas Maciūnas, former LAC president, for bringing me on, and to Sigita Šimkuvienė-Rosen, current LAC president, for encouraging me to stay on. To Algimantas Gustaitis, Juozas Kazlauskas, Loreta Timukienė, Vilija Joyce, Laima Liutikienė and Ina Stankevičienė for their behind-the-scenes involvement in finance, publishing, printing and website management that keep us running day-to-day.

I'm thankful for Rimas Gedeika, whose connections and contributions have helped fill many a page in this journal. For Dan Craig, whose design expertise and creativity make beautiful sense of all of the text and images I send his way. For Jana Sirusaitė Motivans, Laima Vincė Sruoginis and Alan Stankus, in their roles as contributing editors, for their dedication in bringing us fresh content month to month. And to all of the writers, poets, photographers and illustrators whose work has enlivened these pages, thank you.

Special thanks are due to Karilė Vaitkutė, our new editor, who has agreed to carry on the work of Bridges. I wish her nothing but the greatest success as she guides the publication in the coming years.

The winter solstice marks the birth of a celestial new year, a symbolic new beginning. We have made it through the longest night, and look forward to lengthening days, the festival of lights, the ascendancy of the sun and the Son.

I personally am looking forward to fresh start because, I'll admit, 2016 has not been my best year for a number of reasons. Judging from the memes proliferating on social media as the days wind down, it seems that many are glad to see the calendar year come to an end. But that doesn't mean 2017 won't present its own challenges—any change will. It's up to us to turn the challenges into opportunities.

As I look to the new year, I have only one resolution—and it's not to lose weight, or cut down on carbs, or incorporate a workout into my daily routine, all of which undoubtedly are things I need to do—it's to become the best person I can be. To be a person who extends a hand. To be a person who rights a wrong. A person who spreads love, not hate. Who values humanity over doctrine.

We all have the ability to become our best selves—no one can take that power from us. It just may be more or less challenging, depending on circumstances.

James Joseph Brown reminds us in his essay, Stebuklas, that no matter the reality, one can still believe in miracles. Barbara Tedrow, in relating conversations during Kūčios, addresses themes of forgiveness, mercy and social responsibility—and acknowledges that, yes, sometimes we fail, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

In her historic examination of Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė, Diana Vidutis chronicles the life of a woman who was unable to pursue her youthful dream due to circumstance, but who later became a force in shaping a newly independent Lithuanian nation and defining its ideals.

Changes don't have to be big to have an effect, but they do have to be conscious. How can you make your little corner of the globe a better place? What if everyone did the same?

That's all I wish for us, and for the world.

Teresė Vekteris, Editor

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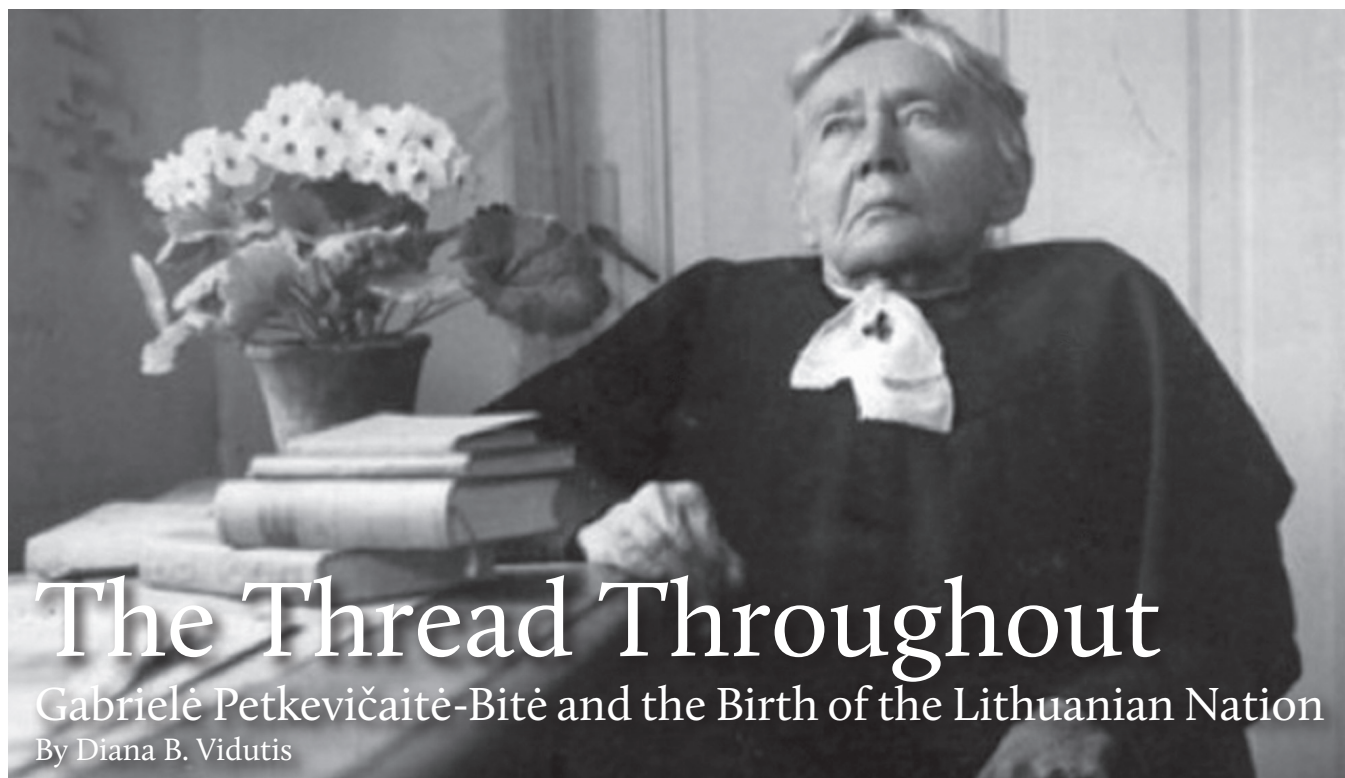


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The Thread Throughout

Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė and the Birth of the Lithuanian Nation

By Diana B. Vidutis

Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė around 1940. Photo: MLLM, PKM

Ivinskis, Višinskis, Kudirka, Žemaitė, Jablonskis, Landsbergis, Čiurlionis, the Juškytės, Lindė-Dobilas, Basanavičius, Lozoraitis ... these are just a few of the major Lithuanian political and literary figures who moved in and out of Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė's life during Lithuania's national rebirth in the mid-19th century and its establishment as a state in the early 20th.

As the Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen of her day, Petkevičaitė-Bitė exasperated the Polish-enamored Lithuanian gentry with her stories depicting the abject poverty among the provincials. The novel she completed late in life, *Ad Astra*, evoked these problems and resolved them via a young heroine, an idealized mid-19th century version of herself, without a hunched back.

A social progressive who once expressed an interest in freemasonry, Petkevičaitė-Bitė raised money to educate young men outside the seminary structure, became an abolitionist confronting the "white slavery" of prostitution, taught Lithuanian in rural adult education classes where no texts existed because the language had been banned, served as publicist to and co-author with Žemaitė, and learned bee-keeping and how to be a physician's assistant.

Petkevičaitė-Bitė was active in the women's movement and chaired the opening meeting of the first Lithuanian Parliament, placing her with Indira Gandhi and Golda Meir in the pantheon of prominent female politicians.

A mathematician at heart forced to forgo university by her father for the *noblesse oblige* of community service, Petkevičaitė-

Bitė turned to journalism as an intellectual outlet. She enjoyed a career as an editor in Vilnius but the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in June 1914 caught her vacationing in her rural home. Rather than return to her colleagues in Vilnius or emigrate, she chose to stay in Puziniškis throughout World War I, recording her observations of the hardships of daily peasant life during wartime. The three-volume diary that resulted would be a valuable contribution to world history if translated into English.

My interest in Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė was piqued when Stasys Lozoraitis Jr., the first Lithuanian ambassador to the U.S after the restoration of Lithuanian independence, was campaigning for president of Lithuania in 1993, and said that Petkevičaitė-Bitė was his favorite author. I then found out that my own mother, Danutė Širvydaitė-Bieliauskienė, had lived with the author as a young girl in order to learn German around 1934. My esteem for the author only grew as I read of the causes that Petkevičaitė-Bitė espoused (education for the underprivileged, self-determination for Lithuania while respecting minorities, women's rights, etc.) and saw their relevance for today's Lithuania.

A Heated Exchange

Let's join Petkevičaitė-Bitė and a neighbor on the eve of World War I. Date: Sometime in June 1914. Place: Puziniškis, a modest baronial estate in northern Lithuania, where Petkevičaitė-Bitė, publicist, editor and author, in her early 50s, has returned for

a nice summer vacation. Or so she thinks. The conversation below is my translation of a part of Petkevičaitė-Bite's diary from that time. Note that "Tamsta" is a form of address between the familiar "tu" and the more formal "Jūs."

"I come to visit you today not only as a neighbor paying his respects, now that you have returned healthy and safe after almost a year away, but also—and I wish to be very honest—as to a source of news.

"What news?" I ask in astonishment.

"You've just returned from the outside world, from the big city, from the editorial offices of a major newspaper. You've met with all kinds of people. Who better than yourself to explain to us this critical moment in our lives?

"I have no idea what you're talking about," I respond to



Puziniškis estate around 1920. Photo: K. M. Varneckio. LLTI MB Apl. 394, Inv. Nr. 89695



Puziniškis estate today.

him, surprised. Knowing very well how much he likes to hear himself talk, I remain quiet and keep on sewing.

"Tamsta! How can you say that?" my neighbor exhorts me, throwing up his heavy arms in astonishment. Then, suddenly realizing that a gentleman avoids making sudden movements, he brings them back down to his knees, but stares sharply at me with his pale eyes, continuing, emphasizing every syllable with pressed lips.

"It smells like war! Does Tamsta not understand? War ... war! It smells like a European war..."

