

# bridges



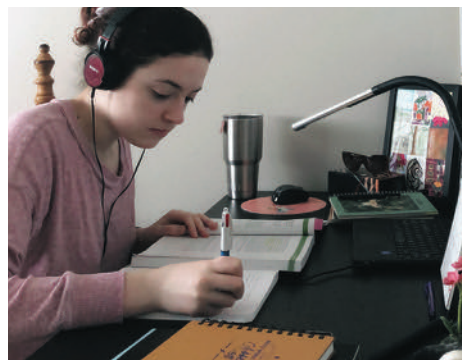
LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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**Front Cover:** The fern flower is supposed to appear only on the night during the celebration of the summer solstice. It brings luck and wealth to those who find it. Photo credit: Viltė Vaitkutė

**Back Cover:** Summer colors. Photo credit: Viltė Vaitkutė

# bridges

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EDITOR  
Karilė Vaitkutė

ART DIRECTOR  
Daniel P. Craig, Jr.

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR, CURRENT EVENTS  
Alan J. Stankus, P.E. (ret)

ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER  
Marius Naris

**Editorial Office**  
139 Willow Blvd., Willow Springs, IL 60480  
[kariledalia@yahoo.com](mailto:kariledalia@yahoo.com)

**Subscriber Services and Advertising**  
[spauda@javlb.org](mailto:spauda@javlb.org)

**Facebook**  
[facebook.com/BridgesLithuanianAmericanMagazine](https://facebook.com/BridgesLithuanianAmericanMagazine)



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LAC, INC. NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD  
14911 127th Street, Lemont, IL 60439  
[finansai@javlb.org](mailto:finansai@javlb.org)

