

# bridges



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3



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3 Champion who disappeared  
The tragic life story of an  
American-Lithuanian basketball player  
By Rytis Kazlauskas

7



7 A Little Bite Of Africa  
An account of four California Lithuanians  
savoring southern Africa  
By Roland Giedraitis

11



11 Lithuanian National Cemetery of Chicago  
By Arvydas Reneckis

19 Unexpected Journey  
Memoir of a Siberian Deportee  
By Juzė Avižienytė Žukauskienė

2 from the editor  
By Karilė Vaitkutė

25 current events  
By Alan Stankus

our community  
27 Boston Lithuanian School Opened Virtual  
School Doors  
By Lina Senuta

27



29 calendar

Front Cover: Symbolic monument to Vincas Kudirka, author of Lithuanian National Anthem, in the Lithuanian National Cemetery in Chicago. Photo by Karilė Vaitkutė

Back Cover: Winter in America. Photo by Arvydas Reneckis

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## from the editor

Dear readers,

Our challenging year is coming to an end. Due to the pandemic, the Lithuanian American Community had to pause and reenvision many of its planned events. However, one of the most important events, the elections to the Lithuanian Seimas, did take place. In these elections, the World Lithuanian Community proved to be worthy of a separate constituency in the Lithuanian Parliament. For the first time in history, our voice will be heard in Lithuania on this level.

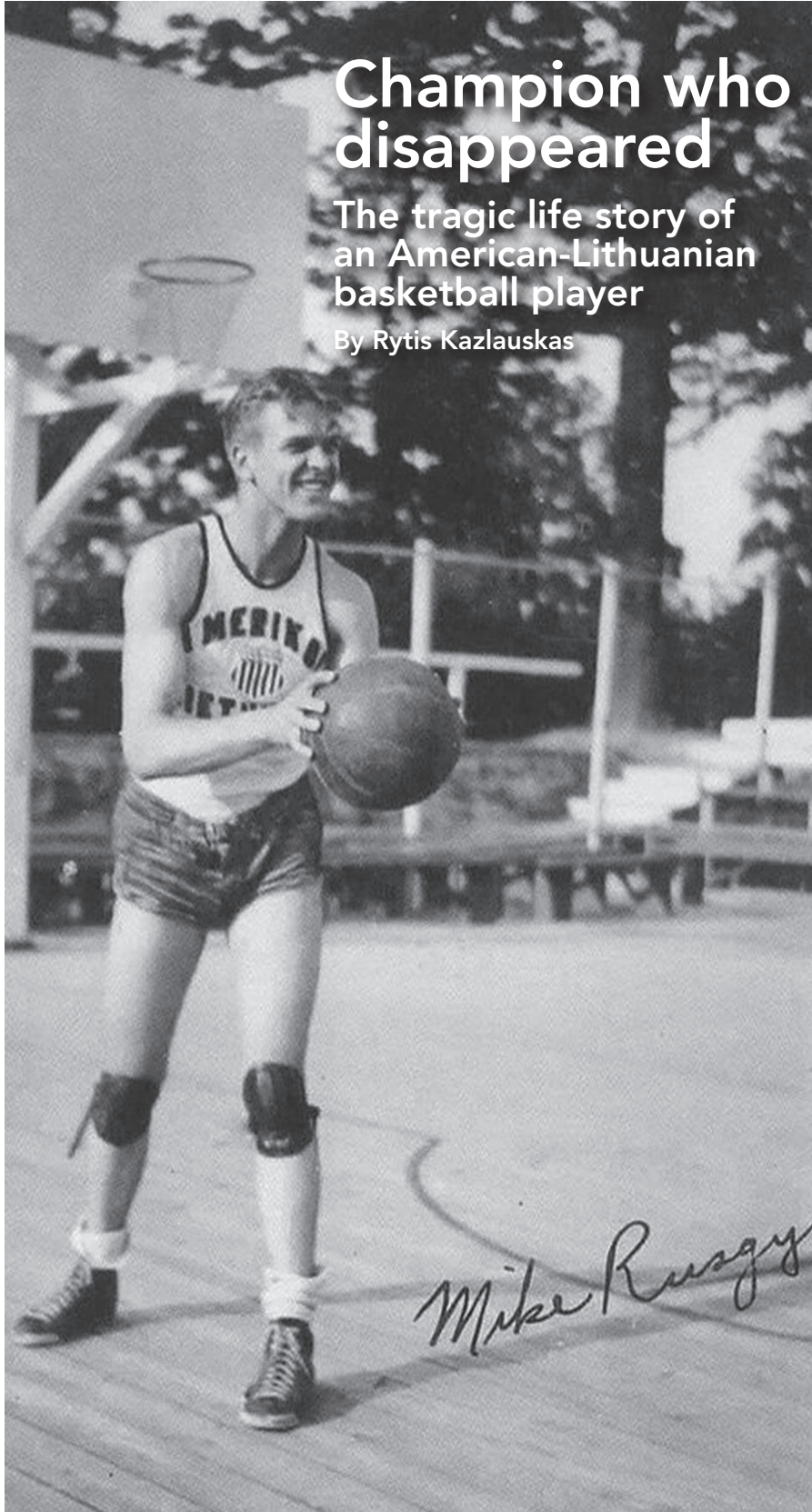
Of course, Lithuanian Americans were always present in the life of Lithuania. To give just one example, exactly one hundred years ago, in 1920, Lithuanian Americans from Boston established the American Lithuanian Company in Kaunas with capital stock valued at one million litas. Seventy-five percent of the capital investments of Amerikos Lietuvių Akcinė Bendrovė were contributed by Lithuanian Americans. The Corporation helped the economic reconstruction of the country by purchasing cars, tractors, and trucks for use in Lithuanian agriculture. The company was, of course, nationalized in the fall of 1940 after the soviets took over.

Starting this year, Lithuanian Americans will be involved in Lithuania's life not only by helping it economically but through a representative, Aušrinė Armonaitė who has been elected to the Lithuanian Seimas in the special constituency established for Lithuanians living abroad. Armonaitė received over 12,900 votes or 53.15 percent of the total votes. Of course, we look forward to working together and hope for mutual benefits.

We shall see what changes will come our way next year. In the meantime, I wish everyone a calm month of November. Let it be a month of contemplation and healing after the tumultuous time in our political life and due to hardships brought on by the virus. I hope you will enjoy the articles in this issue and learn something new.

Karilė Vaitkutė  
Editor





# Champion who disappeared

The tragic life story of an American-Lithuanian basketball player

By Rytis Kazlauskas

Mykolas Ruzgys / Basketball Museum in Joniškis

The life of Mykolas Ruzgys, an American-Lithuanian basketball player and European champion, reminds of a jigsaw puzzle with pieces spread all over the world. Fate dealt him a tragic hand, the consequences of which were also felt by his family.

Before the coronavirus crisis, I did not know much about Ruzgys. At the back of my mind was the fact that he played in the Lithuanian basketball team during the interwar period.

Then, I received a message from my friend Benas: “During the quarantine, I came across an astonishing basketball-related fact. Mykolas Ruzgys, who became a European champion in 1939, is alive and he is 105 years old,” he quoted a Wikipedia article on the basketball player.

A search on the internet did not return Ruzgys’ death date but confirmed that all members of the 1939 Lithuanian basketball team have already passed away.

In the interwar period, the athlete trained French and Spanish national basketball teams. So why was he not remembered at the end of his life? This puzzling fact made me look closer into Ruzgys’ life.

First, I reached out to former Lithuanian president Valdas Adamkus. He was an active member of the post-war Lithuanian diaspora and sports organizations during his time in Chicago.

“Ruzgys was a very nice person. We spoke and met often,” Adamkus said. “He was talking about the beautiful time he spent in Lithuania, especially the 1939 championship. Lithuania was very dear to him.”

Adamkus remembered going to Ruzgys’ funeral, but could not give an exact date of when this happened.

A conversation with Algimantas Bertašius, a sports statistics enthusiast, revealed that during his short time in Lithuania, Ruzgys married Danutė Vitartaitė, who later gave birth to their daughter.

Algimantas remembered that Ruz-



Mykolas Ruzgys / Family archives

gys' daughter had a son, Tomas Preišgalavičius, who played in the Lithuanian national basketball league until his career was interrupted by an injury. He could not say much about his grandfather either.

"When I was 16, I went to the US and looked for my grandad's grave in Chicago, but I could not find it," Preišgalavičius said. "My mom and grandmother did not know his death date either."

## Ruzgys comes to Lithuania

Getting in touch with Karilė Vaitkutė, the head of the Genealogy Department at Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago, gave a few more leads.

Documents discovered by Vaitkutė said that Mykolas

Paulius Ruzgys (Michael Paul Ruzgis) was born on January 15, 1919, although other sources often gave 1915 as his birth year. Ruzgys' parents immigrated to the US from Tauragė, a town in western Lithuanian, at the end of the 19th century. The couple had seven children.

Museum archives also helped to establish Ruzgys' death date. Documents showed that he died on December 15, 1986, in Chicago. They also assisted me in drawing a picture of the basketball player's early life.

Ruzgys probably heard about the Lithuanian basketball team in 1937, during the European Championship. Before the tournament, Lithuanians were considered to be the weakest team to compete.

But the Lithuanians had strengthened their team by inviting Lithuanian-American basketball players to join. Such well-known athletes as Feliksas Kriaučiūnas (Phil Krause) and Pranas Talzūnas (Frank Talzunas) accepted the offer and helped Lithuania win the championship.

The historic victory made Lithuanians crazy about basketball. The following year, in 1938, the Lithuanian National Olympics, the largest interwar sports event, was organized in Kaunas. More than 2,000 sportsmen and sportswomen of Lithuanian origin from all around the world came to compete. The delegation from the US brought 25 athletes, including Ruzgys.

Ruzgys' first performance in the country of his parents was very successful. The American-Lithuanian basketball team won the national Olympics, while Ruzgys scored almost half of the entire team points in the final.

After the Olympics, Ruzgys decided to stay in Lithuania a little longer and became a basketball coach.



Ruzgys (second from the right) with the Lithuanian-American basketball team. / Lithuanian Sports Museum

## Finding love

During his time in Lithuania, Ruzgys met his first wife Danutė Vitartaitė. They met accidentally through Leonas Karaliūnas, the founder of the basketball museum in Joniškis, a town in northern Lithuania.