"I don't know why you smell war," I respond quietly, not lifting my eyes from my sewing.

"Tamsta! What is it with you?" Upset, he starts shouting toward far-off, unseen neighbors. "Financial disaster, crisis everywhere!"

"Our local politicians always declare war in the spring-time," I try to calm down my excited neighbor. "June is almost over. You're too late!"

"I really don't understand why you are joking," he responds, attempting to compose himself. "The heir to the Austrian throne has just been assassinated, the papers are full of panic, and I tell you, Tamsta, the panic is genuine."

"Ah," I remember and, calling to the children, ask them to go look through the pockets of my clothing and bring me the issue of the "Extra." That's when I realize the news has remained unread in my pocket for several days now. Being an optimist, I burst into laughter.

"The wife of the Austrian Kaiser was murdered, but there was no war because of that. King Humboldt of Italy was assassinated, and President Carnot of France..."

"Perhaps Tamsta hasn't been reading the newspapers for a few days," says my neighbor, trying to remain calm.

"And I don't want to!" I interrupt. "As if I don't know newspaper reporters! Do you know that old Warsaw saying, 'Cucumber months'? The drudgery of editing and the summer sun have parched the brains of the editor; there's nothing to write about. ... So someone murdered the heir to the Austrian throne, and now we have to use that as a hook for a story."

"Don't get upset, Tamsta! Don't get upset!" replies my neighbor, now getting serious and reserved, looking at me and shaking his large head. "It is such a political mess now. ... It seems, that all of Europe..."

"How many times in my lifetime have the winds of war not gathered over the European horizon?" I interrupt my neighbor again, not allowing him to speak. By now, I have stopped working on my carpet window covering. His insistence that there will be a war angers me, so I continue.

"If not the Germans, then the French, the Russians and the Turks, and even a ridiculous attack by Russia upon Japan. ... I've seen nothing come of those! And now that the technology of war has become so advanced, it is absurd to think of any kind of war in Europe. ... Countries do arm themselves,

I'll grant you that. Each one is afraid of being attacked by the other, and that is actually a good thing. The more one fears the other, the more peaceful they will all remain. It's just a shame all that money being wasted on arms and ammunition. It's a shame that so many people are forced to squander their young days. ... But we must not forget that, just as the technology of war has advanced, so has human ethics. We will probably not even notice when all the machinery of war eventually gets stored in an archive. Perhaps our children will go stare at the armaments and cannons of today the way we go to look at the teeth of a mastodon in a museum. We should believe for once that humanity does not stand still, that its consciousness is improving, that its ideals have advanced far from the stone age, when man made his way through the world only by tooth and nail!" I go on, getting more heated and angered at the notion that people still see war as an option.

My neighbor keeps staring at me, tilting his head, and repeating, enunciating each word carefully: "God willing, from your lips to God's ear! God willing, but, but...."

It makes me so mad that this man still has doubts, that I start getting upset all over again. Our rural population can be so backward, I think to myself, and smirking, say to him:

"You know how Western cartoonists depict the Russo-Japanese war? The Russians and Japanese are fighting, while above them in the clouds Jesus and Buddha are shaking hands, saying, 'Look at what those people on earth are doing in our name!'

"So yes, yes, my dear sir. There will be no war! There can be no war! Mankind has evolved beyond such barbarism, grown out of it. ... Just as you and I grew out of our childhood clothing," I try to convince my guest, while he just shakes his head, gesticulates with his arms, and continues muttering between clenched teeth, "but, but..."

I finally come to the conclusion that not only am I not convincing this man, but I am beginning to irritate him with my pronouncements.

So we part with uncharacteristic coolness, and he takes off in his horse-drawn carriage as soon as he steps foot into it. Meanwhile, I return to my sewing and think, "What a hard-headed creature he is! So unrelenting, hitting the same nail on the head over and over again. Repeating his own words."

But something is now resting heavily on my soul and I am starting to feel uneasy, as if a wintry mix had descended upon a garden in full bloom...

When this conversation took place, 10 years had passed since 1904, when the Russian czar lifted the ban on publishing anything in the Lithuanian language. Even under that oppressive regime, Gabrielė Petkevičaitė, using the pen name Bitė (Little Bee), and her colleagues had been writing and publishing prodigiously. In the ensuing years, she had enjoyed a career in the



Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė (second from left) with Antanas Kasperavičius' family at the Puziniškis estate apiary. Photo: K. M. Varneckis, PKM 4298/F51

bustling publishing world of Vilnius, writing with independence and nation-building in mind. That fateful summer of 1914, she took a well-earned break from hectic urban life.

Ideals Instilled Early

Born in 1861 to a liberal physician and his equally liberal and progressive wife, little Gabrielė was instilled early on with the Petkevičius family values—love of neighbor and a democratic relationship with each and every person, regardless of his property status, nationality or language used. Gabrielė was the eldest of six children, only three of whom would survive to adulthood. Her mother was Malvina Chodokauskaitė, whose sister would one day wed Lithuania's first president, Antanas Smetona.

Petkevičaitė-Bitė's mother died when the girl was 9 years old. But her father, who had set up practice in the town of Joniškėlis, believed in educating girls, so she was sent around to various other homes where there was a tutor. However, no one would be so influential on her life as Laurynas Ivinskis, who had tutored Petkevičaitė-Bitė when she was 5 years old. He had reinforced her parents' values of generosity, empathy and absolute respect for all people—not just family members but everyone in the household, from the cook to the maid to the driver.

Then she was enrolled in the Dorotėjos girl's gimnazija (high school) in the Latvian town of Mintauja (later known as Jelgava), where many of Lithuania's intellectuals sent their daughters to be educated in German instead of Russian.

Her widower father rarely visited, and, just at the cobbler's children go barefoot, Gabrielė finished gimnazija with a pronounced hunchback, probably the result of untreated scoliosis exacerbated by Jane Eyre-like conditions in the school.

Despite this health challenge, Petkevičaitė-Bitė exceeded all expectations and outscored the boys of the neighboring school in their final exams. But her dreams of pursuing her passion for mathematics in Vienna or Paris were dashed by her father after she graduated. It was 1878, and he needed her at home.



Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė around 1873. Photo: LLTI MB Apl. 394, Inv. Nr.8965/32

Their country needed her to remain here, to promote literacy among the peasants (ironically, the only ones who speak Lithuanian). It was part of their noblesse oblige as intellectuals to work for their country, which desperately needed more enlightened people. Plus, he wanted her to help run the household and his pharmacy.

Action and Activism

Petkevičaitė-Bitė, who, like most women of her class, spoke Polish, Russian, and German, began to tutor young girls in the forbidden Lithuanian language. She established adult education classes and wrote her own textbooks, because none existed in Lithuanian. She continued to educate herself by immersing herself in her father's extensive library, and invited local singers and dramatists to perform in their home. She took a one-year beekeeping course in Deltuva to fund her charitable projects, such as the Žiburėlis society. In later years, she would become an "abolitionist," taking on the problem of "white slavery"; i.e., prostitution, human trafficking.

As a young woman in 1890, she heeded the call sent out by Vincas Kudirka of the journal *Varpas* (The Bell) for Lithuanians to write, as the newspaper lacked correspondents. Kudirka was responsible for fostering many writers, especially many women, such as Julija Beniuševičiūtė-Žymantienė (Žemaitė), Marija Pečkuskaitė (Šatrijos Ragana), and sisters Sofija Ivanauskaite-Pšibiliauskienė and Marija Lastauskienė, Lithuanian writers



Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė with šventadieninių course participants in Puziniškis in 1918. Photo: LLMA F276, ap.1, b.33

of Polish origin using the same pen name, Lazdynų Pelėda (Hazel Owl).

Encouraged by journalist Povilas Višinskis, Petkevičaitė-Bitė began contributing news stories to Varpas. In 1894, she published her first short story, “Vilkiėnė.”

In 1898, she, Višinskis and colleagues Petras Avižonis, Marija Juškytė and Jadvyga Juškytė, made an ethnographic trip around Lithuania that concluded with a visit to the desperately ailing Kudirka, who would die of tuberculosis the following year at the age of 40.

In an 1893 issue of Varpas, Kudirka (author of the Lithuanian national anthem) had encouraged the writing of Lithuanian dramatic works in the Lithuanian language. The brothers Antanas and Juozas Vilkutaičiai, under the pen name Keturakis (Four Eyes) responded with a comedy, “Amerika pirtyje” (America in the Bathhouse). Approved by such luminaries as Jonas Jablonskis, Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, Gabrielius Landsbergis-Žemkalnis and Mykolas Lozoraitis, this play was published in 1895 in Tilžė.

So on August 20, 1899, in a building on the Tiskevičius estate in Palanga, the first play in the Lithuanian language, a comedy, was staged. Co-directing with Petkevičaitė-Bitė, Višinskis played the main role. Actors included Augustinas Janulaitis, Vladas Mongirdas, Marija Šlapelienė-Piaseckaitė and other Lithuanian intellectuals vacationing in Palanga.

Thus emboldened, Petkevičaitė-Bitė continued her writing. With an eye on nation-building, she published an article in 1905 entitled “A Short Word about the Jews.” Here is an excerpt:

“Times are changing in Lithuania. We, who were used to bowing down to everyone, being afraid of everyone else, to serving everyone else, suddenly find ourselves in charge of our own country.

“At this time of our rebirth we must make every effort not to spill our rage onto anyone else. We know that taste of oppression, that bitterness that it nurtures in your heart. But as we rise up, let us rid ourselves of it, let us eradicate the bitterness, let us show other nations that we are people who have truly earned the right to call ourselves people.

“Let us defend ourselves from all oppressors, from all who wish us harm, but let us harm no one in turn.

“Not everyone knows that no one has been so repressed in Russia, so avoided, so persecuted as the Jews.

“So let us not wage war against our quiet neighbors who were harmed just as much as we were, who were oppressed by the government. Let us no longer fight against other inhabitants of our country.”