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## from the editor

Dear readers,

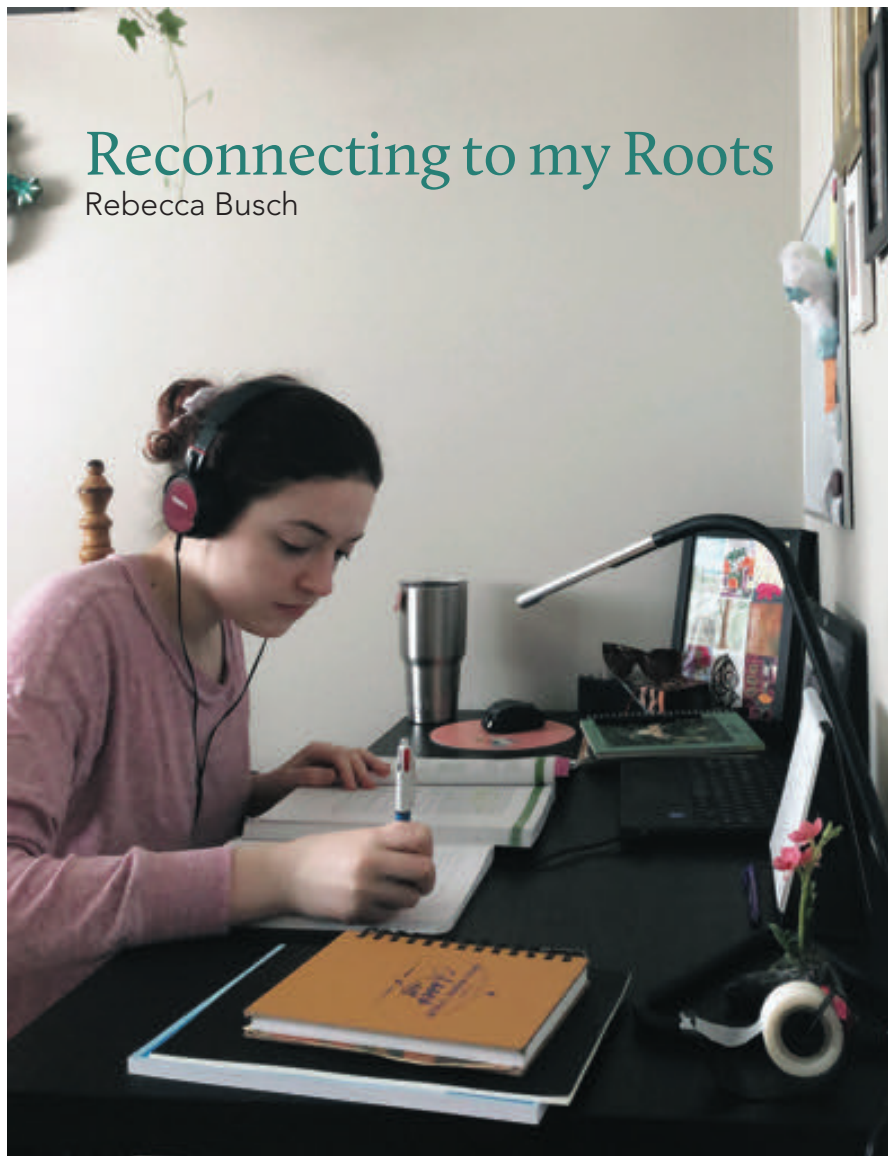
June is the first month of summer, and summer is a traditional vacation time. Especially for students. However, this June I want to talk about studies. The past school year has been a strange one. Mostly, students were learning via Zoom because they were not allowed into schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For many, distance learning was quite challenging and did not yield the desired results. For some, however, distance learning opened new possibilities. All of a sudden, we discovered that we can teach the Lithuanian language to many more students than before. We all know that our children can study Lithuanian at the Lithuanian Saturday schools in the US. We also know that there are several universities in the United States where students can study Lithuanian. There are also cultural centers, such as the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, that offer Lithuanian. However, those physical locations are limited to several cities whereas Lithuanians and Americans of Lithuanian descent also live in locations that cannot offer Lithuanian studies. And now, via Zoom, everyone can participate in Lithuanian classes. In this issue of Bridges, you will read about the Lithuanian language classes taught online by Dr. Daiva Litvinskaitė. Similar online classes for adult learners are available through the Balzekas Museum. However, it is very important to note that the Lithuanian language has been taught for many years at the University of Illinois in Chicago, and students enrolled at this University have an opportunity to get a foreign language credit if they attend Lithuanian classes. In this issue of Bridges, you will read about one of the UIC students who, through learning the language of her grandparents, rediscovered her roots. It is important that we, Lithuanians living abroad, continue speaking our native tongue. The Lithuanian language is often called the oldest language in the world. Well, it is the oldest living Indo-European language, and we should be very proud of it. We have a twenty-volume Lithuanian language dictionary that was being compiled for a hundred years. It has 22,000 pages and more than 11 million words. We will not be able to learn all these words but we can at least learn a couple thousand. There are only a little bit over three million of us, the Lithuanian language speakers, in the world. I hope that this number will not be decreasing.

I wish you a beautiful summer and a magical St. John's Day celebration, and I hope that you consider learning Lithuanian by enrolling in one of those online classes that are available.

Sincerely,  
Karilė Vaitkutė  
Editor

## Reconnecting to my Roots

Rebecca Busch



My maternal grandparents fled Lithuania during the war and with them they brought their culture. Due to this, my early childhood was an amalgamation of Lithuanian and American, of old and new, of traditions and trends. The television showed American cartoons while the stereos played Lithuanian folk songs. On hot summer days, šaltibarščiai with vegetables fresh from the garden was eaten as a starter before grilled burgers and corn on the cob. Santa (who uncannily resembled my uncle) came to the door on Kūčios to deliver gifts but was always in too much of a hurry to take a seat at the open place setting at the table. I often spent time with my grandparents while my parents worked, further exposing me to the language and culture. When they passed away, though, many Lithuanian aspects of the family crumbled into bits and pieces, with only certain favorite recipes and festivities kept. The

language was then barely spoken, and my rudimentary understanding of it soon faded. As I grew up, I've more and more felt the gap when comparing my childhood experiences with my fully American friends. It created a longing for a thing I sometimes struggled to remember, and for many years I was drawn to the idea of rekindling that side of myself. I would beg my mother to make me the infamously difficult Napoleono tortas for my birthdays and I even learned the accordion, but often my inability to speak the language was a barrier from joining more connecting, community activities.