I called Karaliūnas, who invited me to come to Joniškis. There, I found out about Laima Vitartaitė-Poželienė, the 89-year-old sister of Ruzgys' wife, who was still alive and lived in Šiauliai. The following day, I was on the way to meet her.

The woman had a very lucid memory of events from 81 years ago. Her sister was born in 1919 and was a talented athlete. At the age of 19, she won one gold, four silver, and three





Danutė Vitartaitė, second from the right / Family archives

The victory of a lifetime and saying goodbye to Lithuania

In May 1939, the European basketball championship took place in Lithuania for the first time. Ruzgys played with the Lithuanian national team, was one of the best players of the tournament, and significantly contributed to Lithuania's victory.

After the championship, Ruzgys' life started to change. In March 1940, he played in the last national team match against Estonia and together with CJSO, a basketball club from Kaunas, became the Lithuanian basketball league champion.

On 15 June, the Red Army entered Lithuania and occupied the country.

bronze medals at the Lithuanian National Olympics.

Vitartaitė met Ruzgys in Kaunas, where she was studying the English language. They fell in love and got married in 1939. Initially, Vitartaitė's parents opposed the marriage because they thought that Ruzgys' profession was not serious enough. But the communicative and good-looking groom quickly turned them around, Vitartaitė's sister said.

The woman remembered that Ruzgys always had a photo camera in his hands and was capturing everything around him. The sportsman, who came from Chicago with a population greater than entire Lithuania, was fascinated by his parents' country and planned to stay there.



Mykolas Ruzgys with his wife's sister and his mother-in-law / Family archives

Americans who were in Lithuania at the time received a notice from the embassy about the worsening political situation, advising them to go back to the US. Initially, Ruzgys did not understand that he had to leave Lithuania and his pregnant wife behind.

This was confirmed by a letter written by Vitartaitė's father to his granddaughter in which he refers to the events of 1940.

"Your father was an American citizen. He received a telegram from Kaunas. And then another one. But he did not go. When he received the third telegram, he started crying and I brought him to Šiauliai station. He went to Kaunas, was given 300 dollars, and returned to the US," the letter read.

The sister of Ruzgys' wife also recalled the day when she and her father brought her brother-in-law to the station.

"It was the last day of his visit to our village. He and Danutė cried when saying their goodbyes. My dad harnessed a horse [...]. Danutė couldn't come with us because the separation was too hard for her," the woman said.

"He cried the entire way to Šiauliai railway station. [...] He could not wait for the baby to be born. He expected a girl and wanted to call her Lidija," she added.

The US immigration archives revealed that Ruzgys reached New York on August 28. His daughter Lidija was born on August 30. He never met her.

After his return to the US, Ruzgys put a lot of effort into trying to bring his family to the country. But while he was looking for ways to reunite with his wife and daughter, the family in Lithuania was hit by one tragedy after another.



Mykolas Ruzgys, first from the right / Basketball Museum in Joniškis



The Lithuanian team in the Kaunas airport; Mykolas Ruzgys is second from the left in the first row / Family archives



Mykolas Ruzgys (fifth from the right) with the Lithuanian team / Basketball Museum in Joniškis





## A LITTLE BITE OF AFRICA

An account of four California Lithuanians savoring southern Africa

By Roland Giedraitis

Four California Lithuanians by the Cape. Ruta and Rimas Mulokas; Drs. Roland and Danute Giedraitis

The telephone rang at 5:30 AM. It was not unexpected. “Good morning, sir; this is your wake-up call for the game drive!” Yes, we were told to expect a call, but it took a minute or so to get oriented in the dark of our room. And yes, we were looking forward to our first game drive in Africa.

A quick coffee with a croissant, then off we go to meet our guide, spotter and the eight-seat 4 wheel drive Toyota Land Cruiser which will be our transport and refuge for the next three hours of driving through the bush in the Kruger National Forest in northeastern South Africa. We meet our guide-driver. He is a tall husky African who calls himself Ben. Also with him is Solevo, the spotter, who sits in the very front of the vehicle. He is the eyes and ears since his job is to notice animals, tracks, bird flights, and congregations which would lead us to some interesting animals. I also notice the rifle which is attached between the driver and the spotter. Besides my wife and me, there are three other guests in the vehicle: Rimas, Ruta, and Carol, who also happens to be a dentist and half-Lithua-

nian so we became rather close during our sojourn.

The sun is beginning to show as we start our drive at about 6 AM, but it is rather cold. It is African winter, after all! About 40 F or so. Wool blankets are provided since the vehicle is very open, like a large convertible to better see the wildlife. The Land Cruiser rumbles and creaks on the dirt road. All we see is a lot of bush, trees, but no animals yet. We approach a river with a one-way narrow bridge across. The driver dutifully traverses when, about the middle of the bridge, the spotter signals a stop. We see nothing at first. Then, on my right looking down on a mid-island, I see what seems a leopard’s head staring at me. Our eyes meet, then the beast lets out a loud roar, still staring at me. It was rather frightening.

Then he scampers forward and jumps on the bridge in front of us. Again he sounds something between a roar and some grunts. He looks us over then races on the side of our machine backward. I see that the spotter and driver are excited. He puts the machine into reverse to follow the leopard. Deftly he drives backward on the narrow



bridge, avoiding the calamity of plunging us into the river.

"I know where he is going!" exclaims the driver-guide. When we reach the shore he turns the machine right into the bushes where there is no road but some clearance. We bump along parallel to the river. The bushes, small trees, rocks are easily traversed by the Land Cruiser. We drive a couple of hundred yards, then he stops and shuts off the motor. "Let's watch and listen!" he whispers to us. In a few minutes, we sight the leopard leisurely jumping from one boulder to another, then climbing on the larger one completely ignoring us. He is about 100 feet away. Quite the sight! Bush, trees, boulders, the splendid beast, and the river. We watch at our leisure. Our guide communicates with his 2-way radio to the other drivers of the lodge. (there were about 4 or 5 parties). Soon one, then another vehicle appears to watch the animal. We dutifully sit, some taking photos, but all remaining very quiet. No sudden moves, no shouting, as we were warned. After about 10 minutes we saw enough. Time to move on.

In good time we saw elephants, wild African dogs who had treed a leopard, a herd of cape buffalo, lots of impalas, various birds. But no lions, yet. The morning drive ended with a little surprise from our hosts. We were at least 1/2 hour away from our lodge and 1 hour away from our scheduled breakfast. The driver and spotter, with big smiles, opened the back of the vehicle which was supplied with coffee, tea, wine, cookies, and other goodies. "Just a little snack before we get back." A wonderful surprise indeed, this little picnic in the African bush! They picked a spot that was on high ground overlooking the river. The guide showed us and let us handle their rifle, which he said he never had to use, yet! We felt privileged. Ben, the driver, confided he had lived all his life in this area. He had never seen an ocean, he had never flown. But, he says, his daughter is in Cape Town, studying law.

We had seven more game drives. Three hours in the morning, then three hours in the evening. We eventually got to see more elephants, a cheetah, hippopotamuses, baboons, zebras then finally lions! A most interesting phenomenon occurs when we are in our vehicle. We get close to the animals but they practically ignore us. The guide explains that the animals take us either for a big rock or some strange non-dangerous animal. But things would be disastrous if we were to descend from our vehicle. Then we are a threat that the animals would quickly discern and likely attack us. One admonition we were told at the very beginning: if we confront an animal when walking our lodge grounds then stand still, don't let your eyes meet, and never, never run! If you run, you die! In one foot encounter close to Victoria Falls hotel, we were walking in a public path when we met a family of warthogs. Now, warthogs can eviscerate a horse and kill a man within seconds with their tusks if they feel threat-



By the Dr. David Livingstone statue in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. Rimas, Roland, Ruta and Danute.

ened. We all froze. The family, mom, dad, and two little warthogs just passed us by without any mishap. Yes, I did feel scared!

On another game drive, we encountered a herd of cape buffalo. These animals are renowned for their strength and courage. It takes about three lions to bring one down. They are not like the water buffalos of southeast Asia. In our drive, safely in our vehicle, we drove through the bushes to get a closer look. They ignored us, except one! He was staring straight at me and making aggressive moves like moving slowly forward, stomping his feet, towards me. The guide upfront looked at me and said "I don't think he likes your shirt." I was wearing a maroon shirt. I quickly put on an olive jacket. The buffalo seemed to relax. What gives?

Some of us accepted an invitation for a walking safari, about 1 1/2 hours long. Completely different rules than riding the Land Cruiser. No talking, always walking single-file, and paying attention to hand signals of our guides.



Roland and Danute Giedraitis by the Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

Nine of us were escorted by two rifle-carrying rangers. Just as we jumped off our vehicles a few miles from our lodge, we heard a very loud and emotional screeching, growling, roaring in the near distance. The guides seemed disturbed. One of them went off to check what is going on. When he came back he said it was an elephant family squabble. Apparently one of the old bull-elephants fancied he wants to mate with a young female. The matriarch and the rest of the elephants vehemently protested. Thus the noise. The bull's wishes were not granted!

We were now in the 8th day of our African visit. We came not only to see the animals but also to get a feel for the country, geography, people, history. The history is not a pleasant one. There were tribes living in these parts for thousands of years. Yes, they fought with each other. The Zulus were the most warlike and dominant.

The European connection came only in the late 15th century. The trade routes through the Mediterranean and the Arabian peninsula were becoming very dangerous, but the people clamored for the spices and other goods of the far east. Vasco da Game, a Portuguese, reached India rounding the Cape of Good Hope. The Dutch established a trading post to supply ships rounding the cape in the late 16th hundreds. It was very successful.

Soon followed colonization by the Dutch, then English. Wars between natives and Europeans ensue. The Europeans, with their modern weapons, prevail. But there are fights between the Dutch and English since gold and diamonds have been discovered in the country. The Brit-

ish triumph but eventually grant self-determination to South Africa. In the mid 20th century it is ruled by the minority whites. Time of apartheid, or separation of races ensues which goes on until the 1990's when the white government, after much blood, agrees to a one man one vote rule. Nelson Mandela, who was in prison for 27 years, becomes president. We also toured Robben Island which was Mandela's prison.

At the time of our visit, 2017, all seemed normal. Most of the services were conducted by Africans. We were treated with respect, smiles, and courtesy. Indeed, one African, who once was a political prisoner, explained that they welcome tourists because it creates jobs for the locals.