But it was with Žemaitė that Petkevičaitė-Bitė formed the closest bond. They wrote together. She promoted Žemaitė’s work. Žemaitė came to live with them to help take care of Petkevičaitė-Bitė’s ailing father.

Although 20 years Petkevičaitė-Bitė’s senior, the widow



Vincas Kudirka, editor of Varpas, who put out a call for writers, to which Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė responded, launching her career as a correspondent.

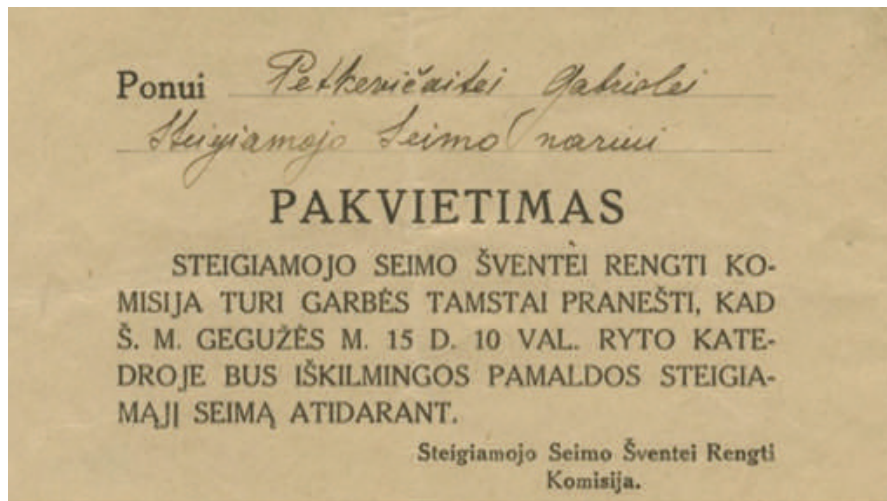
Žemaitė was an active, dynamic woman, the kind who would rush to the train station and stand in line for two hours to help procure Petkevičaitė-Bitė tickets when she needed them. Despite her image as an old woman in a white scarf, as depicted on the one litas banknote, Žemaitė wound up falling in love with Petkevičaitė-Bitė’s farm manager—she in her 60s and he in his 30s. He, however, proposed to Žemaitė’s granddaughter, who rejected him as an old man, and wound up marrying the girl’s mother, Žemaitė’s own daughter.

There was no such drama in Bite’s life.

Never married, in the summer of 1914, on the eve of World War I, she was caring for her father and raising and supporting the two children of her mentally disabled brother (“the curse of the nobility and their constant inter-marrying,” her father once said). She was also in a property dispute with her other living brother, who wanted to sell their family manor and mocked her obsession with educating the “unworthy” and advocating for women. And then there was the war. Petkevičaitė-Bitė made the decision, incomprehensible to her colleagues back in Vilnius, to stay in Puziniškis where she felt more needed.

Petkevičaitė-Bitė continued educating the local children and holding weekend classes for adults, all the while serving as local dispeller of rumors and a source of news.

Her immediate family (which swelled to five youngsters dur-



Invitation addressed to "Ponui" ("Mr.") Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė to chair the opening session of the Constituent Seimas.



Constituent Seimas members in 1920. From right: Emilija Spudaitė-Gvildienė, Ona Muraškaitė-Račiukaitienė, Gabrielė Petkevičaitė, Salomėja Stakauskaitė, Magdalena Draugelytė-Galdikienė. Photo: MLLM 17154

ing the war) emerged from the war intact. And Petkevičaitė-Bitė's focus turned once more to nation-building.

A Brief Career in Politics

Petkevičaitė-Bitė actively participated in the women's movement in Lithuania. In 1920, as the oldest member of the new Parliament (Seimas), she was invited to chair the opening session. The youngest member—who coincidentally was also a woman—was invited to be the secretary, which caused no small consternation among many other members of the male-dominated Seimas.

Petkevičaitė-Bitė was not technically the oldest member of Seimas. That honor should have gone to Simonas Rozenbaumas. Historian Vanda Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė postulates that either Rozenbaumas withdrew his own candidacy (as it would not have been appropriate for the Parliament to be chaired

by someone who did not speak Lithuanian but only Russian and Yiddish), or the wording of this symbolic honor was changed to go to the oldest member who had fought for the cause of Lithuanian freedom.

In any event, Petkevičaitė-Bitė gave a very moving speech at the opening session. She exhorted, in part:

"We have been tasked with turning over a new leaf in history. For far too long a multitude of grievances have been visited upon us. Let us try to do everything possible that the new leaf of history will stay fresh by diligently guaranteeing every one of our country's inhabitants' civil rights, allowing them to improve their

life and aspire to a higher level of culture. Let's be careful, let us not forget for even a moment, that we still do not lack for enemies, enemies who would use every opportunity to demean us before the West, who are so diligently watching our progress."

But two items had removed by those who reviewed her speech in advance of the opening session.

She had asked that everyone stand in honor of our national heroes and fighters for independence. That was crossed out.

She had also written, "Let us show ourselves to be good hosts all over our land. Let us not forget the non-Lithuanians in our midst, as we have limited minority rights." Again, deleted by the reviewers.

Petkevičaitė-Bitė did not last long in Parliament.

Later Years

Petkevičaitė-Bitė was invited to teach at the Panevėžys gimnazija by her good friend Julijonas Lindė-Dobilas, a former priest and fellow crusader for human rights and tolerance. Petkevičaitė-Bitė had brought his first novel to the attention of Jonas Jablonskis. She taught at the school until her retirement. During this period of time, Petkevičaitė-Bitė would occasionally take in boarders to help supplement her income. In about 1932, when she was 10 years old, my own mother was sent to live with Petkevičaitė-Bitė on Sv. Zitos gatvė (St. Zita's Street) in Panevėžys to learn German.

An Enduring Legacy

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Women's Movement in Lithuania, a play will be staged in Panevėžys on March 11, 2017, entitled "Great Women—Heralds of Independence." Naturally, Petkevičaitė-Bitė will play a prominent role. The production will be filmed and subtitled in English for U.S. distribution in through the Lithuanian American Community, Inc.



Julijonas Lindė-Dobilas, whose first novel Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė had brought to the attention of Jonas Jablonskis.

In anticipation of the 100th anniversary of Lithuania's independence in 2018, we had proposed a six-episode mini-series for Lithuanian television using the life of Petkevičaitė-Bitė as the thread by which to weave the story of Lithuania's rebirth. In view of the resources and talent required for such an undertaking, however, it may be more practical to propose such a project for 2020, the 100th anniversary of the First Parliament, at which Petkevičaitė-Bitė gave the opening speech.

Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė's values of civic participation, democracy, love of the Lithuanian language and culture, and tolerance toward all are more important than ever today. What better way to hear that message than from one of your own?



Diana Vidutis (center) in Lithuania while conducting research on Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė.



Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė's house on St. Zita's Street in Panevėžys. MLLM 22737 F3-2073

Diana (Bieliauskas) Vidutis has been active in Lithuanian-American affairs in Washington, D.C., including serving as local community president from 2007 to 2014. She was born in Richmond, Va., the second of four children (but the first to be born in the U.S.) of post-World War II Lithuanian refugees. She grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, where her father taught psychology and her mother practiced medicine. After earning a B.A. in English from Xavier University, she taught high school for a year before enrolling in the Slavic Department at Indiana University in Bloomington. Upon receiving her M.A., she moved to Washington, D.C., where she administered international exchanges, first with the Fulbright Program, then with the National Academy of Sciences. Since the fall of the USSR, she has worked as a legal secretary, and for the past six years has served as chair of the Public Affairs Committee of the Lithuanian American Community, Inc.

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Kūčios

The Longest Night

by Barbara Tedrow



Kūčios, our Lithuanian family's Christmas Eve ritual, was one way that my mother's family kept their Lithuanian identity. At Kūčios, they drew on a tradition of the past as a way to appease their sorrow and regret at leaving their homeland for life in their new country, the United States of America. The yearly Christmas Eve observance imprinted on us the Lithuanian way to adapt, to connect past and present, to keep family together, and to immerse ourselves in the mystery and joy of life.

My mother had some firm beliefs about the evening. "Only family attends Kūčios with their spouses," my mother would pronounce emphatically; she wasn't always sure about the

in-laws. She believed that talking about Kūčios ahead of time would lead to ridicule—concentrating on the details of dinner would make the holiday seem frivolous. My mother also may have feared the neighbors would think we were political subversives or practicing witchcraft if we explained that this holiday celebrated Lithuanian traditions rooted in nature and Christian mysticism. Remembering the dead with a candle burning on an empty plate was a bit out of the ordinary in the U.S.

We children didn't need an explanation for Kūčios. The mystery of the holiday was intensified as we ate by candlelight in the dining room, heard happy and sad stories of relatives dead and alive, and listened to the adults speak Lithuanian. Grandfather Kazys, whom we lovingly called "Didzukas," made it real when he wept softly, remembering his boyhood in Radžiūnai, Lithuania, a small village near Alytus. Then when my father, Nick, spoke of his Ukrainian family and my mother and aunts remembered their mother, we knew that happiness and sadness intermingled on this evening.



Babarskas family farm in Radžiūnai, Lithuania, a small village near Alytus.

Kūčios preparation was women's work in our family. The house was cleaned from top to bottom. The 12-course meatless meal included smoked fish, pickled herring, pickled mushrooms, poppy seed rolls and cranberry pudding. Later, when my mother and my Aunt Min worked for well-to-do families who liked shellfish, Aunt Min began serving lobster, shrimp, clams and crab cakes. Ukrainian pierogies (potato dumplings) and

Lithuanian grybų ausytės (mushroom dumplings) were holiday staples, made in advance and frozen.