At various points in my teenage years, I tried to learn Lithuanian on my own, but to no avail. To this day there are relatively few resources available, even in the age of the Internet, and many of the native speakers I knew couldn't explain the intense grammar, nor did they want to attempt. My hope to learn it was often put on the back burner as I focused on my studies and other languages, that is, until I started college. I attended the University of Illinois at Chicago to study biology and chemistry, but my program still required four semesters of a foreign language. I considered continuing with Spanish as I knew some from high school, but on a whim decided to check what other options I had. To my surprise,

the university offered a plethora of language classes, one of which being Lithuanian. Even then it shocked me-- I had never seen anything Lithuanian-related in American settings before. I could not help but jump at this opportunity, one which I now know to be rare given that UIC is one of two universities in the United States to offer the courses.

Learning Lithuanian was a unique experience. Linguistics has always been a point of fascination in my life and I've even studied a small handful of languages autodidactically, but none were as complex and ancient as Lithuanian. The grammatical rules are intense and sometimes feel like solving a math equation to coordinate all the declensions and genders and conjugations. The sounds of the language are also like no other; Lithuanian has the most phonemes (sounds) of all European languages and

is only beaten worldwide by a few African languages that utilize tongue clicks. Due to hearing the language during a prime developmental stage, I can differentiate between most sounds I hear, but since I barely spoke it, I still have considerable difficulty producing the sounds when speaking. Although arduous at times, I have seen immense improvement throughout the semesters. I walked into 101 only knowing how to say “labas,” and I walked out of 104 able to tell my patients at work how to take their medication, joining conversations on online forums, and reading the occasional newspaper article.

Language isn't only a skill for straightforward translation, though. It opens the doors for further exploration of cultural pools in which you couldn't swim in prior. It makes that place on the other side of the big pond feel a lot closer. I know there is a good chance I will never be able to bring my Lithuanian to a shiny, perfect native level in my lifetime, but it isn't stopping me from trying and enjoying the process. Even a basic level, filled with errors and mispronunciation, connects you. Over the semesters, I've discovered (and rediscovered) so much about where I'm from in ways big and small. I often feel like I've been slowly introduced to a new bubble of existence. To the folk songs I used to listen to as a child, I've added new Lithuanian songs in pop and rap and jazz and more genres I would never get to hear without the language. I've discovered a few Lithuanian delis and restaurants around Chicago and have been able to practice my speaking with strangers. I've learned about the history and natural environment of the country, about how we've always managed to overcome hardships. I've also been able to read



the notes my senelis left on the backs of his photographs and accordion music from the D.P. camps to learn about those times personally. I've gotten to see a side of me I haven't known in many years and further develop it, and for that I am grateful. Moving forward, I plan on not only continuing to learn the language and enjoy what it brings, but also find a way to visit or live in Lithuania. Cultural exploration has no age limit. Our roots are always there below the surface.



# Students from the United States and Lithuania Celebrated International Family Day in Suvalkija

Aura Juškevičienė, a teacher at the Colorado Lithuanian School

Česlova Žukienė, teacher at the KTU Vaižgantas School



Šarūnas and his brother, Ričardas, are making decorations for a house.

As International Family Day was approaching, students from the United States and Lithuania opened the doors of the virtual STEAM classroom for the second time. Foreigners and Lithuanians who live abroad always are surprised to find out that even though Lithuania is so small, people here speak in several different dialects, and there are several ethnographical regions with distinct customs, culinary and architectural heritage. Teachers and students of the Colorado Lithuanian School and the KTU Vaižgantas School were united by a common idea to get to know the ethnographic regions of Lithuania. In March, the students got acquainted with Aukštaitija, and on May 8, 2021, they met in another region, Suvalkija.

On Saturday evening in Lithuania and early morning in Colorado, the children traveled to the land on the other side of the Nemunas River, where many educated

Lithuanians have lived. What is stuba? What is kumečiai? What do the languages of kapsai and zanavykai sound? Does unity really blossom among them as the words of the Lithuanian national anthem say? How did they dress in the old times? What is the taste of the soup called duonzupė? Why was it considered a great joy for a sūduvis to receive a multicolored sash?