We visited Cape Town, a gondola ride to Table Mountain, traveled by bus to Cape of Good Hope, where we were charmed by the African pen-

guins on the beach. Ostriches and baboons were common on the road. After Cape Town, which impressed us as a picturesque and orderly city, we flew to Johannesburg, the largest city in So. Africa. There we visited the Apartheid Museum. Sad history.

In Johannesburg, we were housed in a hotel in a predominantly middle-class African area. The locals were well dressed and polite. We dined at adjacent tables.

On the last leg of our visit, we flew to Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. Spectacular sight! The guide explained to us it is a good thing we are in the winter when it is dry. In the summer, the trees and flowers bloom, but the heat and humidity are unbearable. You hardly see the Falls since it is entrapped in a veil of spray, mist, and water. Forget about taking pictures since the cameras are all wet. And you hardly see any animals since they can successfully hide behind the abundant foliage.

My wife Danute and I enjoyed the company of Rimas and Ruta during our trip. Rimas was a bit of a comedian sometimes. When ordering a dry martini, he wanted it shaken, not stirred, you know, the James Bond style. The bartenders just could not get it right. It's either too sweet, too dry, wrong ingredients, etc. He practically drove them to tears (or worse!) Also, on the last night with our group, each of us had to declare what we liked best about this trip. Most said they liked the accommodations, the excellent food and service, knowledgeable and friendly guides, abundant animals. Rimas, of course, had to be different. He declared: "I am very disappointed!" Everybody was





We experienced some tense moments when encountering local animals, such as this warthog in Zimbabwe.

aghast. But then he added: “I am very disappointed since I can’t find a heck of thing wrong with this trip!” Smiles all around.

As we boarded our plane for our flight to London, next to us sat down a young man who said he was a British Royal Marine. We noticed his jaw was swollen. He explained that he was vacationing near the Namibia border when he was attacked by four drunk locals. Now he is going home for surgery to correct his jaw. We asked the stewardess to provide a bag of ice for him.

Man’s adventure continues.

(The participants in this trip were Rimas Mulokas, architect; his wife Ruta, his business associate and Roland and Danute Giedraitis, both dentists. All from Southern California)

Odds and ends:

We had African newspapers in our rooms. Here are some news items that we noticed:

1. A man walks into a police station, giving himself up. He says he is tired of killing his neighbors and eating human flesh. The police are shocked. He is arrested for practicing cannibalism.
2. Two white men are arrested after police were called by witnesses. They were accused of tying up and burying alive in a coffin a black neighbor. Their defense: they were just trying to scare him not to trespass on their land.



Meeting the lions



A graceful giraffe

3. Funerals are important events in SA and very expensive. A son was bringing cash-funds when robbers attacked, killed him, and took off with the money. Now the family has to bury two members.

A couple of anecdotes told us by locals:

1. Zimbabwe has an extremely high inflation rate. You need trillions of Z \$’s to buy a loaf of bread. So, a man was pushing a wheelbarrow full of money to buy some toothpaste. He placed the wheelbarrow down for a couple of seconds to chat with a friend. When he returned his gaze to the wheelbarrow, all his money was on the floor but his wheelbarrow was gone!
2. The president of Zimbabwe, Mr. Mugabe, fancied himself as a very fair and democratic man. He always won his elections with at least 96% of the vote. So, his family, wife and two children were planning a vacation. The wife and children wanted to go to Europe, but Mugabe wanted to go to the Bahamas. They decided to have a vote. It was from 96 to 3. They went to the Bahamas.



# Lithuanian National Cemetery of Chicago

Arvydas Reneckis



The very first gravestone in the Lithuanian National Cemetery

The founding of an independent Lithuanian national cemetery in Chicago more than a hundred years ago was prompted by the injured self-esteem of some Lithuanians. According to old customs, the deceased were being divided into those worthy of honorable eternal rest and those whose remains could be buried only outside the cemetery fence due to their sins, worldviews, or religious beliefs. The customs and concepts that immigrants brought from the old country were rapidly changing in the new environment. In the United States, Lithuanian immigrants were learning of democracy and tolerance to people whose beliefs were different from theirs. Some Lithuanian national organizations even included the commitment to respect various religions and the freedom of conscience in their bylaws.

National cemeteries were founded in several Lithuanian colonies: Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), Waterbury (Connecticut), Haverhill (north of Boston), a coal mining village, Donora (Pennsylvania), and elsewhere. However, today there would be no other place where we would experience so much of the unique history of Lithuanian American immigrants than in the Lithuanian National Cemetery near Chicago. As if traveling through the virtual reality of the past, here we can see what Lithuanians

of several emigrations, their children, and grandchildren have created.

Every nation is comprised of its living members, its future generation, and its historical memory. In times of turmoil, revolutions, wars, and enslavement or liberation of nations, symbols of the past acquire special significance. In the United States and many other parts of the world, century-old monuments are being demolished or desecrated, and signs and symbols that express new ideas are emerging instead of them.

A visitor to the Lithuanian National Cemetery would first of all notice monuments and signs that are seemingly irreconcilable and strictly contradictory to one another. Here we can find Christian crosses and Communist sickles and hammers, Pillars of Grand Duke Gediminas, Vytis, and Masonic triangles. All of them testify to the experiences of one nation, Lithuanians. In this essay, it would be impossible to examine all the branches of Lithuanian American public life that spread over more than a century. We can mention just a few.

After World War II, the urn with the cremated remains of Dr. Jonas Šliūpas was buried here, and soon after, a monument to him was erected. Dr. Šliūpas' personality is a symbol of the entire epoch of Lithuanian national



revival in Lithuania and the United States. While studying at the universities of Moscow and St. Petersburg in 1880-1882, Šliūpas was arrested for Lithuanian and socialist activities, expelled from these universities without the right to ever continue his studies, and persecuted. After fleeing abroad, he met with Dr. Jonas Basanavičius and was offered the position of the editor of the Aušra newspaper. The Aušra was printed in East Prussia and secretly distributed by book smugglers in Lithuania. It served as the first and most important wake-up call for the Lithuanian nation. In 1884, Šliūpas was tracked down again by tsarist gendarmes. He escaped and fled to the USA. While in this country, he edited and published Lithuanian newspapers, wrote books, and sent them to Lithuania. He also founded several educational societies. Paradoxically, even being a hardened atheist, Šliūpas was instrumental in creating Lithuanian parishes for the sake of fostering Lithuanian activities. While working for the benefit of the Lithuanian community, he lived in poverty. Therefore, he decided to graduate from a university with a medical degree. Unlike some others, he did not withdraw from

Lithuanian activities after he became a medical doctor. He founded the Lithuanian American Alliance and became involved in political work in the international organization of representatives of enslaved nations. At a time when no one talked about it yet, Dr. Šliūpas had already publicly announced Lithuania's aspirations for full independence. During World War I, he was the first person to speak about Lithuania's statehood in the US Congress on behalf of all Lithuanians. He informally participated in the Paris Peace Conference and helped provide Lithuania with multimillion-dollar financial aid. Later on, he served as the first Lithuanian ambassador in London. Due to his radical views, Šliūpas was not liked by the government of independent Lithuania. He was appointed ambassador to Riga, and later became the mayor of Palanga. He and his family fled the second Soviet occupation. On November 6, 1944, in Berlin, he was preparing to give a speech on the radio when he died suddenly just an hour before the scheduled show. Throughout his life, Dr. Šliūpas was actively fostering Lithuanian activities and educating people. He was



Vytis, Lithuania's coat of arms, on one of the gravestones



Monument to Dr. Jonas Šliūpas





Monument to President Kazys Grinius

also a fierce freemason and a critic of the church hierarchy. Some Lithuanians respected him for it, while others hated him.

Dėdė Šernas (Juozas Adomaitis, 1859-1922) was a book smuggler and a publicist. In 1888, together with Vincas Kudirka and other students, he founded the Lietuva Society in Warsaw. The society aimed at educating the Lithuanian nation and raising its national consciousness. In Lithuania Minor, he was working for the Varpas (Bell) newspaper. He was denounced to gendarmes, and in 1895 Uncle Šernas had to flee to the US. In Chicago, he edited the Lietuva weekly. He translated textbooks and science books from other languages to Lithuanian "to reduce the darkness of our people and bring it closer to others". After dedicating all his life to the Lithuanian nation, in the last years of his life he spent in utmost poverty. After his death, a group of Chicago Lithuanians organized a fundraiser to collect money for his tombstone. The Lithuanian National Cemetery gave a lot free of charge. The monument was solemnly unveiled in 1932.

In the Lithuanian National Cemetery, there is a modest grave of the founder of the Lithuanian National Church in America, Bishop Stasys B. Mickevičius (1876-1923). A lot was written about the so-called "evil works of independent Micka" in the Catholic press of the time. The Darbininkas and Draugas called him an extortionist and criticized the cemetery blessing ceremony and the picnics that took place in the park nearby. Newspapers mocked the Masses he held in his church and the speeches he gave in saloons. Only two national parishes founded by Fr. Mickiewicz survived for a longer period. One was God's Providence parish in Scranton, Pennsylvania (opened in



Monument honoring war veterans

1913 and is not yet officially closed), and the other one is the Sweetest Heart of Jesus parish in Lawrence, Massachusetts (1916–2002). In Chicago, Fr. Mickevičius had founded the Seminary for Priests of the Lithuanian National Catholic Church. Several young Lithuanian men graduated from the Seminary and were ordained to the priesthood.

After just entering through the cemetery gate, on the left, we would notice an old monument, erected in 1916 to a poet, writer, publicist, and director of Lithuanian plays, Bronius Laucevičius - Vargšas. I remember his name since the time when I studied in elementary school in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. His poems about the wrongs endured by the proletariat were included in our literature text-



books, and our teacher required us to recite those sad poems aloud. After the suppression of the 1905-1907 revolution in Russia, Vargšas was forced to flee to the United States. In Chicago, he worked in pharmacies and a printing house; he wrote articles for the Kova newspaper published by the Lithuanian Socialist Union in Philadelphia; he organized an amateur theater group, Veidrožio Bendrovė (Mirror Company), and published a monthly theatre magazine. He saw the revolutionary fight as the purpose of his life and his writing. According to contemporaries, the poet suffered from alcoholism and, as a result, died as a young man.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Lithuanian Americans contributed financially and politically to the restoration and later strengthening of independent Lithuania. One of the largest Lithuanian organizations with chapters in various cities continuously allocated part of its activities and funds to Lithuania. It was the Lithuanian American Alliance. For many years, it was led by a lawyer Fortunatas Bagočius (1887-1951), who was buried in the Lithuanian National Cemetery. He was also a member of the American Lithuanian Council and President of the Joint Lithuanian American Foundation.