The holiday was a mandatory time of family togetherness, but our Kūčios traditions evolved when everyone could not attend. Travel costs could be staggering for members traveling from long distances. When Aunt Beatrice, my mother's youngest sister, moved to Pittsburgh in the 1950s after she married, she came only on Christmas Day. But when she was diagnosed with cancer and in remission, Aunt Beatrice flew to Boston to celebrate Kūčios with us at my sister Nicki's house. Over the years, my grandfather Kazys died, then my father Nick, and Aunt Beatrice died too.

When I moved from Pennsylvania to Michigan and finally to Atlanta, Georgia, I resolved to carry on the Kūčios tradition at my house. Finally my turn to host, I struggled with how to include our diverse family: the living and the dead, young and old, Lithuanians and non-Lithuanians, male and female, picky eaters and traditionalists.

In 2013, the dinner was special because my mother, Florence, who was 91 with dementia, attended her last Christmas Eve dinner.

That December 24, when we returned from early Christmas Eve Mass, my playful, impatient grandchildren were running through the house playing tag. I said to the grandchildren in a sweet but direct voice, "Why don't you all go out on the porch and find the first star? This is the year's longest night and you should be able to see a lot of stars."

"OUMA, the stars aren't out," the grandchildren shouted impatiently while peeking out the windows.

"Go outside on the porch and search the sky," I repeated gently. "When the sky darkens, you will see the stars. Only when you see the first star can we begin Kūčios, our Christmas Eve dinner."

Wisps of clouds softened the Atlanta skyline, hiding the stars longer than normal, yet the children trusted that a star would appear. Running from window to window, then out on the porch for a closer look, the children scanned the sky.

"There's the first star," shrieked dark-haired Sophie, age 9, my oldest granddaughter. She looked like an ornament in her red velvet dress climbing on the wrought iron banister. Pulling her younger cousins Bente, age 4, and Selleck, age 6, to the porch railing, she pointed to a tiny twinkle dangling against the darkening sky between two houses across our tree-lined street.

Grandson Nick stood by, waiting for the star-watch game to be over. This evening he was more than a kid looking for the first star. Nick, at age 12, agreed to help lead Kūčios for the first time.

Shouting, the younger kids raced inside to pull me out to the porch. "Come, Ouma. The star is here." Obeying their command, I left the chaotic kitchen. Outside they pointed to the star hanging in the sky. Then more stars appeared against the darkening blue above, but we had no time to stargaze. I returned



Aunt Ruth and Daddy, who had been working in the coal mine.

inside to signal that festivities should begin. As I passed the dining room, I reached into my long black and white apron, found the stick matches, and lit the six white tapered candles standing tall in brass candleholders across the dining room table on a special linen table runner. So began Kūčios 2013, celebrating the longest night of the year.

At 6:20 p.m., with the stars glittering outside in the sky, our candle-lit cocktail party began. Grandpap Bill and my son-in-law Mike fired up the gas logs, and turned on a CD with accordion music by Lithuanian artist Gintarė. The hors d'oeuvres were six of the traditional 12 Lithuanian dishes that would be served during this portion of the evening. We served Lithuanian dishes of smoked fish, pickled herring and mushrooms, caviar, tiny poppy seed rolls and cranberry pudding. Grandpap Bill offered a shot of whiskey to adults and ginger ale to the non-alcohol drinkers.

"Skanaus—good eating," Grandpap Bill bellowed. In and out of the cocktail party, my daughter Leslie and I passed into the kitchen because we were both Kūčios participants and organizers. In a precise but subtle way, our job was to keep the evening flowing smoothly because it could drop into chaos with so many moving parts. Leslie and I frantically checked the food preparation schedule, poured water and ice into the Waterford crystal glasses, located serving dishes and spoons, and scanned for any possible problems like a missing piece of cutlery.

By the end of the cocktail party, disheveled from our juggling act, Leslie and I needed a break. With our aprons damp from drying last-minute dishes and our brows dripping with sweat, we sat in our little library for a quick rest, with our legs splayed out in a decidedly undignified manner. As the rich aroma of the



"Didzukas" (Grandfather Kazys) and me when I was about 7 years old.

cinnamon candles filled the air, I was taken back to my grandfather's humble cedar shake house at 92 Ninth Street in Lucerne Mines, Pa. Oh, how I missed him and Aunt Min. I remember we called Grandfather Kazys "Didzukas," our special term of endearment. I can see him standing at his front door as the falling snow swirled around him in the blue night. With his wide-brimmed brown felt hat, in his baggy blue denim trousers and his warm, grey, durable Pendleton wool shirt, he would rub our hands when we entered and say "šaltis" (cold).

Short, sturdy, dark-haired Aunt Min also eagerly awaited our arrival. She wore her long, mid-calf, crepe, dark blue coat dress with rhinestone buttons and a belt. Over the dress, she wrapped around her wide waist a stained apron with a bib and long front panel. Standing in black leather stacked heels at least two sizes too small, she overflowed her shoes. It did not matter. Her warm, welcoming hugs made her beautiful to us.

My granddaughter Sophie snapped me out of my daydream. "Ouma, I'm ready for our reader's theatre after dinner," Sophie whispered. She had the Grinch Who Stole Christmas, her favorite. Kazyinka and the Magic Harmonica by Aloyzas Baronas was new to her. In the story, Kūčios was so special that at midnight the animals could talk. Sophie was doing her best to

be patient, but the dinner celebration on the longest night of the year was turning into a personal endurance test.

Our faces were bathed in candlelight as we stood opposite each other around the table with our backs to the room's darkness. Kūčios wove together pre-Christian and Judeo-Christian beliefs to celebrate the winter solstice, the sacredness of family and the Incarnation, which means we must see God in nature and in people. Nick, with the help of Grandpap Bill, passed a plate filled with apple slices and asked everyone to take a slice, eat it and remember our biblical first parents, Adam and Eve. The apple slice acknowledges that we often fail others and must forgive ourselves and others

I softly said, "May we know mercy and give mercy."

Several beats of silence passed when precocious Selleck, second grandson, suddenly asked, "What is mercy?" One of the adults explained mercy is having compassion and forgiveness toward others who you could otherwise hurt: "Tonight we come together to wish each other well and commit to give our best to one another, those present and those not present."

Next, Nick took the small plate of plotkelė (or paplotėlis), unconsecrated communion wafers, from the center of the table and passed one to everyone. Then we asked each other's forgiveness for any transgressions and wished each other well for the coming year. Everyone moved around, broke their wafer with each other, then gave them their good wishes. "We do this because we know when we are loved and love, we can see the spirit of God in each other." When everyone settled into their seats, we inhaled the silent Kūčios ambiance of togetherness.

Then, like seeds that were fed and watered in sunlight, curiosity gradually bloomed.

Sophie, Bente and Selleck wondered out loud if animals really spoke at midnight on Christmas Eve as told in the Kazyinka story. They questioned, "Are the spirits of the dead really here with us? Why were nature, animals and the dead so important to the Lithuanians?"

Sonja, Bente and Selleck's mother, answered, "Yes, I believe the spirits of the dead are with us in non-interfering ways. Of course, we can't know for sure, but because life energy is not destroyed but transformed, I can accept that the energy of the dead is around us. Do animals talk? I believe they talk in some way, perhaps not words like us but in their own way. How well we care for the earth, keeping its balance with people and animals, will mean our survival."

While everyone talked, the crab cakes were served with a delicate orange sauce. The mushroom and potato dumplings were passed around the table along with a green vegetable, cooked mushrooms and rice. I finished eating my food and answered carefully. "We believe that we were meant for good and can do good if we can forgive and act with compassion. All of us are better when we are loved. Nature and people are one and we are in this world together."

"Why do we only eat fish for this meal?" asked Selleck.



This is Kūčios 2013. I am sitting at the head of the table.

“In Lithuania and the other Baltic countries, fish such as hering and cod were preserved in brine and vinegar and served at sacred winter rituals during the pre-Christian era. Christians adopted this, too, and it was meant to remember the sacrifice of Jesus’ death. But look it up when we are done and then tell us what you learned,” I suggested.

Leslie, Nick and Sophie’s mother, added. “Nature has lessons. In the starkness of winter it is difficult to believe spring and summer will come again. But we need the rest in the winter for the plant growth of spring and summer. This holiday we learned that even at the darkest time of the year, there is always reason for hope. We know about the baby born in a manger to a poor woman, and a pharaoh who tried to kill all the Jewish first-born sons because it was predicted that one day one of these sons would become a future king. But Jesus’ small family found a way to save themselves when they worked together and believed in their good.”

“Everything is possible with God,” I said.

“You mean, even stopping global warming?” asked Sophie, waving her hands to include the world.

“Yes! Aren’t we supposed to love God with our whole heart, soul and mind? That means doing the hard work to figure things out for the good of all, like stopping global warming,” Grandpap Bill responded. “Yes, sometime we fail, but we must continue to try.”

I raised my glass and wished everyone good health, “Tavo sveikata. God willing, we will be together next year.” Engulfed by the glow of the candlelight, the past and present wove together as we each stayed in our own inner worlds. In minutes, laughter and small talk began again.

My son Mark dropped his voice as he leaned into the table’s candlelight and pondered what he had just heard, “Ok, Mom. So Christmas Eve, the Kūčios celebration, honors God in nature and the relationship between people and nature? That’s why

we celebrate the living and the dead, science and mystery, animals and people, women and men, because it marks how we are a part of an ever-changing connected universe. Learning to love and care for each other and our differences makes the puzzle work. We start with our family and our place. Lithuanians celebrated this for centuries before we celebrated the birth of Christ?”

“Yes, that is a way to explain it, Mark.”

I thanked Nick for leading Kūčios. “Sophie, Selleck and Bente can take their turns next year.”

When I blew out the candles on the dining room table, I placed a few leftovers on the empty plate with a candle remembering those absent. One by one, we passed the window on the way to the living room. As predicted, we could see many stars made brilliant against the darkness in the background. In the living room, the children began enacting Sophie’s chosen stories. Nick asked, “Ouma, next time, will you tell us why Kazys cried and how he got to the U.S. from Lithuania? What about Grandpap Nick’s Ukrainian family?”