Children separated from Lithuania by the Atlantic Ocean had an opportunity to hear the Suvalkian dialect. People of Suvalkija can be proud of it because the foundation of the standard Lithuanian language is built on it. Vincas Kudirka, the author of the national anthem, and Jonas Jablonskis, the creator of Lithuanian grammar, lived in Suvalkija.

Students learned to weave multicolored sashes while listening to teachers and chatting amongst themselves.



Lukas is weaving a sash.

They decorated the shutters and cornices of houses called stuba. They found out that pottery has exceptionally deep traditions in Suvalkija. Folk artist and ceramicist Jurgita Čiplytė told students that when making pots she has to follow certain rules. The children mastered the craft of pottery making cups, jugs, and teapots out of clay.

Although the STEAM classes were remote, the participants felt like they were on a real journey. They traveled to the town of Marijampolė, founded by Countess Pranciška Butlerienė, a great lover of cats. They walked around the Zypliai Manor, hiked on the trail around the Amalva swamp, and climbed the mounds of Sudargas. They visited the birthplaces of Vincas Kudirka and Jonas Basanavičius, the museum of antique cars, the Cat Yard in the capital of Suvalkija, and the Lithuanian National Revival Oak Grove. The children could choose a vehicle they wanted to travel in and draw it. And in just a few hours during the virtual STEA class, they traveled all over Suvalkija by train, bicycle, car, or motorcycle.

In order for children and their family members to get to know Lithuania better, two more international virtual meetings will be held during the next school year. Students will visit Žemaitija and Dzūkija.



Ievutė is decorating a Suvalkian stuba.



Bracelets made by children.



Lukas is happy with decorations he made.



Milda and Austė are ready for the STEAM class.



Future architects and designers Kajus and Aronas



Beauty created by children.



Dominykas and his sister in the ceramics studio.

How was the idea of the international STEAM project born?

The STEAM project enabled children to apply their knowledge of science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics, learn to solve problems creatively, and use the acquired experience in real life. “These days, students are forced to spend a lot of time at the computer. So why not make that time more interesting and rewarding? It is an opportunity for children to broaden their horizons and invite Lithuanians living abroad who are especially thirsty

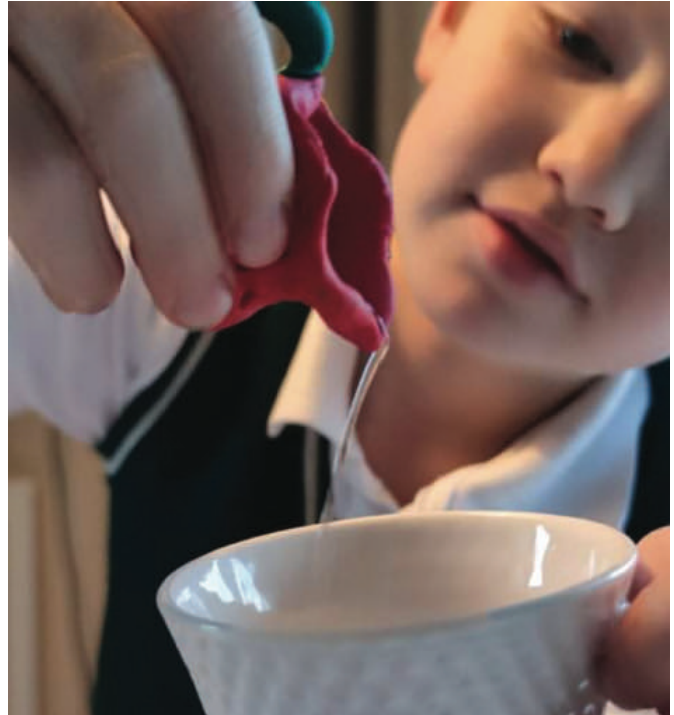
for information about Lithuania,” says project organizer Jolanta Vaitkevičienė, who invited her colleagues Jūratė Valančiausienė, Česlova Žukienė, and Agnė Varžukienė as well as project coordinator, assistant principal Eglė Grinkevičienė, to participate in the project.