An impressive and undeservedly forgotten personality was Dr. Matas Juozas Vinikas (1884 -1961). Having earned a degree in chemical engineering in New York, he worked according to his profession but also was regularly involved in Lithuanian activities. In 1919, the Lithuanian American Council delegated him to the Paris Peace Conference. Together with other American Lithuanians, representatives of Catholics and nationals, he assisted the representatives of the first Lithuanian government, Prof. A. Valdemaras and P. Klimas, and together with all the delegates, worked for the recognition of independent Lithuania and securing various aid to it. Without sparing any funds, Lithuanian Americans supported the delegation's work and helped the representatives to establish contacts with the US and British officials. In 1919, Dr. Vinikas delivered an important speech on the recognition of the Lithuanian state in the US Congress, which at that time was discussing the results of the Versailles Peace Treaty (World War I). The US Congress did not approve the agreement signed by President W. Wilson in Paris, according to which the fate of the Lithuanian state was envisaged as an autonomous territory of Russia or Poland. Lithuanian representatives sought various solutions for political recognition. In 1919 - 1925, Dr. Vinikas served as the secretary of the first Lithuanian embassy in Washington. He later served as a trade attaché and collected several millions of dollars for Lithuanian freedom. Together with others, he collected one million signatures for the recognition of the Lithuanian state.

One of the representatives of the first generation of



Blessing of the symbolic monument dedicated to Lithuanians deported to Siberia



Nutautas family gravestone



Monument to the societies that founded the Lithuanian National Cemetery





Lithuanian wayside cross erected by Julius Pakalka



Old tombstone

Lithuanian American professionals was attorney Pranas F. Bradčiulis (1869-1952). He is buried in the Lithuanian National Cemetery. Bradčiulis was the person who prepared the documents of the founding of this cemetery and headed its board of directors. It is believed that he was the first Lithuanian to earned the right to practice as an attorney at law in the United States. He was also one of the Lithuanian representatives who spoke to the US Congress in 1919. Since Bradčiulis was the one who had organized the Lithuanian American Committee to Free the Klaipėda Region, his presentation to the Congress had to do with the legal, ethnic, territorial, and economic reasons why the Klaipėda Region should belong to Lithuania. During the time of Lithuania's first independence, Bradchulis had returned to Lithuania and helped write the state's Constitution and create its legal system. During the first Soviet occupation, he was forced to return to the United States.

In order to at least briefly describe all the prominent persons associated with the Klaipėda region, buried in the Lithuanian National Cemetery, a thick book would need to be published. However, one other person should be mentioned here. It is Jonas Budrys - Polovinskas (1889 - 1964), a Lithuanian statesman and diplomat. In 1915-1921, he served as the Chief of Counterintelligence of the Amur War District of the Russian White Guard. In 1921 he returned to Lithuania and became the Chief of Counter-Intelligence of Lithuania's Armed Forces. He applied his professional abilities and experience in 1923 when he was secretly appointed the main commander of the Klaipėda Region rebels. In 1924-1925, Budrys served as the governor of the Klaipėda Region. Later he served as Consul General in Karaliaučius, and in 1936, he was appointed Consul General of Lithuania in New York. He represented Lithuania even after the state ceased to exist and the nation and its territory were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union. In 1940, Budrys was awarded the title of Honorary Citizen of the City of New York.

Ten years ago, the Lithuanian National Cemetery in Chicago was celebrating its 100th anniversary. I was asked to make a documentary film for the occasion. At that time, a volcano erupted in Iceland, and all transatlantic flights were suspended for about a week. It just so happened that President of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus was visiting Chicago at the time. Due to the volcano eruption, he could not return to Lithuania as scheduled, and, since he had enough free time, he agreed to be our guide in the Lithuanian National Cemetery. It was interesting to hear what the Lithuanian Chicago was like at the time when the post-war immigrants came to the US from DP camps in Germany.

*"I think this cemetery is a living story. The people who lay here resting eternally have really given a lot to Lithuania",*



President Valdas Adamkus said. “Memorial Day commemorations held at the symbolic monument to the soldiers who died in both World Wars and the War of Independence left an immensely big impression on me. There used to be a sea of flags here; members of various organizations marched, all the graves were decorated”. While walking around the cemetery, we stopped at the monument to Lithuanian President Kazys Grinius.

“I am one of the lucky ones who had the opportunity to know President Grinius quite well. I was friends with his son, Liūtas, whom I knew since I was a child. Later we went to school together. When we arrived in Chicago, I spent my first night at 72 South May Street, in President Grinius’ apartment. A mattress was laid on the floor, and I spent my first evening in the United States with the Grinius family. Dr. Kazys Grinius left a huge impression on me. I was often at their apartment in Kaunas, and he was a kind of spiritual inspiration to me. He spoke as a free liberal man; he was working towards the awakening of our nation. He was a close friend of Vincas Kudirka, and until the end of his life, he fought for Lithuania’s rights in the world. The words “Freedom for the Lithuanian Nation” that are engraved on his gravestone, were probably said by him in Germany when he was addressing people who fled Lithuania”.

The urn with President Kazys Grinius’ (1866-1950) remains was kept in the columbarium of the Lithuanian National Cemetery. In 1994, a few years after Lithuania regained its independence, it was taken to Lithuania and buried in his native village of Selemos Būda.

In 1940, when Lithuania was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union, the then editor of the Draugas daily, Leonardas Šimutis, took the initiative to immediately restore the Lithuanian American Council, a political organization, the main goal of which was the restoration of Lithuania’s freedom and independence. One of the first members of the organization was Dr. Pijus Grigaitis (1883-1969), the editor of the Naujienos daily.

“I knew Pijus very well. The Naujienos newsroom was in Bridgeport, housed in a very old wooden building. Dr. Pijus Grigaitis used to look at me from above as if saying that I was too young to know better than him. He was one of the main pillars of the Lithuanian American community, a really tough fighter, very anti-Bolshevik. Leonardas Šimutis, Pijus Grigaitis, Antanas Olis, and Mykolas Vaidyla were the nucleus of the Lithuanian American Council. It is a shame that the Naujienos daily did not survive to see its centenary”.

Mykolas Vaidyla (1902-1976) was the representative of the so-called nationals in the Lithuanian American Council. He edited and published a liberal weekly, Sandara.

“I remember when I visited the editorial office in Bridgeport. I saw a man sitting at his desk with his face turned to the typewriter. His desk was loaded almost to the ceiling with old newspapers, books. He was crouching under a desk



Monument to book smuggler Kipras Bielinis

lamp with a green cover, just working all by himself. When he raised his head, I recognized Vaidyla. He definitely looked the way I imagined ancient Lithuanians. That image remained with me for the rest of my life. Vaidyla was an idealist. He did not have a large group of followers. Sandara kept the spirit and the language of the first wave of Lithuanian immigrants. In Sandara, you could find old Lithuanian expressions that people today do not know; Vaidyla tried to keep those old immigrants who cared about being Lithuanian together. The sign on Vaidyla’s gravestone shows that he was open to the Freemasons; the cross shows that he was very tolerant of religion, and the Gediminas Pillars reflect his patriotism towards Lithuania. His gravestone says a lot about him”.

The Lithuanian American Council was made up of people representing various ideological currents and parties. There were a lot of discussions and even misunderstandings between them but they did not doubt the main goal, the preservation of the idea of Lithuania’s independence and the restoration of the state.

“In 1940, when the Red Army entered Lithuania, they went to the White House to meet President Franklin Roosevelt. After that, President Roosevelt made the historic statement that the United States did not recognize the occupation of Lithuania. That principle was maintained until we regained our independence. So this is thanks to the Lithuanian American Council”.

Representatives of the Lithuanian American Council have repeatedly visited the White House and met with the United States presidents, senators, congressmen, and

representatives of the administration. It was through their care that approximately 35,000 Lithuanians, who had found themselves in DP camps in Germany during the storms of the Second World War, were admitted to the United States. Through the efforts of the Lithuanian American Council, the Joint American Lithuanian Foundation was established, which mobilized financial and material support for Lithuanians affected by the war and communism. After 1950, Lithuanian communities were established in the USA and other countries, and later they were united by the World Lithuanian Community. Juozas Bačiūnas (1893-1969) was elected its first chairman. The words "Seeking happiness for other Lithuanians, I

became happy myself" are engraved on his tombstone.

There were many active communists among the first generation of American Lithuanians. They did not care about Lithuania's independence or its statehood; they cared about the well-being and social equality of working people. It is unbelievable that even the occupation of Lithuania and the knowledge about the deportations of Lithuanian residents to Siberia did not change the views of the communist Lithuanians.

*"The lives of many Lithuanians of the first wave of immigration were very hard. I will admit that when I first saw this monument with Stalin's sun and other symbols, I thought to myself: how can they allow this in the National Cemetery;*



Monument to Dėdė Šernas



after all, it symbolizes the occupiers. Lithuanian American communists had even two daily, not weekly, newspapers! The *Laisvė* (Freedom) was published in New York and the *Vilnis* (Wave) in Chicago. It is unique that one ethnic group in the United States would be able to publish two dailies that defended communism, justified the occupation, and had so many followers. Logically, I can't justify it. Even then, everyone knew about the atrocities of communism, deportations, prisons, killings, and everything else. It is unthinkable that they would be publishing a communist daily in Lithuanian at such a time. I think there is no other example of this anywhere. In the end, there were just a few people convinced of communism left. As far as I know, there was a shortage of journalists, and the Communists were sending in articles from Lithuania and Vilnius. In my eyes, this was the press inspired by Moscow. However, the propaganda was so strong that it was able to make an effect on people, who may have been good people, hard-working people. Well, if the gravestone was erected, it means that this man really believed it and lived his beliefs. For our part, we must show openness, tolerance to others. Let it stand. The history remains. Communism existed, the occupation existed, the world knows it, and now we are free. We have to look at it from a historical perspective."