Kūčios, a Lithuanian family tradition, taught us how to capture the wisdom and sacredness of ordinary life in good and in difficult times no matter where we live, Alytus or Atlanta.

Barbara Tedrow, daughter of Nicholas Maruszak and Florence Babarskaitė, is a retired college professor living in Avondale Estates, Ga., an Atlanta suburb. Her formative years were spent in Western Pennsylvania with her Eastern European family who worked in the coal mines.

She has held Fulbright Fellowships to South Africa in 2002-2003 and 2008. This fall, she was on a Fulbright Fellowship to Lithuania and will go again in 2017. Her research and teaching is focused on narratives around sense of place, time and nature as a means to understand one’s context for learning about self and the world.

Stebuklas

By James Joseph Brown



Stebuklas means miracle. It's the place where anyone can go to petition for the fulfillment of their heart's desire. Photo: Adamico | Dreamstime.com

I knew the Stebuklas was somewhere near Vilnius Cathedral, but I was having trouble finding it. When the summer sky filled with drizzle and thick, rolling clouds that turned the air chilly in just a few minutes, I thought about giving up. I couldn't imagine spotting a single tile in the sea of wet stone slabs that lined Cathedral Square.

It was tradition for locals and visitors alike to visit this lucky square of hallowed ground, where they performed a minor ritual and then sent their prayers up into the ether, fully expecting for them to one day come true. Stebuklas means miracle. It's the place where anyone can go to petition for the fulfillment of their heart's desire.

It was also tradition that no one could tell you exactly where to find it. You had to stumble upon it on your own. I worried it might be like finding a needle in a haystack. My spirits fell as I continued to scan the monochrome tiles between the cathedral and the bell tower. With each false lead I considered the possibility that it was an elaborate hoax. Maybe I was foolish to still believe in miracles in the first place.

But then, just as the rain began to clear and the sun sent a few nervous rays through the clouds, I found the famous Stebuklas.

It turned out to be as simple as scanning the crowds until I noticed a group of schoolchildren lined up, waiting their turn to stand on it and spin three times in a circle, closing their eyes,

making their own secret wishes, then stumbling away half-dizzy and giddy with the excitement of imagining their wildest dreams coming true.

I felt self-conscious, waiting my turn behind a group of 10-year-olds, as if I were doing something childish and frivolous, something I should have long grown out of. But I didn't come all the way to Lithuania just to chicken out of anything that felt uncomfortable or that made me look foolish. I was used to bearing the cross of humiliation here. I had to do it every time I spoke this language, which I struggled with mightily as an American-born Lithuanian.

The schoolchildren, some with tiny umbrellas and miniature, grown-up looking shoes that made them look like storybook children, finally finished their pilgrimage to the Stebuklas and were shepherded away by two cheerful teachers, dressed nicely for the occasion.

I approached the tile, which was different from the others surrounding it, and turned my head to read the letters coiled around its perimeter that spelled out Stebuklas, The large-scale figures of saints lining the façade of the cathedral, dazzling in the light of the sun, which was breaking free of the clouds, seemed to be watching me. I felt the need to think carefully about this, to invest my wish with gravitas, and steer it in the direction of the grandiose and selfless.

Instead of wishing to write a bestseller, or praying to be so wealthy I didn't have to worry about medical bills or student loans, I played with other ideas. Less hunger, more freedom, a compassionate world for all.

I settled on my wish, and vowed to keep it to myself. This was also tradition. Remaining silent about what you wish for.

I closed my eyes, sent my wish out into the world, and spun around three times.

The first time I visited Lithuania was in the '90s, when everyone was still shaking off the remnants of Soviet influence. It felt like a society that had barely survived a long battle with a terminal illness, and was only beginning to realize that it was now in full remission, and would one day become healthy again. Hope was a small point of light, like the flame of a candle just flickering to life, small and feeble in the dark of night just before the dawn.

There was a sense of danger in the air. I learned to avoid places where the Russian mafia hung out, because I didn't want to get mixed up in their sporadic drunken brawls and shoot-outs. Border crossings, even into neighboring Latvia, were subject to long delays and usually meant dealing with suspicious officials. When I first took the bus from Riga to Panevėžys to visit cousins, I feared for my life because the driver was so drunk he could barely stay on the road. The passengers who rode the route regularly told me they wished there was something they could do, but admitted they felt powerless to change anything.

There was a profound sense of lingering stagnation. Because this society had been forcibly isolated for so long, it took time for change to come. Lithuanians were proud of their tradi-



I knew the Stebuklas was somewhere near Vilnius Cathedral, but I was having trouble finding it ... My spirits fell as I continued to scan the monochrome tiles between the cathedral and the bell tower. Photo: Teresė Vekteris

tions, and they were eager to revitalize and preserve them after years of suppression. But they were also going to have to learn to embrace a certain amount of change if they were going to reintegrate into the rest of Europe and the West.

By 2010, when I received a fellowship to spend the summer in Vilnius to do research for my university, I found a place I barely recognized. It finally felt like Europe and not like an abandoned outpost of the former Soviet empire. There were new and interesting choices on menus, tastefully renovated cafes, and stylish, optimistic young people who wanted nothing to do with the awful parts of the past that still haunted their parents.

But, just like the dark storm clouds that can appear out of nowhere on any given summer day in Lithuania, there was a terrible shadow cast across this rosy tableau.

I arrived just after the first Baltic Pride parade in Lithuania took place, the first major public event supporting the rights of LGBTQ people. It shook up the entire nation, and was still making national news as I was getting settled in for the summer. What should have been a sign of progress had turned into a national embarrassment.

The parade was limited, for safety reasons, to a small group of delegates. They were mostly international human rights activists and spokespeople throughout Lithuania who bore the weight of representing an entire community that until then had been invisible. Lithuania was still reconciling its more rigid Catholic traditions, its decades of isolation, and the hostility, mob mentality and homophobia that were largely leftovers of Russian cultural influence. All of these toxic ingredients came to a deadly boil on the day of the parade. Police barricades were erected. Security was tight, and the mood was tense.

Troublemakers from cities outside of Vilnius, who were less tolerant than their more cosmopolitan counterparts living in the capital, swarmed the city and attended the parade with the

sole purpose of catcalling and disrupting the somber, dignified event. They threatened violence. They menaced and created an unwelcoming air of hostility.

It was not a good look for Lithuania.

Officials wouldn't allow the parade to pass through the center of the city, the same way every other parade is allowed to do. Instead the Baltic Pride parade was held at a location near the Neris River. Relegated to its own ghetto, it was far away from crowds and onlookers who could potentially witness the clashes that seemed inevitable.

The first gay club I went to in Lithuania was hard to find. Somewhere along the banks of the Neris River, behind a crumbling building, down a set of dark stairs. It was the '90s. There was barely a whisper about human rights or gay pride; just this small, clandestine bar, hidden in a basement. You could only find it if you knew where to look.

I was nervous as I approached the door. Only the twilight of the late night sky cast any light on the dark courtyard. In these northern latitudes, the sun refused to stop lightening the sky until nearly midnight in June.

There was an ancient-looking door with a sign next to it that I could barely make out. Ring the bell. In Lithuanian and in Russian. I pressed the button, which looked long out of service. It didn't make a sound. I waited and waited.

As I was just about to leave, a small window in the door slid open, startling me. Loud music was coming from inside. A face appeared in the square of light, half-hidden in smoke.

"What do you want?" he demanded, in Russian. His accent was off. Maybe Polish.

I didn't know what to say. He looked me up and down a few times, then slammed the window shut in my face.

Again I turned to leave. Then the door opened and the Polish

guy motioned me to come in, quickly. He was built like a body-builder and had a slicked-back ponytail. He lifted my arms out to the side and patted me down, then turned me around and did it again from behind.

"Go inside," he said.

The parade took place without incident. Despite the air of hostility and the threat of violence surrounding them, this small group of people stood up to the swarm of protesters who wanted nothing more than to silence them, even if it meant using brute force. As they marched, some of them held hands, either to affirm their love and support for each other, or to show solidarity and comfort to one another. They united in their passion to stand up for the notion of equality for all, even if it meant putting themselves in danger.

It was tense. It was even scary for many. But they survived.

Because of this, it was claimed by the LGBTQ community and its supporters as a success. It was seen as a step in the right direction by human rights activists. But instead of celebrating, when it was over, most people involved let out a collective sigh of relief.

The longest unbroken chain of people holding hands in recorded history began in Tallinn, Estonia, passed through Riga, Latvia, and ended in Vilnius, Lithuania. It was called The Baltic Way. On August 23, 1989, citizens of all three Baltic States joined hands in solidarity against the Soviet occupation of their countries.

Many of them sang folk songs in their native languages. They filled the air with Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian melodies, as a way to affirm their national pride.

At this point, the Soviet occupation had lasted 50 years. Gaining freedom from the Soviet Union seemed like an insurmount-



Troublemakers from cities outside of Vilnius swarmed the city and attended the parade with the sole purpose of catcalling and disrupting the somber, dignified event. Photo: Andrius Vaitkevičius | Dreamstime.com



The parade was limited, for safety reasons, to a small group of delegates. They were mostly international human rights activists and spokespersons throughout Lithuania who bore the weight of representing an entire community that until then had been invisible. Photo: Andrius Vaitkevičius | Dreamstime.com

able task, like something that could never happen in anyone's wildest dreams.

But the people of the Baltic States never lost hope.

The Baltic Way stretched over 370 miles, from Tallinn to Vilnius, where it ended in Cathedral Square.

The last person in the chain stood at the Stebuklas. I can only imagine they were wishing for a miracle unlike any they had ever seen in their lifetime.

I always used to believe that I could change the world if I just prayed and meditated every day. If I dreamed and wished hard enough. If I spun around three times and conjured helpful spells and dispelled harmful hexes. Religion, spirituality, superstition and the power of positive thinking all combined to instill in me a world view that gave me a sense of personal power, albeit one that was tempered with appeasing the capricious, mysterious forces of nature and the divine. Maybe this is because I grew up in a Lithuanian family.