The international STEAM project brought together two communities - schools in the United States and Lithuania - and helped participants engage in a meaningful activity. In the present time, we all experience a lot of social distancing and lack communication. Our children have to





Let's weave a sash!



Pouring water from a self-made cup.

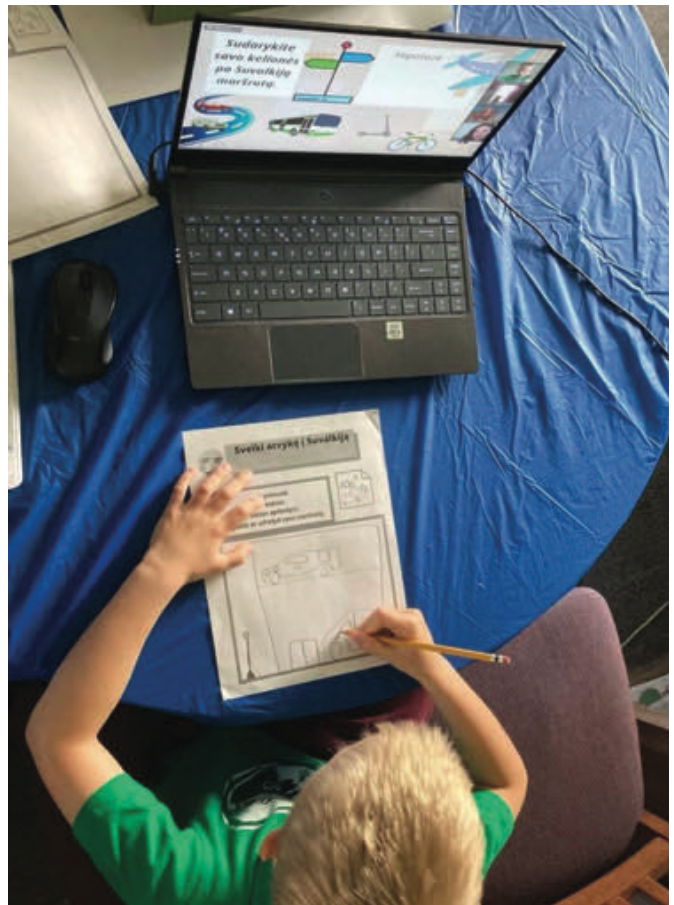


Working at the home ceramics studio.

take on new challenges that psychologists are still trying to define and name. We have to draw spiritual strength from each other, so it would not be easy to disperse us and oppose us to one another. After all, as it is said, united we stand, divided we fall.

The dedication of the Colorado Lithuanian School principal Edita Buzėnienė is fascinating. She and the school staff she assembled work tirelessly in fostering Lithuanian culture and traditions in the United States. It is hard work, but it is meaningful. The seeds of love of the country of their parents and grandparents are sown in the hearts of children. One day, they will grow and bear fruit.

We look forward to our next meetings!



Ričardas is planning his trip to Lithuania.

# The LAC Board of Education organizes remote Lithuanian language courses

Daiva Litvinskaitė



The remote Lithuanian language courses for adults organized by the LAC Board of Education began at the end of August last year, attracting a lot of interest. Almost 100 students enrolled in the first class. They were grouped into two groups of beginners and one group of advanced learners and successfully completed the first semester. The beginning, which exceeded the expectations of the organizers, has already been written up in the press. In this article, we want to take a look at how well this project is progressing.