The storms of the Second World War also brought a large number of Lithuanians from the Klaipėda Region to Chicago. The famous musician, Martynas Lacytis, and his wife, Gertrūda, as well as composer Vladas Jakubėnas are buried in this cemetery. Lithuanian Evangelical Lutherans concentrated in Chicago and established the Tėviškė parish, headed by Bishop Anas Trakis. Many famous Lithuanian writers, artists, musicians, cultural and public figures also found themselves in Chicago.

"In the 1950s, when my generation of immigrants came here, we found out that everyone regarded this cemetery as an atheist cemetery. Probably, the first priest to break the idea that Catholics could not enter this cemetery was a Jesuit monk, Jonas Kubilius. He attended the funeral of Professor Biržiška."

Brothers, scientist Vaclovas Biržiška (1884-1956) and mathematician Viktoras Biržiška (1886-1964) were the founders of the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, where they also taught. The third brother, Mykolas Biržiška (1882-1962), was a signatory of the Lithuanian Act of Independence. He died in Los Angeles, California. Their remains were later brought to Lithuania.

"It was daring for the Jesuits to come and break that taboo."

People often said that this cemetery is unsanctified, that they belong to atheists, pagans. Notions like that and misunderstandings between believers and atheists have long been forgotten, especially after a metal wayside cross was erected in the cemetery in 1955. It is a traditional Lithuanian cross with a sun, designed and built by the Julius



Monument to Juozas Bačiūnas

and Prane Pakalka family at their own expense. The cross is made of stainless steel; it weighs more than 2 tons. This symbolic cross is dedicated to the memory of the Siberian deportees. The cross and the cemetery itself were blessed in 1995 by Bishop Paulius Baltakis, O.F.M. The Lithuanian National Cemetery was also visited by the then Vilnius Archbishop Metropolitan, Lithuanian Cardinal Audrys Juozas Bačkis.

The tradition of building symbolic monuments in the Lithuanian National Cemetery has existed for a long time. There is a monument to the societies that established this cemetery, and a monument to the awakener of the Lithuanian nation, the author of the Lithuanian National Anthem, Dr. Vincas Kudirka. Lithuanian Masons, scouts, riflemen also immortalized the activities of their organizations by erecting symbolic gravestones in this cemetery.

"I am glad that we have this really beautiful Lithuanian cemetery under the shadows of great oaks. Oak has always been a symbol of strength for Lithuanians. Giants of Lithuanian political, cultural, and scientific life are buried in the Lithuanian National Cemetery. In my opinion, this is the most beautiful cemetery of all."

(President of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus, 2010, Lithuanian National Cemetery)

The documentary about the Lithuanian National Cemetery is available at the following link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDKokkemB\\_M&t=12375](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDKokkemB_M&t=12375)

# UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

## Memoir of a Siberian Deportee

By Juzė Avižienytė Žukauskienė

Translated from the Lithuanian by Giedrė Kumpikas, Ph.D., niece of the author, and Isabel Kumpikas, sister of the author



Siberian Sky. Photograph by Rolandas Žygas

### 9. ON THE BARGE

Above us, on the barge, the parents of the famous Lithuanian pilot Pyragius settled in. The old man was unshaven, gray-haired, with shabby clothes... Lice were dropping from him. Apparently, he had not changed clothes on the journey and had eaten poorly. It was not surprising after almost a month under these conditions. All the others were distancing themselves from him... The woman next to me, Šičkienė, screamed when she saw a huge louse crawling on her black coat... A little bit further from us settled in two sisters and their paralytic brother, who was a former colonel, the Budrevičiai.

It was pitiful to watch how those two old women - both were nearing 60 - were pulling their brother like ants, and

were seating him on the chamber pot... They fed him by hand because he himself, like a sack of chaff, was totally helpless. The sisters were nurses at the Military Hospital and tended to him very conscientiously: they wrapped his legs in a warm blanket, fed him with whatever they had, forgetting themselves.

We watched that woman with those blind, barely moving old people, with her two-year-old child and expecting a second one and that paralytic, who could not even lift his hand:

"What kind of menace could they have been to the Soviet government?!"

I met one more family that I knew from before. They were the Kalakauskai, who had lived not far from my native place, 3 km from Marijampolė. They owned six acres of land, one meager cow, one paltry horse, and had nine children! The children, not quite grown, would work for neighboring farmers, while the father, in his spare time, would repair shoes. Another cent earned or a small piece of bacon. And these people were enemies of the Soviet government?! In what way could they do harm?! What would they be afraid to lose?! Their only concern - a piece of daily bread...

The unknown lay before all of us. What will happen to us? How will we be fed? What kind of work will we do? But now we already had more hope.

We said to each other, that we would

not become as poor as those people we saw by the roads, because Lithuanians are hard-working people and are not afraid of the hardest jobs.

We did not foresee the true reality...

The local people were crowding together on the shore. We still had money and began to ask, that those free people would buy some food for us. Some people were ordering white buns, others sausage, some others butter, alcohol. The locals were looking at us and smiling shook their heads:

"Oh, dearies, we don't have any of that."

Nevertheless, they brought some alcohol, and the farm women some eggs and milk.

When we saw someone with food products, we all forgot



our manners and rushed at the sellers. There were few sellers and many buyers. Yes! Hunger is a great moving force. A hungry person becomes in no way different from a four-legged creature... There were even those "accommodating" people, who, having collected a substantial amount of money, would go to town "to buy" something and would not come back.

Our guards also changed. Instead of the red-marked CHEKists, a normal militia accompanied us.

The militiamen were not so strict anymore, they allowed us to go on shore, to ask the people what could be bought.

In this fashion, we obtained some soap.

We rushed to the river to do our laundry. We washed ourselves, changed clothes, splashed around like ducks.

A new problem: we were attacked by gnats, but not the kind we used to have sometimes in Lithuania, but tiny, poisonous bloodsuckers, which were difficult even to notice. They got in everywhere: under our dresses, under our belts, on our faces, and, under the cover of hair, on our eyelids. And as soon as they touched us, it burned like fire. We started to scratch, and, from that, white blisters appeared immediately. We would scratch our skin till we bled, but we did not succeed in alleviating the itching.

There were none near the steamboat or the barges because they are afraid of the smell of oil. And we, not knowing that, would go further off from the barges to do laundry and to wash ourselves. Finally, the steamboat "Proletarij" came chugging along. We were informed that we could get dinner on board, some tea, and could buy something. We got 200 grams of bread each and half a liter of soup. Each elder of the group, formerly of the train car, received coupons for those in his charge, but each person could pick up his ration individually.

## 10. ONE MORE SMALL EPISODE FROM THE JOURNEY BY TRAIN

A judge, Žilinskas, from Kaunas, was being deported together with us. A cranky and self-serving man. His wife was a very caring and accommodating little Russian woman. Once she came running up joyfully carrying some sort of buns and gave them to her husband.

"Symusenka, I brought you some pyrozhenki\* with mushrooms," and waited to see with what gratitude her "Symusenka" would eat them.

Her husband tasted them, made a face and said:

"Oh! They're disgusting!"

The poor wife became upset, stretched out her hand to take them and taste them herself to see if they were really so "disgusting," but her husband clutched all three to himself. And we all covered our mouths with whatever we could so as not to burst out laughing.

Žilinskas was, in general, cranky, a pessimist, and the

biggest egotist whom we had ever met. While we were still traveling over the Siberian expanses, where the stations were far apart and water was very sparingly used, one such night, I heard his wife's whisper (we were lying next to each other on the same plank-beds):

"Symusenka, give me a drop of water. My mouth is very dry. I have a headache."

"Go away, I won't give you any!" came the harsh reply and her husband hid the bottle under his pillow. I took our hot-water bottle, in which there was still some warm and rather smelly water (but it was still water. At the stations we scooped it into whatever could hold water), I poured some into a cup and gave it to our neighbor. She drank it greedily, grabbed me, and began to kiss me, with tears in her eyes, apologizing that she had "robbed" us. We all disliked Žilinskas. And after that incident with the buns, we all adopted the saying: "Oh! Disgusting," which meant that even if we didn't like something very much, but we were reluctant to give it up.

Whenever the doors of the car would slam shut, he would always quote a saying from Dante's Inferno: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." He would express apprehension that we were being taken to Central Asia, where there were many types of "disgusting" fruit. However, we were overjoyed and actually dreamed of getting some greens or fruit. But, on the journey, in no way would our guards allow anyone with any berries or fruit near us. We were only able to buy some steamed milk, steamed mushrooms, or some potato buns.

We used to grumble, but Žilinskas would rejoice:

"It's a good thing that they don't give us any of that junk. Typhoid!"

Perhaps he was right. Under these circumstances, everything was possible, not excluding even typhoid.

In our car, throughout the whole trip, thank God, no one fell sick, only I was still suffering from my bladder inflammation.

\*pyrozhenki – little potato buns usually with meat inside

\*Symusenka – a diminutive, probably of Simas

## 11. A NEW "MEDICAL STAFF"

When we moved onto the barges, as I mentioned, the guards changed. The CHEKists were replaced by the militia. The medical personnel also changed. Instead of those two medical nurses, that we had seen walking past our cars, now, as our medical supervisor, was assigned a fourth-year student from the Novosibirsk Medical Institute, a very sweet and solicitous young woman.

I myself had been a medical nurse and later a student at the Medical Faculty and I more or less understood what might be needed, but in her "pharmacy" the supplies were very limited.

Our medic was very sympathetic towards us, and afterwards, when she was coming back from the steamboat she slipped and fell off the gangplank and almost drowned, a young Lithuanian man, jumped in after her into the Ob, and pulled her out, although she had already been drawn under the barge by a whirlpool in the water. She herself would probably not have been able to save herself, and for this reason, she became very close to us, almost like family. She would come often to sit with us and told us a great deal about Soviet life, about which we knew nothing, but had experienced only its bad side. She was wearing only a whitish, faded, cotton dress and had nothing else.

"How could you go on such a journey, so lightly dressed? After all, it's cold on the river."

"I didn't have time to take anything with me. A militiaman came and gave the order:"

"Come on, at once. You will accompany the steamboat. It's warm in the cabin."

"I didn't know how long this trip would take. Besides, I had to pick up the medication. I sent a note to my mother, that she should bring some things. But, among so many steamboats, how could she possibly find me..."