Lithuania is still at least a nominally Catholic country, yet firmly rooted in its pagan identity. Throughout history, it has syncretized the Catholic religion into its nature-based spiritual traditions and cosmology. Many of these traditions come off as quaint and charming to visitors, the stuff of fairy tales and intrigue. But they are not to be dismissed or trivialized. They are of great interest to scholars and anthropologists, because they carry cultural notes that echo back millennia and illuminate ties to ancient societies.

This folksy, spooky way of viewing the world as a place where rituals and charms are valid and necessary is part of what makes Lithuanians who they are. Even though many Lithuanians no longer embrace this as a comprehensive world view, most still

believe that at the very least it can't hurt to follow through with some of these traditions. Even if it's just for luck, to cover your bases.

On that day in 2010 when I first visited the Stebuklas and sent my wish out into the world, it was raining off and on until evening. As the long twilight stretched into night, it suddenly cleared up, leaving the streets slick and shrouded with a hint of mist that gave Old Town a dreamy quality, like a moody pastel, or an atmospheric film.

There was a new gay club in town, new to me anyway, and I was determined to check it out that night, dreary weather or not. I was having trouble with my phone, so instead of calling a cab, I decided to walk down Pilies gatvė to Cathedral Square, where taxis tended to zip by, looking for fares. It was getting late, so

I worried it might take some time to flag one down. Vilnius is still a relatively small city, without the lines of cabs and the steady stream of traffic of most European capitals. It's one of the charms that makes the city feel like a hidden gem, timeless and valuable.

When a cab finally stopped I asked the driver if he could take me to Naujamiestis, another part of town not too far away. He had a bit of an accent, Polish I think, which was odd, as most cab drivers were Russian. He nodded his head and said, "Yes, yes." As I stepped into the cab, he asked where exactly, and I told him the name of the club. He gripped the steering wheel tightly and asked me to repeat it, just to make sure.

I could see his eyes in the rearview mirror, going from friendly, to cautious, to panicked. He got completely spooked. Drove away with my foot halfway in the back of his cab, letting the door wave, saying "no, no," as if he had seen a ghost.

I wanted to feel bad for him but really I was just furious. Who was he to treat me like some unclean beast who would pollute his cab if I got into it, or some predatory vampire who would bite his neck and curse him forever?

I stormed away, going in the wrong direction, just to walk off my rage. As I turned the next corner I stumbled right into a stunning, panoramic view of the cathedral, with Gediminas Tower right behind it, rising into the night sky atop a small, green hill. The tower loomed above the city, lit with floodlights, glowing like a beacon in the barely darkening midsummer twilight. The Lithuanian flag was waving in the breeze above it.

This was the flag that once called troops to battle. It flew atop this castle for centuries. Then during the Soviet occupation, it had come down. Lithuania was no more, the Russian occupation dissolved the nation, and the culture and language were

dominated by Russian. The flag was in danger of never flying again.

But then in 1991, two years after The Baltic Way formed an unbroken link of people holding hands as a way to hope for a better future in the face of overwhelming oppression, a miracle came true.

With great effort and struggle, the Lithuanian nation reasserted its sovereignty, ousting once and for all the Soviet government. It was the fulfilment of so many desperate pleas and petitions that it seemed hard to believe when it happened. Lithuanians stood up to their oppressors, and won back their independence.

But still, 20 years later, after all that struggle, I was dealing with this. Someone who thought that freedom for his country meant freedom for only some people in his country. Lithuanian cultural discourse had been stunted under the heel of Soviet oppression, and it was still catching up. It had spent 50 years sealed off from the rest of the world, from the necessary flow of ideas and information that helps societies grow and change.

This was not the country my grandfather would want me to come back to. When he left for America, he had the intention of going back when Lithuania was free. But he wouldn't have wanted to go back to this. And he wouldn't have wanted me to go back to this, for anyone in his family to go back and to be treated like this, like they didn't belong.

Maybe I was only half-Lithuanian. Maybe I *didn't* speak the language perfectly. Maybe I *wasn't* the most conventional Lithuanian you'd ever meet. But I was not going to let someone make me feel like I didn't belong in this society just because I was gay.

I swore then that I wouldn't be silent. That I would speak up and not deny it if the issue came up, even if it made some



The tower loomed above the city, lit with floodlights, glowing like a beacon in the barely darkening midsummer twilight. The Lithuanian flag was waving in the breeze above it. Photo: Pavel Kavalenkau | Dreamstime.com

squeamish Lithuanians uncomfortable when they asked where my wife and kids were and I told them the truth. I would make sure I stood up for what was right until the day when this nation treated us all equally.

I walked past the bell tower, to the Stebuklas, and made one last wish. This time I broke with tradition and told everyone I could about it afterward. I wished for Lithuania to be a more tolerant society for gays and lesbians and anyone else who felt different and misunderstood. It was too important a wish to keep to myself.

Closing my eyes, feeling the fog begin to close around me, I stepped onto the tile. Wishes can come true. The world can change for the better. I kept these thoughts close to me, letting them light me up as I stood on the Stebuklas, spinning, spinning, spinning.

James Joseph Brown is the winner of the 2015 Maggie award for Best Essay. His writing has appeared in The Stockholm Review of Literature, Desert Companion, Santa Fe Literary Review, Red Rock Review, 300 Days of Sun and other publications.

He received an MFA in creative writing from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas where he was the recipient of the 2010 Black Mountain Institute International Travel Fellowship to Lithuania.

A former Peace Corps volunteer, he has taught English in Russia, Spain, Korea, Thailand and Lithuania. In addition to serving as consulting editor of Helen Literary Magazine, based in Las Vegas, he currently works as a freelance writer and English language trainer in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.



I stumbled right into a stunning, panoramic view of the cathedral, with Giediminas Tower right behind it, rising into the night sky atop a small, green hill. Photo: Olgacov | Dreamstime.com



Photo: Pijus Vyčas

Žuvis su Pomidorais

(Fish fillets in tomato sauce)

By Jana Sirusaitė Motivans



According to Catholic tradition, Christmas Eve was a day of fasting. In Lithuania, this fast was observed for Kūčios, the traditional Christmas Eve meal, which contained no dairy, eggs or meat. Devout believers often even omitted fish. The meal was simple, because Christmas Eve was meant to be a time for prayer and reflection. Over the years, these practices have been somewhat relaxed, and most Lithuanian-American Kūčios celebrations now include eggs and dairy, and of course fish, but the meal is still meatless.

I recently read an article by Monika Juodeškaitė in the November issue of Draugas News, in which she interviewed Milda Beržanskaitė-Kašėtienė and Dovilė Stonė. Mi and Do (as they are known) are vegan cooks and entrepreneurs in Lithuania. What I found most interesting in this interview was the suggestion that Kūčios, in its original Catholic format, was basically a vegan meal. The current trend toward veganism was something our ancestors practiced long ago. We should be proud to have maintained our traditions for so long that now they can be embraced by a new generation!

I strongly believe in maintaining the tradition of Kūčios and all the special foods we enjoy as part of our celebration. The only way to preserve a cuisine is to actually cook it, and to share the

experience with our friends and families. These traditions unite Lithuanians around the world, and remind us of our heritage.

For Kūčios, it is traditional to prepare 12 dishes, representing the 12 Apostles. The majority of these are served during the first course, which consists of cold foods such as herring, smoked fish, mišrainė (mixed vegetable salad), žuvis su pomidorais (fish with tomato sauce) and mushrooms. The cold foods are followed by a hot main course, usually more fish. After the meal, šližikai (Christmas Eve poppy seed biscuits also known as kūčiukai) are served with kisielius (cranberry pudding). This is usually followed by more desserts, then the gift exchange. The celebration continues with midnight Mass at the nearest Lithuanian church or local parish.

After many years of preparing Kūčios together, my mother and I have divided up the cooking tasks and have an organized plan for preparing the many dishes. Žuvis su pomidorais (fish in tomato sauce) falls under my mother's area of responsibility; therefore, I was free to take notes and photos to document the process. This dish is also known as rauduona žuvis (red fish), but at our house we simply call it ketchup fish.

Linksmų Kalėdų! Merry Christmas!

a taste of lithuania

Žuvis su Pomidorais (fish fillets in tomato sauce)

INGREDIENTS

- 6-8 tilapia fillets (or other firm white fish), approximately 1.5 lbs, preferably fresh, not frozen
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
- 3 large onions
- 2 cups ketchup

1. Peel and slice (not chop) the onions. Heat some olive oil in a large frying pan, and gently sauté the onion slices until they are very tender. Add the ketchup to the onions and stir just until evenly combined. Remove the pan from the heat.



2. Place the seasoned flour into a shallow bowl. Beat the eggs with a little water in another shallow bowl.
3. Heat some olive oil in a large frying pan. Cut the fish fillets into serving-size pieces, approximately 2-3 inches long. Take one piece of fish in your hand, dip it first in the seasoned flour, then into the egg. Let the excess egg drip back into the bowl, then place the battered fish into the hot frying pan.



4. Continue with the remaining fish pieces until the pan is full, taking care not to crowd them. When the bottom is golden, flip the fillet pieces over until they are cooked

through and browned on both sides. Remove the cooked fish to a platter, and cook remaining pieces in the same way.



5. Spread a layer of the onion mixture in the bottom of a serving dish. Place a layer of cooked fish over the onions, followed by another layer of onions. Continue layering the fish and onions, ending with onions on top.



6. We usually double this recipe and serve it in a glass serving dish, which shows off the layers nicely. Decorate the top with fresh dill and lemon slices. Chill in the refrigerator until ready to serve. This is served as part of the cold first course for Kūčios.