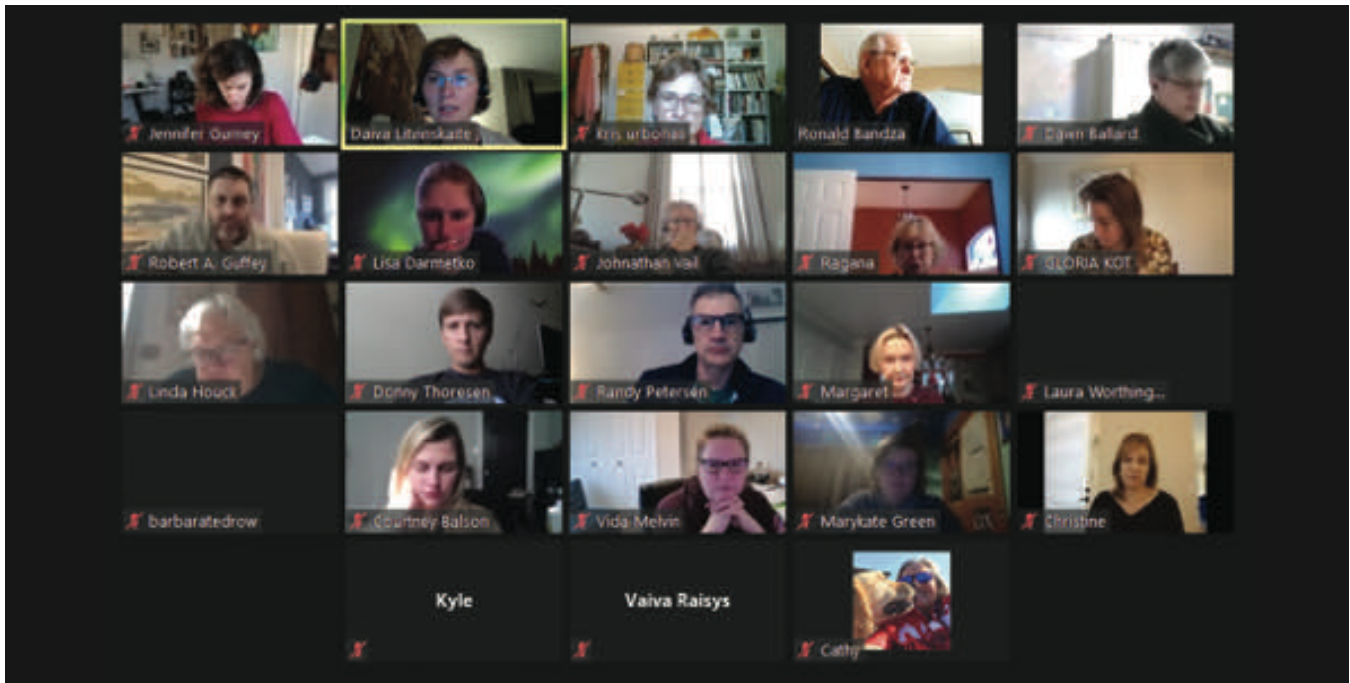
This year, the courses started on January 9 and continued until the end of May. In order to achieve the set goals, the organizers offered students more courses of different levels: a course for beginners, a course for those who already have some knowledge of the language, and a course for advanced students. The courses are taught by Dr. Daiva Litvinskaitė and Vytautas Magnus University Lithuanian Language and Culture Summer Course director Vilma Leonavičienė.

In the spring semester, 14 students enrolled in the beginner group. Almost half of them are students who have recently graduated or are still studying at various universities. They are the children of parents who enrolled in the higher level Lithuanian course. There are also siblings who encourage each other to enroll in courses. As a lecturer, after finishing one class and beginning the next one, I enjoy seeing the parents of my students who had just finished their class come in the room and wave to me from their son's or daughter's computer screen. Sometimes the connection between family members becomes motivation to try to be better and learn more. As is often the case, the younger students of the group, for one reason or another, did not have the opportunity to learn

Lithuanian in their childhood. However, now that they have reached adulthood and turned to family history, they need the language skills to be able to learn more about their ancestry. It is quite moving to see a flag with the coat of arms of Lithuania in the background of such a student's room when sitting at the computer screen.

There are 28 students in the group of learners who started studying Lithuanian last year. In the third group of advanced students taught by Vilma Leonavičienė, there are 7 students. All these students began their Lithuanian language studies last year. Their knowledge of the Lithuanian language was varied: some had only heard Lithuanian at home, but they did not learn it, others were able to communicate, and still others spoke well, but wanted to deepen their knowledge. All students are either working, raising families, or retired. Often times, remote language learning courses have been an old dream to learn the language of parents, to communicate with relatives in Lithuania, only due to lack of time, this dream was being postponed. For others, it is an opportunity to learn the language of the spouse without leaving home, and with the help of language, establish a connection with the country of their loved ones.