## 12. WE GAIN ONE MORE FRIEND

As the elder, I had to get the ration coupons for my group (the former train car group), because, even here, although the barge was filled with many people, the groups remained the same, because our "superior" was afraid of losing even one person and under no circumstances would allow us to form new groups. And we would gladly have done so, because, as I already mentioned, I met many acquaintances.

One day, I was a little late in getting the coupons. When the militiaman came on the deck to distribute them, I had gone down from the barge to do some laundry, and they were not given to anyone else.

Having run to his cabin, I found him having lunch. He was supping his soup with a large ladle from a small kettle ...

Upon seeing me, he became embarrassed and put the ladle aside.

I apologized for the interruption and explained why I had come.

He gave me the coupons and looked embarrassingly at the ladle:

"As you see, there aren't enough spoons for everyone, and I didn't have time to take one from home."

It seems that he had also been assigned as hurriedly to the convoy as the young medical student.

"Well, this matter is correctable," I smiled and, having distributed the coupons to my group, I brought him a spoon and gave it to him as a gift. After all, the young soldiers in Kaunas had put in a whole dozen and we were

only five. If it hadn't been for those young soldiers, we also would have left without spoons, because I certainly would have forgotten them. The militiaman, even though he was overjoyed, but bethought himself, that he might have some trouble with his superiors.

"Well, now! For a spoon! Don't tell him it's a present and that it's silver. After all, there's no need to show it to the superior:"

He was quite intrigued that a spoon can be silver.

One more friendly person was gained and for such a trifle!

Sometimes the commandant of the column would even come to visit us. One time, I pointed out to him the dilapidated houses with peeling plaster, with blackened streaks on the walls. Apparently, since the beginning of the Revolution, when the houses lost their owners, they had not been repaired. Through leaking roofs, water was running down the walls. So, I said:

"Why have you neglected everything so? After all, even if they are not for the bourgeois, the workers need them. They should take care of the houses and look after them."

"Ha! the workers! - they have their jobs..."

"Well, then you, the government, should take care of this. One can't allow everything to crumble, to decay..."

"We are working for the defense."

My fellow passengers began to reprimand me, that I should drop such discussions because I could bring misfortune to everyone.

## 13. PESSIMISM AND NEW HOPES AND DISAPPOINTMENT AGAIN

Finally, another barge was hooked on and, having left Novosibirsk, we chugged up the Ob to Kolpashevo. At Kolpashevo we again stopped a couple of days. And here we were allowed to go ashore to talk with the people. They were dressed shabbily. They all questioned us about everything, and we questioned them: about life, living conditions. We even met a Latvian woman, who had wound up here twelve years ago.

"Oh, you will have hard times here!" she said, and my fellow traveler, Finkelšteinienė, said to her:

"Well, we will work and somehow we will feed ourselves. The war will end, we'll go back home." - The Latvian woman only shook her head:

"Work, oh, you'll work, but what of it?! What will you earn?"

"Well, we will at least earn enough for bread," I answered with certainty. And once again, rather sadly, rather bitterly, our speaker droned on:

"Bread! If you'll want bread, well! You'll take off your dress, give it away, and then maybe you'll get some bread for that day."

"And after that?"



"Then, you'll take off your coat and you'll get some for another day or so."

"How can that be?!" cried out Finkelšteiniē.

"So how many dresses and coats must one have?! That's not possible! And when the dresses and coats are gone, what then?" she asked even leaning towards the Latvian woman. And the latter answered with indifference:

"After that... Drop to the ground, stretch out your legs, and wait for the end. You will live and you will see," and she went away.

We did not really believe that it could be as she said, but still, that conversation caused us to worry: How will it really be? And here the shore people would bring some steamed potatoes in their skins, some boiled milk, sometimes eggs or fish. We would immediately cluster around them. We all crowded around trying to buy something edible. We paid dearly for everything.

Every morning, I would run over to see that poor teacher with the two old, blind people and the little one. I would talk to our doctors and other acquaintances. One morning, having come to visit the teacher, I did not find her: at night, her child-birth pains had begun and she and her child and the old people had been taken ashore. That same day, we were moved to smaller barges and were rafted further. We were now tugged by a small steamboat "KOMUNIST." And so, I remained without any further knowledge of that woman's fate.

At Novosibirsk and Kolpashevo, we would even get a newspaper to read. We learned that the Germans were marching forward unstopably. We had hope that the war would end soon and that we would be returned home.

Once we met a steamboat pulling a couple of barges. On the mast was fluttering a white flag, and on the deck of one barge, was lying a statue of Stalin divided into three small pieces. The Jews, always somewhat more sensitive and exalted: Immediately, one cried out:

"Look, look! A white flag! Stalin without a head! Revolution! We'll be returned soon!"

And, in reality, we were moving backwards towards Novosibirsk.

But our joy was short-lived: the flag of the steamboat, a piece of cheap cotton, apparently having at one time been red, but, from the sun and the rain, had become completely faded. And "Stalin without a head" was only a dismantled statue; easier to load and unload in pieces.

We were rafted backwards not for long, - only until we reached the Chaya River, the tributary of the Ob. And again, we turned north...and again our hopes diminished.

The Chaya was a rather big, deep river, perhaps bigger than our Nemunas. The water was completely yellow since it flowed through swamps. Due to the color of the water, apparently, its name "The Chaya."\* From the Chaya, we turned into its affluent, the river Parbig,

further into the Northwest. Around us was rustling the taiga.\* We stopped for a short while at an uninhabited shore.

We all hurried to look around the taiga to see if we would find some mushrooms or berries, but we found near the river shore only some grave knolls... That meant that people had been here. About them, we learned only much later. We did not succeed in going deeper into the taiga, - everywhere there was grass as tall as a man, and under it, fallen trees, rotten branches broken off by the wind. Instead of berries, we could have stepped on a snake. Besides, we were attacked by swarms of mosquitos. They were terrible bloodsuckers, not like those in Lithuania, from which one could defend oneself. They stick onto a person like a crust. Barely do you brush away one layer, immediately another one sticks to you.

We all ran headlong back to the barges. Here, they are deterred by the smoke of the steamboat and the smell of the oil. The braver ones, I also among that number, walked around with spotted, swollen faces and legs and hands scratched down to the blood. Where they bite, a hard, white blister forms and creates an unspeakable itching. We would scratch our skin until blood appeared, but we were unable to relieve the itching.

\* chai - the phonetic spelling for the Russian word "tea," hence its yellow color

\*taiga - the swampy coniferous forests of Siberia between the tundra and steppe

#### 14. THE PRICE OF BREAD

A small skiff came up to our steamboat. A man was wearing a thick canvas-like jacket, on his head a sort of hat, and his face covered with a black horse-hair net. It was a protection against mosquitos.

He asked for bread and offered fish in exchange.

Someone gave him half of a small loaf of bread, and he, a whole pail of very beautiful fish. But what to do with the fish? We had not yet become used to eating raw fish, and there was no way of cooking or frying them. The man refused to take the fish and gave the bread as a gift. The fisherman kept offering the fish. He had no money and how could he reciprocate?! And he immediately broke off a piece of bread and began to chew it.

While the negotiations were going on, the militiaman noticed it. The fisherman quickly pushed himself away from the barge and escaped down the stream.

"Stop! I'll shoot!" shouted the militiaman, but the man rowed full-force ahead.

We surrounded the militiaman and explained, that that man had done nothing wrong, he had only offered fish.

"I know them! Privateers! Instead of giving them over to the artel\*, see, the snake is bringing them to sell. I saw

that you gave him something," raged the militiaman. We, naive people, did not know the price of bread, because, in our Lithuania, those who worked never were short of that dear bread. Someone blundered, that they had only given a small piece of bread. The militiaman became furious. The commandant intervened and stated to the giver, that, perhaps he was getting too much bread since he was giving it to someone that he shouldn't have; so he would no longer receive any ration.

We were proceeding further north. The next stop was Krylovka. It was a rather large docking place. Up to it, come medium size steamboats with barges. They bring the most necessary supplies to the inhabitants of the taiga, and take away the precious goods of the taiga: leather, animal fur, grain, and other things.

I and Finkešteinienė, went ashore, since we both had larger families and, for that reason, would always go looking for some sort of food. A rather large group of people were gathering. We both started asking right away if they had anything edible for sale.

"There's an eatery here, there you can get something."

We went there. For a rather modest price, one was able to get some soup and fish. But into what could we put it? We refused the soup but asked them to wrap the fish into some paper... We had forgotten that this was not Lithuania...

"What, are you joking, we don't have a shred of paper. We have nothing on which to write something. How do you go around without a dish?"

"We didn't know we would find an eatery."

There was no time to go back and get something and to leave food when hungry mouths were waiting, we couldn't. I took off my silk scarf and said:

"Put in five portions."

"Oh! You will ruin such a scarf!" exclaimed the cook.

Finkelšteinienė, hiding in the corner, deftly took off her silk panties, folded them in such a way, that one couldn't tell what sort of garment it was, asked to put in as much as possible, and explained to me:

"It's all right! They're clean."

Yes, a hungry person pays no attention, it's only important to have something to put in your mouth. We returned to the barge, smiling. This meant that as soon as we will land in a permanent settlement, we will start to work and there will be no hunger... Oh, those dreams, those dreams! And how they disappointed us!

We returned by means of some sort of soft "asphalt," with which was covered a rather large area. We asked workers passing-by, what kind of pavement this was.

"Oh, it's bread," they answered.

We thought that they were joking. But, they weren't. They recounted that in the spring there had been a big flood. The river had flooded the grain storage houses

and pulled down some of them. The water receded only after a month because the snow, melting in the northern swamps was continuously sending down new torrents. The place was level. The river itself flows slowly through the swamps and so the flooding lasts for a long time. The ground remained wet; there was no way of drying out the grain. To that were also added downpours. The grain became softened. Later, the summer heat dried it and it formed a crust.

"So now it will probably be very difficult with bread?"

"We won't suffer because of that, since we only grow bread, but who eats it, we don't know. We have been living here for ten years already. We only see bread, but we don't eat it. Wait, you will live here a while and you will also learn..."

We, of course, could not believe, that people who grew bread, wading through fields of grain, could have no bread. We had no time for explanations: we had to carry back our lucky find to our families and hurry so as not to be left behind.

Some even smaller boats arrived. We had to rearrange ourselves again. Once more, there was a "sifting" of fellow travelers.