*Sveikiname su Šv. Kalėdomis ir artėjančiais Naujaisiais Metais!
Tegul Kalėdos atneša Jums džiugumą, o 2017-ieji metai būna
pilni naujų galimybių, laimės ir sėkmės.*

*Wishing you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!
May the Christmas season bring you joy, and may 2017 be filled
with new opportunities, fortune, and success!*



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our community

22 Artists Featured in West Coast Exhibition

The Consulate General of Lithuania in Los Angeles recently organized an exhibition of the works of 22 emigrant Lithuanian artists living and creating in the United States. Held at the Santa Monica Art Studios, the show was titled simply, "Lithuanian Art Show."

At the opening on October 29, 2016, Lithuanian Consul General Darius Gaidys welcomed an abundance of guests. "It is clear that the art perfectly unites people of different nationalities," he said. "I'm pleased that so many U.S. West Coast Lithuanians, Los Angeles residents and visitors from other states and cities are gathered together today to view Lithuanian art."

The exhibition, which was open through November 29, 2016, encompassed paintings, graphics, photography, ceramics and sculpture by the participating artists. It was organized to facilitate opportunities for cultural self-expression through the arts to bring together the Lithuanian community, to promote discussion of Lithuanian art and to interest the wider public in Lithuanian art.

Artists featured in the exhibition included Rasa Arbas, Krista Augius, Vytas Barauskas, Justina Brazdžionis, Renata Ciuzausk-Markley, Rolandas Dabrukas, Giedrė Gudžiūtė Kavalyauskas, Alexandra Hoover, Martynas Ivinskas, Livija Lipaitė, Juozas Lipas, Daina Mattis, Gintaras Meškauskas, Kęstutis Mikėnas, Ilona Peteris, Saulė Piktytis, Stasys Pinkus, Girmant Ragus, Vytas Sakalas, Virga Šiaučiūnaitė, Sigitas Šniras and Raisa Urbanas.



Art appreciation starts young.



Artist Ilona Peteris



Artist Giedrė Gudžiūtė Kavalyauskas (right).



This family was among the guests at the opening reception.



Artist Krista Augius.



Artist Girmant Ragus (right).



Artist Stasys Pinkus.

Los Angeles Kūčios Evokes Childhood Memories

By Algis Bliūdžius

The Lithuanian Community in Los Angeles celebrated Christmas Eve—Kūčios—on December 18, 2016, at a celebration sponsored by the Daughters of Lithuania. A donation of \$45 was requested to reserve a seat at a table. For the event, St. Casimir's parish hall was decorated with evergreens, ornaments and lights.

To start the program, Eglė Janulevičiūtė played the piano. Daria Francesco, the president of Daughters of Lithuania, welcomed the guests. A poem was recited about the night before the Christmas. Tomas Karanauskas, the parish pastor, read from the scriptures and delivered a prayer before the meal.

For the American guests, a spokesperson explained the significance of the meal in Lithuania. Kūčios celebrates the birth of Jesus, the son of God. It is a family Christmas Eve meal that adheres to old traditions. On the table a handful of fine hay is spread under a white tablecloth as a symbol of Christ's birth in a manger. An empty chair is placed at the table for a family member who had passed away that year. A moment of silence is observed to welcome the deceased. A person living alone may be invited to the table. The meal consists of 12 different meatless dishes symbolizing the 12 Apostles of Jesus. When the first star appears, the family gathers at the table to say a prayer and exchange wafers before the meal. After the meal, they go to church for the midnight shepherds' Mass to welcome Baby Jesus.

Food preparation is an important part of Kūčios, and only meatless dishes are served. The Christmas Eve meal at our celebration began with a first course of cold food that had been placed on the tables before the guests arrived. On the plates were herring with onions, Lithuanian potato salad, salmon, salad, cranberry pudding, fruit compote, small biscuits with poppy seed milk, and rye bread. The second course was the warm food. It was three plates of white fish filets with tomatoes and onions, potato puree with mushroom sauce, and beets. The last course was the dessert at the end of the program. It was gingerbread cake and yule log cake, sprouting mushroom cookies, served with coffee.

For the main program, the choir under the direction of Viktoras Ralys sang Christmas carols. To start the program, the choir sang Silent Night. After the first course, they returned to sing numerous classic Christmas carols. One carol stands out, for we all joined to sing it with the choir. It was "Muškim būgnais, trimituokim," which means beat the drums and blow the trumpets. The carol is about the night where a great joy arose in the land when a star shone over Bethlehem. So let us beat the drums and blow the trumpets ... let us give glory to Jesus born to us tonight, we sang.



We decorated the Christmas tree with hand-made ornaments from white straw called "šiaudinukai."

The program was a joyful holiday celebration. The meal was as our parents served it, and carols were the songs we grew up with. I was grateful to the Daughters of Lithuania for staging this event, for it brought back childhood memories of Christmas. That was a magical time of the year. Mother would prepare the meal, father would bring in the tree, and after the meal we would open the presents. Later in the cold night we would drive under a starry sky to midnight Mass. There the nativity display was set up, the candles glowed bright and the choir sang joy to the world. This is my cherished memory of Christmas.

When my wife and I left the hall, we made plans to go food shopping the next day. It would be to prepare the Christmas Eve meal at our home from our moms' family recipes.



The table was set with cold, meatless dishes.

Amber Roots Celebrates the Season

By Teresė Vekteris

In a little corner of Philadelphia's River Wards, in a neighborhood that many Lithuanians new to the U.S. once called home, a community of Lithuanian-Americans from near and far gathered to celebrate an annual tradition.

We were in the Lithuanian Music Hall for the Amber Roots Lithuanian Heritage Club's annual Kūčios.

The hall was a place that some of our immigrant grandparents or great-grandparents helped build at the turn of the 20th century. For later arrivals, it was a place to celebrate community and family events among countrymen. On this afternoon, we were carrying on that tradition.

Club coordinators Kęstutis and Joyce Lukas did yeoman's work in making the facilities festive and assembling special gifts for club members. Throughout the year, they had gathered our photographs, family histories and recipes. They supplemented the contributions with Lithuanian history, folk tales, poems, songs, resource lists and language lessons, and on this occasion gifted binders containing the assemblage to each member.

Aušra Maknys, Amber Roots treasurer and recording secretary, then stepped into her role as Kūčios hostess. She explained the meaning of the celebration, and led us through the lighting of the Kūčios candles and the sharing of the plotkelės.

After we had wished each other a "linskmų šventų Kalėdų" and "laimingų naujų metų," it was time to exercise our brains before diving into the ample buffet. Amber Roots' resident quizmaster Stephany Gutasukas had devised a fill-in-the-blanks quiz based on Christmas songs whose answers were food items.

As some of us hummed the tunes to recall the lyrics, others caught up with friends, while others got down to the business of filling their plates. With everyone contributing to the potluck, the table was groaning. As it's traditional to sample everything to guarantee a good year, bellies were soon groaning as well.

As the convivial afternoon drew to a close, Marion Gaudinski reminded everyone not to leave without picking up a jar of her home-made virytas, her annual gift to us all. Each vial of the potent amber liquid was accompanied by a parchment chronicling the history of the lietuviškas midus (Lithuanian mead).

Although Amber Roots calls itself a club, there are no dues or formal memberships. Everyone is always welcome to attend any of its eight meetings a year—March through June and September through December. You don't even have to be Lithuanian—friends, spouses and visitors of many ethnicities have enjoyed a warm welcome and a taste of Lithuanian culture at one of the club's gatherings. For more information, or to join the Amber Roots mailing list, email Millie Helt at milliemarks@aol.com.



Each place at the table held a greeting card with the club logo and a star.



Irenė Sabaliauskaitė Blanco, playing the role of mother, lights the Kūčios candles above the table holding the plotkelės.



Tom Stanuikynas and his son, Alex, holding his prize for getting the most answers right in the Christmas song quiz.

our community

Springfield Club Supports Lithuanian Relief

by Sandra Baksys

The Lithuanian-American Club of Springfield, Illinois, donated \$2,300 to the Knights of Malta Relief Organization in Lithuania (Maltos Ordino Pagalbos Tarnyba) in the Club's second annual Christmas charity drive. Club member Robert Narmont (Narmontas) and his wife, Marsha, owners of United Community Bank of Chatham, Ill., generously matched \$1,150 collected from 24 other members.

Club officer Viktorija Bieliauskaitė Legge visited the Knights' Vilnius office on Thanksgiving, the same day our funds were received, to meet with Maltiečiai officials and some of the organization's elderly "meals on wheels" recipients. Ms. Legge conveyed the Knights' thanks to the 90 club members and friends gathered for our Christmas party on December 11, 2016, in Springfield, and told us our donations will provide 1,500 hot meals delivered right to the doors of elderly shut-ins.



Lithuanian-American Club of Springfield board member Viktorija Bieliauskaitė Legge (third from right), meeting with the staff of the Knights of Malta Relief Organization in Vilnius. The Knights' General Secretary Eitvydas Bingelis (fourth from left, in red tie) was the Club's contact in setting up the donation and the meeting in Lithuania.

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In Lithuania



Photo: R. Dačkus, Office of the President of Lithuania

... Valdas Adamkus, former president of the Republic of Lithuania, was recognized on the occasion of his 90th birthday, November 3, by current President Dalia Grybauskaitė. Adamkus served as president twice, though not for successive terms.

... Vytautas Landsbergis, Lithuania's first post-independence Parliamentary head, was presented with France's highest award, The Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, for leading Lithuania to independence from the Soviet Union in 1990 and through two subsequent years of struggle.

... Many Syrian refugees who relocated to Lithuania have moved on to Germany to take advantage of larger relief benefits.

... The Times of Israel reports that the Chabad Jews, a fundamentalist Hasidic movement with headquarters in New York and Israel, were barred from the Jewish Community Center in Vilnius under orders of the locally selected Chief Rabbi Kalev Krelin. Lithuania is home to about 6,000 Jews.

Security

... Lithuania will purchase 168 German M577 armored personnel carriers for \$1.7 million during 2017-2018. The carriers are designed to carry up to five soldiers. At about \$10,000 each, they are used only for transportation.