\*artel - a collective workers' association in the USSR

## 15. LAST STAGE

After Kolpashevo, I was no longer able to account for Doctor Valansevicius and the teacher in childbirth. The Estonian and Latvian groups remained. At Krylovka, they decreased again. It was not difficult for us to move. The children were not small anymore, I was strong, and my husband, though still sick, was able to walk by himself. The poor Budrevičiūtės\* sisters were still struggling with their immobile brother. And to cross over onto a barge with such a burden by means of a couple of small boards stretched from shore was quite a task...

The rain began to pour and with what poor timing!

If it had only rained when we were dying of thirst in the train cars while traveling over the immeasurable, - (but we measured them, nonetheless) - expanses of Russia and especially Siberia.

Actually, even there, it rained one time, once we had crossed over the range of the Urals. At that time, everyone crowded near the two little windows nailed over with wire-mesh. Some had stuck out a cup, others a small plate, those who had nothing, stuck out their palm, we were trying to catch raindrops, with which we wet our lips.

And now, surrounded by water, even though it was brown, the rain was pouring on our heads. Our clothes and things got soaked. We sought shelter where it dripped less. But each one was guarding his "territory," and this



territory was very limited... The sky, covered with lead-colored clouds, was weeping and weeping, perhaps shedding tears over our sad fate, and did not spare water, which was so pitifully lacking two or three weeks ago.

Finally, at dusk, we reached our permanent settlement, called Komarovka, which, in Lithuanian, would mean "Mosquito Place." The name itself was an indication of what kind of place it was. We received the order to move out and this time permanently.

We all grabbed our bundles and sliding on the dirty little bridge of two contiguous boards, we crowded onto the shore. After a long journey by water, even the solid ground seemed to sway.

At Krylovka, new superiors had taken us over: the commandant Shabalin and two militiamen. Our group had remained rather large. Since it was summer vacation, we were shown the way to the school. That was our temporary shelter. Our bundles, rolled in the coal dust at Novosibirsk, soaked through by the rain, and also rolled on the dirty shore of the docking area, as well as we ourselves, looked terrible. Water was dripping from us; our shoes were encrusted with dirt and were falling apart. Our bodies distorted, slipping and sliding, we dragged our things. What surprised me was that everyone was in a terrible hurry, splashing through the mud, sliding, rushing headlong for shelter...

Why hurry so? We were already wet. But it became apparent, that the smarter ones were hurrying for a reason. Space was limited. The ones who got there first settled in better. Our family and the Šičkai\* came last. And the only space remaining was in a corridor full of water from the dirt brought in by many feet. Having thrown our things down into that morass, we went to look around to see what was next. But all seven classrooms were already densely "inhabited." The commandant was turning about here and there, as well as the director of the school and the chairman of the collective farm. The director looked at us with sympathy, the commandant with spite and the chairman looked worried. Finally, the director, having remained alone, came up to us and said:

You will get no rest here: you can't lie down, there's not even room to sit down. If you don't touch anything, I'll let you into the teachers' room."

We assured him that we wouldn't touch anything. He unlocked the door and we found ourselves in a bright, clean room, actually, rather crammed with school treasures: tables, chairs, and other things.

On the wall, hung a large map of the USSR. We thanked the director again and assured him once more that we would not touch anything. The dirty things and our shoes we put near the door and took off our dirty clothing. Our suitcases had not soaked through completely. We had some dry underwear in them. Our bedding was only wet

in parts.

We felt happy. But it was difficult with food. Our food reserves were finished, besides, we wanted at least a glass of hot water, but alas...

Here, it would have been possible to go to the local inhabitants and buy something, but the rain kept pouring down as if from a bucket. Those who were not deterred by the rain, and determined to go look for something to eat, came back disappointed. The locals said they had not seen bread in ten years, and as far as potatoes were concerned, they were allowed to grow only 3 ares\* and this was not enough for their own families. They could only sell 1-2 liters of milk. Even that was a stroke of luck, especially for those, who had small children. Our men also made an "expedition." Each one brought back a liter of milk. We took out the small remnants of our precious dry bread, which we had bought in Novosibirsk, and dividing it among ourselves, chewed it as if it were something sacred. The bread, somewhat moldy and dry, still was very delicious with milk. My husband and I said we didn't want any milk, because the children were looking at it with avid eyes, then questioningly at us. How could we want any milk! - one liter for five people.

"Drink, my children, drink!" I urged, but they still did not believe us and left us some.

Having had "supper," each one of us took up something: my middle son, Stasiukas\*, and the oldest one, Liudas, busied themselves with their large art notebook, to check and draw our itinerary from Kaunas to Komarovka, according to the notes from our journey.

Šičkienė\* and I picked up our dirty clothes and barefoot waded down the slushy, muddy road to the river, at least to wash some of the dirt off. Some others came with the same idea, especially since it had stopped raining.

The militiaman said to us:

Wait, you'll tidy up tomorrow. You'll be able to wash yourselves in the sauna and do your laundry."

And so, in the year 1941 on July 28, that is, after six weeks of arduous travel, subjugation, deprivation, hunger, and thirst, for the first time, we stood on solid ground. That distant Siberian land welcomed us with tears, and was, actually, not so solid. After so much swaying on the train and in the barges, it seemed to us that the ground was still unstable.

\*Budrevičiūtės - in Lithuanian, the last name of unmarried women frequently ends in -iūtė

\*-kai - in Lithuanian, the plural for family names frequently ends in -ai

\*ares - 100 sq. meters or 119.6 sq. yards

\*Stasiukas - a diminutive form of the name Stasys

\*Šičkienė - in Lithuanian, a married woman's last name, in most cases has the ending -ienė

## current events

### Security

...A contingent of 500 U.S. soldiers with 25 Abrams tanks and about 30 Bradley armored transports arrived in early September for a two-month encampment near the Belarus border. With the post-election unrest in Belarus, Reuters reports that the troops are now planning to stay until mid-June 2021 (9 months).

...Russia and Belarus participated in a military exercise termed Slavic Brotherhood-2020 with an airborne assault regiment aimed at counter-terrorist scenarios against the "Union State" of Russia and Belarus. Russia sent over 900 servicemen and about 100 pieces of military equipment.

...The Kavkaz-2020 drills were held in Russia's Southern Military District, just east of Ukraine, and included the Black and Caspian Seas, involved 80,000 personnel, and included up to 1,000 servicemen from Armenia, Belarus, China, Myanmar, and Pakistan. Additional observers were from Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, and Tajikistan. Active hardware included 250 tanks, 450 mechanized infantry fighting vehicles, 250 artillery systems, and multiple-launch rocket systems. Three models of drones, Forpost, Orlan-10, and Eleron-3, were demonstrated in covering altitudes ranging from 100 meters to 5,000 meters.

...Reelected for a sixth term, and sworn in at an unannounced inauguration, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko put half of his army on the highest state of readiness. He also shut down the borders with Lithuania and Poland and built up the "Union State" with Russian and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius called the inauguration "a farce." "Forged elections. Forged inauguration. The former president of Belarus does not become less former. Quite the contrary. His illegitimacy is a fact with all the consequences that this entails," the Foreign Minister tweeted. These sentiments were echoed by Czech, German, Latvian and Polish officials. The Kremlin spokesman refused to comment on the inauguration, saying it was "a sovereign, internal decision of the Belarusian leadership."

...The Lithuanian government will fund 100 Belarusians to be able to study free of charge in Lithuania, and the Minister of Education, Science and Sport signed an order approving the arrangement.

...The Lithuanian Interior Ministry will allow 326 Belarusians to enter the country for humanitarian reasons; 81 have accepted, and another 26 have asked for asylum.

...On an official state visit, French President Emmanuel Macron met with Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in Vilnius. Later, he met with officials and students at Vilnius University and afterward met with French troops included in a NATO battalion located in Rukla.

...The Lithuanian Labor Party has expelled Sergei Dmitrijev after he praised the Ukrainian separatist leader, Alexander Zakharchenko, on a Facebook post "glory to the memory of a hero" on the second anniversary of his death. Dmitrijev is also chairman of the Lithuanian Russian Union and a Labor Party member in the Vilnius municipal council.

### COVID-19

...The third weekend in September registered 249 new cases of coronavirus, and the Lithuanian National Public Health Center recommends that employers organize remote working from home.

...A resurgence of new cases (e.g. 114 for the last Friday in September) has alarmed Lithuanian officials who now report a total of 89 deaths. Some of the new cases were found in residents who have recently returned from the U.S., Germany, Nigeria, and Norway. A Radviliškis hospital in northern Lithuania reports 8 cases including 6 nurses and support staff, one in admissions, and one patient. Another cluster of 8 cases occurred at a police station in Raseiniai, in western Lithuania. The town of 11,200 has 26 cases.

...Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis and Health Minister Aurelijus Veryga said that Lithuania may need over 100 million euros to purchase COVID-19 vaccines from the seven producers who are working on vaccine projects.

...The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has projected covid-19 economic declines in 2020 for the Baltic nations: Estonia (-4%), Latvia (-5%) and Lithuania (-2%) but estimated rebounds in 2021: Estonia (+4%), Latvia (+3.5%) and Lithuania (+4%).

...The European Commission informed member states that the Emergency Support Instrument needs 750 million euros in additional funds to conclude talks and contracts with vaccine producers. The Lithuanian government has agreed to contribute 2.5 million euros (1/3 of 1%).

### Business

...San Diego based Dexcom, an international leader in



continuous glucose monitoring for diabetics, will open a global business service center (GBS) in Vilnius in 2021. Many will know of its 14-day FreeStyle Libre sensor, which eliminates daily finger sticks. This center will expand its European support for patients, customer advocacy, finance, and accounting operations. The selection process was enhanced by Invest Lithuania, the Lithuanian development agency, and the presence of 80 GBS centers in Vilnius, which has been stimulated by the educational system which produces a multilingual, highly skilled talent pool. Founded in 1999, Dexcom employs 3,900 specialists, and in 2019 had sales of \$1.47 billion. Dexcom will implement robotic process automation (RPA) in the new center as part of its expansion across the European, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) markets.

...As Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia disagree on implementing the Rail Baltica, Lithuania does not want work done in Lithuania by a non-state operator. It wants to follow Poland's example where Poland is carrying out the European standard gauge railway on its own, in cooperation with the European Commission. The total cost of the Rail Baltica project in the Baltic nations is estimated to be 5.8 billion euros for 870 km of track. Lithuania is scheduled for 392 km.

...The investigative group OCCRP has been going over the U.S. Treasury Department intelligence reports known as Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) and has uncovered evidence that Lithuania's largest company, Orlen Lietuva, a Polish state-owned oil refiner, was paid \$4.4 million by Transnistria's powerful Sheriff LLC conglomerate to ship petroleum from Lithuania to the separatist region through Ukraine to avoid paying duties to Moldova. The self-proclaimed separatist state of Transnistria sits between Moldova and Ukraine. Sheriff LLC has interests in gas stations, hotels, supermarkets, a TV station, telecom networks, a regional bank, and a professional soccer team. Its annual sales typically exceed Transnistria's annual budget. It sponsors the ruling party and subsidizes the state. HSBC Bank U.S.A. filed a Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) in May 2016. The U.N. Comtrade data shows Lithuanian was declaring almost eight times as much in oil exports as Moldova was declaring as imports.

...The U.S. and Lithuania signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate on the development of 5G communication networks and cooperate in the evaluation of suppliers of hardware and software. The U.S. is pressuring allies to not allow Huawei, the Chinese telecommunications giant, to take part in this development.

...Lithuania's state-owned energy group, Ignitis Grupe, has offered 20.9 million shares (27.8%) in an Initial Public Offering at an estimate of 22.5 euros per share. This will value the company at 1.69 billion euros and bring 470 million euros (\$551 million) to the company for investment in future growth. The company operates gas, electricity, and solar power networks. The public shares are offered to residents of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia and will trade on NASDAQ – Vilnius and the London Stock Exchange; the government will retain the remaining shares.

### General

...Since 1994, the Baltic Assembly has been awarding Prizes in literature, arts, and science. The Prizes consist of a monetary award, a certificate, and a statuette. This year the Literature prize went to Lithuanian novelist, poet, and essayist Birutė Jonuškaitė for her novels "Marant" and "Maestro." The prize for arts went to the documentary, "Bridges of Time" by Kristine Briedė and Audrius Stonys, which portrays less remembered cinema poets of the Baltic New Wave. The prize for science was awarded to Dr. Roberts Eglitis for his work, "Theoretical predictions of new materials for energy storage and harvesting."

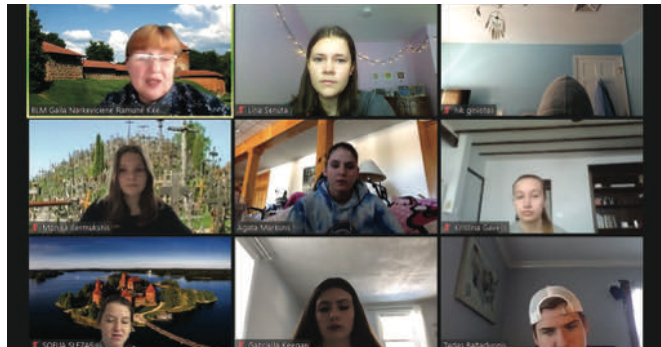
...In 1987 the U.S.A. celebrated the bicentennial of our constitution. In 2021 Lithuania and Poland are preparing to celebrate the 230th anniversary of the May 3, 1791 Constitution of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the first written constitution in Europe. With the recent improvement in Lithuanian-Polish relations, the "Commonwealth" period is seeing renewed attention, which will include visits by the heads of state and meeting between the Lithuanian Constitutional Court and the Polish Tribunal in Warsaw. The Lithuanian Seimas has designated 2021 as the "Year of the Constitution of May 3" and Mutual Pledge of the Commonwealth of Two Nations.

...The search for a missing West Highland Terrier leads to the discovery of 47 dogs living in deplorable conditions with illegal dog breeders in Kretinga District, 12 km east of the Baltic Sea resort of Palanga. The missing dog was found and returned to its lawful owner. The other dogs were removed to the dog shelter, Nuaras.

...Autumn rains bring out the "Fun" in "Fungi" hunting in the annual search for mushrooms. There is even a Lithuanian word for this hunt – grybavimas! With 300+ types of edible fungi found in the country's woods, many return from a foraging trip with a full basket - as long as the wild pigs don't get there first!

## Boston Lithuanian School Opened Virtual School Doors

By Lina Senuta



10th grade during history lesson with teacher Gaila Narkevičienė



Third grade students during the lesson with teacher Orinta Kalibatienė

October 17 marked the first day of my final year at Lithuanian school. On a sunny autumn Saturday, the Boston Lithuanian School opened its virtual doors for distant learning. Despite the changes in the world, it was gratifying to see so many families returning to school. It affirmed that Lithuanian activities are important to us, and Lithuanian school is the bridge that connects us with the Lithuanian community and thus helps to create a sense of security in turbulent times.

The day began traditionally by singing the Lithuanian National Anthem together. Afterward, the Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania (New York) Vaclovas Šalkauskas and the Executive Director of The Kazickas Family Foundation (New York) Neila Baumilienė congratulated everyone on the new school year.

Jurgis Didžiulis, a songwriter, performer, and public figure shared his childhood memories of how, growing up in Colombia, his grandmother spoke to him among Colombians in Lithuanian, the language only the two of them understood. Mr. Jurgis explained how Lithuanian words could be interesting to pronounce and learn for non-Lithuanian friends. He compared language to musical instruments: unused, they are worthless - they do not create music, and over time we forget how to play them. For homework, Mr. Jurgis asked each student to teach three new Lithuanian words to our American friends and illustrated how to do it with a song. An entertaining song, accompanied by a guitar, brightened everyone's mood - some people even danced to its lively tune.

Gaila Narkevičienė, the principal of the Boston Lithuanian School, rejoiced at the excellent first day of the school year: "The Boston Lithuanian School is the engine of our community, the gateway to Lithuanian life. It is the key to self-knowledge because it is a value that will not be replaced by any other activity".

This school year is different for all of us, full of changes and challenges. Some of those changes are positive. For example, remote learning has given the Boston Lithuanian School an incredible opportunity to invite amazing people from around the world as teachers to further diversify students' learning. Artist Rolandas Dabrukas (California) will share his artistic skills; the singing will be led by singer, composer, and former music teacher at our school Simona Smirnova (New York). Older students will be introduced to contemporary Lithuanian youth music by music educator Gintarė Bukauskienė (New York), and creative writing will be taught by writer Laima Vince (Maine, USA / Lithuania).

There will be events for the whole family, such as All Souls Day with folk music performer and composer Žemyna Trinkūnaitė (Lithuania) and singer Jorigė Jurgutytė (Great Britain). There will be a game show "Do You Know Lithuania?" which will be led by Columbia University (New York) graduate Justinas Grigaitis.

A lecture on the importance of bilingual education with Sandra Petraškaitė-Pabst, a professor at the University of Mannheim (Germany), and a creative writing workshop with writer Laima Vincė (ME, USA / Lithuania) are planned for parents.

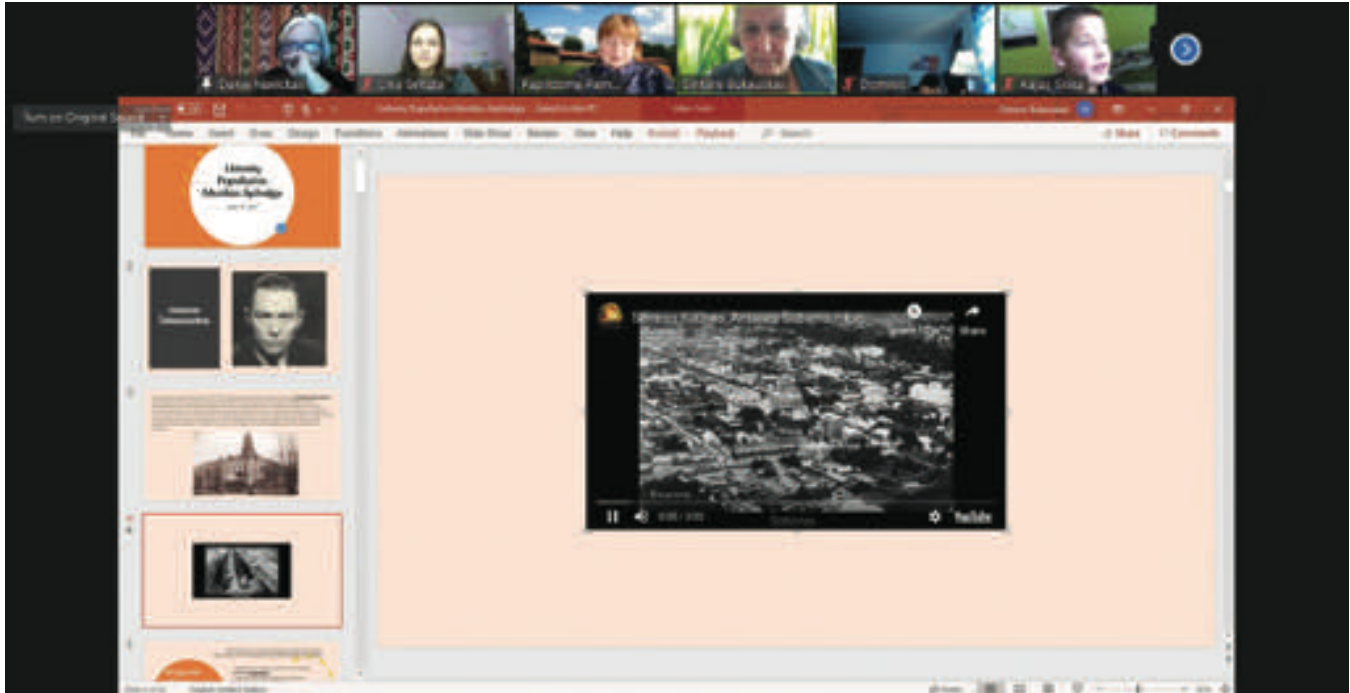
The feeling of togetherness at the Boston Lithuanian School proved once again that, no matter what difficulties befall us, Lithuanian identity and community are important to us and will stay with us as we become adults.



Despite the difficulties during the pandemic, we will carry on with the Lithuanian language, traditions, and heritage, just like our grandparents and great-grandparents did, when faced with hardships.

Lina Senuta is a 10th grader at Boston Lithuanian School, Boston, MA





Music educator Gintarė Bukauskienė introduces contemporary Lithuanian youth music to older students



Everyone sings and dances with Jurgis Didžiulis

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DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC  
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