... The U.S. and 10 NATO allies held Iron Sword 2016 exercises with 4,000 troops in Lithuania between November 20 and December 2, 2016. In 2014 there were 2,500 troops and in 2015 there were 2,000.

... In its Kaliningrad enclave, Russia has installed nuclear-capable surface to-surface Iskander missiles and reinforced its Baltic fleet with two warships with long-range cruise missiles.

... Retired U.S. General Jack Keane, who told The Baltic Times that he had declined an offer to become Secretary of Defense in the Trump administration, said that NATO estimates there are 225,000 Russian troops in Kaliningrad.

... Russian President Vladimir Putin has suspended the U.S.-Russian agreement to clean up weapons-grade plutonium stockpiles.

... Lithuania has again suspended Russian TV broadcasts because a Russian Duma member thrice threatened U.S. troops if they get near Russia's borders. The suspension is scheduled to end February 21, 2017. Russians make up about 6 percent of Lithuania's population, and close to 25 percent in Latvia and Estonia. Broadcasts were previously restricted to a paid subscription for similar reasons but resumed under pressure from the European Commission as a violation of its broadcasting rules.

... In January 2017, the Lithuanian Navy will take delivery of a new Danish-built 54-meter patrol boat and two anti-submarine sonar systems with a price tag of 6.5 million euros. It will join three existing patrol boats in securing Lithuania's economic in the 'Baltic, discouraging smugglers and participating in search and rescue operations.

Business

... With about 500 Chinese people working in Lithuania, a Federation of Overseas Chinese has been established in Lithuania. Its purpose is to protect the rights and interests of Chinese living there.

... Chinese Premier Li Keqiang spoke at the 5th summit of the Chinese and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (16+1). He spoke with Lithuanian and Slovakian prime ministers about bilateral cooperation and relations.

... Stasys Dailydka, long-term head of the Lithuanian Railways, resigned shortly after it was revealed that the railroad had purchased locomotive parts from Russia without alternative bids.

... Vilnius Tech Park has officially opened near the junction of Routes 102 and 103 just east of the Neris. With 90 percent of its 97,000 square foot office space already occupied, it is home to 40 startup and venture capital firms. The renovated 19th century buildings house a conference center, café, community garden and pub. The Park offers special relocation packages and free work space for teams setting up in Lithuania.

current events

... The European Union and Canada have signed a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which will eliminate 99 percent of customs duties, improve access to Canadian public procurement and eliminate non-tariff barriers to trade. Typical Lithuanian exports to Canada include cheese, furniture, textiles, clothes, electrical equipment and fishing nets. In 2015, Lithuania exported products worth 164 million euros to Canada. The agreement still awaits approval by the European Parliament and national Parliaments.

International Relations

... The United Nations in Geneva was the site of the Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review of Lithuania's progress in human rights. Lithuania received plaudits for passing anti-human trafficking legislation, establishing the Department of National Minorities and hosting Baltic Pride 2016 in support of the LGBTQ community. Lithuania received recommendations to prevent child abuse and corporal punishment, to increase funding for victims of trafficking and to investigate hate crimes against LGBTQ, Roma (Gypsies) and refugees. There are about 2,000 Roma in Lithuania.

... The 22nd Baltic Council met in Riga to review the trilateral cooperation among Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia for 2017 including security, defense, regional energy markets and transportation links. The foreign ministers of the three countries also met with Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze to help reintegrate Ukraine into Europe.

... Lithuania's President Dalia Grybauskaitė extended congratulations to U.S. President-elect Donald Trump. She said that she is convinced that the United States will remain the strongest and closest ally of Lithuania and will jointly defend the principles of freedom and democracy, implement mutually beneficial projects in the fields of economics, security and energy, and continue work based on the U.S.-Baltic Charter and NATO.

Politics

... Lithuania's new prime minister, Saulius Skvernelis, former national police chief, proposed the following cabinet ministers:

- Foreign Minister: Linas Linkevičius, current foreign minister
- Transport and Communications Minister: Rokas Masiulis, current energy minister
- National Defense Minister: Raimundas Karoblis, current deputy foreign minister and former representative to the European Union
- Finance Minister: Vilius Šapoka, economist and former head of financial services and market supervision at the Bank of Lithuania
- Economic Minister: Mindaugas Sinkevičius, mayor of Jonava in central Lithuania
- Energy Minister: Žygimantas Vaičiūnas, Lithuania's energy attaché for the European Union
- Culture Minister: Liana Ruokytė-Jonsson, actor and translator

The new cabinet took office on December 13, 2016.

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November/December 2016

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

ONGOING

Through April 22, 2017
Daily Life: Photography from Lithuania Exhibit
 The Print Center, 1614 Latimer St., Philadelphia, Pa.
 Free and open to the public
 Tuesday through Saturday
 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.
 Info: printcenter.org,
 215-735-6090

Most Fridays, 4:30-7:30 p.m.
Friday Fish Fry at the Rockford Lithuanian Club
 716 Indiana Avenue, Rockford, Ill.
 Open to the public. Weekly specials vary. First Friday of the month—Lithuanian dumplings.
 Info: lithuanianclub.org,
 815-962-9256

Every Sunday,
 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
All-You-Can-Eat Lithuanian Brunch Buffet
 Lithuanian Club and Gintaras Dining Room
 877 E. 185 St., Cleveland, Ohio
 \$15 per person; \$6 kids 6-12
 Info: lithclub@gmail.com,
 216-531-8318

First Sunday of the Month,
 12-4 p.m.
Lithuanian Brunch
 The Avenue Restaurant, 71-22 Myrtle Ave., Glendale, N.Y.
 Reservations strongly recommended.
 Info: 347-725-3853

First Sunday of the Month
Rockford Lithuanian Club General Membership Meeting
 716 Indiana Avenue, Rockford, Ill.
 Open to all members.
 Info: lithuanianclub.org,
 815-962-9256

Every Third Saturday,
 Mar-Jun & Sep-Nov, 1-3 p.m.
Amber Roots Lithuanian Heritage Club
 Lithuanian Music Hall, 2517 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.
 Use Tilton Street entrance.
 Bring a dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

FEBRUARY 2017

February 11
Poker Tournament to Benefit Versmė Lithuanian School of Kansas City
 Cedar Creek Clubhouse, 25775 W. 103rd St., Olathe, Kans.
 \$45 ticket includes \$3,150 in chips, dinner buffet, soft drinks and Lithuanian snacks.
 Info: Renata Nantz, 913-271-3422

February 24-March 4
Lithuanian Snow Ski Trip
 Aspen Mountain Resort, Aspen, Colo.
 Sponsored by Lithuanian Athletic Union of North America and Lithuanian American Doctors Union. Skiers, non-skiers and families welcome. Race schedule TBA. Travel and accommodations: linda@ski.com, 800-525-2052 x3329 or 970-925-9500 x3329.
 Identify yourself as part of the Lithuanian Ski Group.
 General info: edmickus1@aol.com or vsaulis@sbcglobal.net

February 26, 4 p.m.
Annual Aspen Lithuanian Independence Day Celebration
 809 South Aspen Street, Aspen, Colo.
 Special guest Rolandas Krisčiūnas, Lithuanian Ambassador to the U.S.
 Info: dmb@aspenconsul.com

MARCH 2017

March 3-6
17th Annual Florida Lithuanian Open Golf Tournament
 Info: LTConsulFlorida.com,
 727-895-4811

March 17-19 (new date)
Women's Weekend
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Group discussions, exercise, art, cooking, and spiritual and personal rebirth.
 Info: kerry@watershedcoachingllc.com or kriscon@frontiernet.net

March 17-20
Vyresnių Skaučių + Gintarių Lithuanian Scouts Jamboree
 Agatha A. Durland Scout Reservation, 1 Clear Lake Road, Putnam Valley, N.Y.
 Registration: via Facebook: Vyr. Sk. + Gintarių Suvaziamas 2017 or Skautai.net
 Info: djmattis@gmail.com or vaiva.rimeika@gmail.com

March 25
Ethnic Heritage Mass
 St. Peter and Paul Basilica, Philadelphia, Pa.
 Choir "Laisvė" will sing at the Mass

APRIL 2017

April 1
Benefit Concert for Neringa
 600 Liberty Hwy., Putnam, Conn.
 Info: neringa.org

MAY 2017

May 13-14, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.
45th Annual Baltimore Lithuanian Festival
 Catonsville Armory, 130 Mellor Avenue, Catonsville, Md.

May 19-21
Counselor Retreat
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

JUNE 2017

June 3-4, 2017
Talka Work Weekend
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: regina@neringa.com,
 978-582-5592

June 5 – July 28
Baltic Studies Summer Institute
 Indiana University Bloomington Campus, 107 S. Indiana Ave., Bloomington, Ind.
 Six-week intensive beginning Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian language courses.
 Application deadline for Title VIII Fellowships is February 1, 2017.
 Info: indiana.edu/~swseel/balssi

June 9-11
New England Chapter Knights of Lithuania Retreat
 Franciscan Guest House,
 26 Beach Ave., Kennebunk, Maine
 Info: 207-967-4865

June 24-29
Heritage Family Camp in English
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

JULY 2017

July 2-8
Family Camp for Lithuanian Speakers
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

July 9-23
Children's Camp for Lithuanian Speakers 7-16
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

July 23
Lithuanian Friendship Day/ Putnam Picnic
 600 Liberty Hwy., Putnam, Conn.
 Info: neringa.org

July 23-29
"Third Week" Youth Camp for Lithuanian Speakers, 12-16 Years Old
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

July 27-30
Knights of Lithuania 104th National Convention
 Holiday Inn Hotel, Dayton, Ohio
 Info: knightsoflithuania.com

July 30-August 12
Heritage Camp in English, 7-16 Years Old
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

GOT EVENTS?

Let us help you spread the word! Please send your event notice to kariledalia@yahoo.com two months in advance of the month in which you would like to see it listed.

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