Before the pandemic, I didn't have a chance to teach remotely, and I couldn't know what the class dynamics would be. Of course, several students were familiar to me from before the course began; some of them have been attending the Lithuanian language courses organized at Dainava Camp in Michigan for several years. Therefore, they often call each other and study and speak Lithuanian to one another. Over time, a wonderful initiative has emerged to come together for virtual chat hours led by the students themselves or by their spouses. So it is



probably not surprising that when teaching these courses, I hear the phrase "like family" more and more often. Perhaps for this reason, students sometimes join a class from their workplace, when driving to the airport, or with a child sitting on their knees.

Lithuanian language classes take place on Saturdays through the Zoom program. Classes start at 9:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. central time and last for one hour. Those who do not connect directly have the opportunity to view the recorded classes at a time convenient for them. During the class, grammar is taught, students' questions are

answered, and, of course, we speak Lithuanian. During the week, students independently do their homework and check it. Advanced students have the opportunity to study faster, as pre-arranged lessons are available on the LAC Board of Education website: <https://svietimotaryba.org/LongDistance/>

The LAC Board of Education plans to continue teaching these courses. In the summer, registration for the fall courses will be announced, and three levels, of course, will be offered again. More information will be announced when it becomes available.

# 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

### 18. OUR OWN CHATA

Our landlord became even more sullen. In the *chata*, there were now two sick people and our youngest, so that there were constantly three outsiders. My husband began to look for some way out. The chairman suggested we buy our own *chata*. Easy to say! But for what? The hundreds that I had brought with me were simply melting away and we were paid nothing for our work. Besides, the only two working were the two Liudai, my husband and my son. And they, one was practically still only a child, a boy of seventeen, who had never done any physical labor, was constantly hungry and weakened, and the father, a war invalid of the Lithuanian Army, having lost 50% of his work capability. According to the words of Nekra-

sov: "The family is large, but only two men: my father and I..." But the chairman kept on urging us:

"Don't worry, I'll recall Michich, and you will come to an agreement." That Michich was one of the workers of this collective farm, who had been sent to the farms about twelve kilometers deeper into the *taiga*, where there were small plots for grazing and where fodder was being prepared for the winter. It was not possible to bring the fodder out of there since there was no road. Therefore, a part of the cattle was being kept there on the spot and was being tended by Michich.

After a few days, Michich, who had been called back, arrived.

"The chairman said you want to buy my *chata*," he began the conversation, while rolling a himself a cigarette.

"Yes, we do, only I don't know how we will come to an agreement."

"So, what do you have? I don't want money. Do you have any clothes or fabric?" Upon seeing our silver plated samovar, he jumped:

"That piece, you will give me. Maybe you have some mens' shirts, some boots and some clothing for my old lady..." started counting Michich.

We were inexperienced: We did not know here the value of our things, and that *chata* he was offering was a real shack. The walls were bent from the flood that had passed through last spring, instead of a foundation,

there were wooden beams, since here there were no stones. The roof was covered with birch bark, warped and cracked from the rain and the sun. The windows were only holes - no frames, no glass. From the stove of beaten clay in the corner remained only a pile of slimy dirt. The floor was rotten...

It was good that I was still sick and could not get out of bed. If I had seen that "palace," which was being offered for our things, I would probably have talked my husband out of buying it. At least if there had been a roof! At least shelter from the wind! But here there was nothing!

But our landlord and the chairman kept urging us:

"It'll be all right, we'll fix it up, we'll help. We can push the walls back in place and we'll patch the roof up somehow." They mentioned who had some birch bark which

they had peeled off that spring.

"With the glass, it'll be more difficult. And the stove? It's not like it was before: we have our own brick factory."

A deal was made. Our beautiful samovar went to its new owner. Besides, from my suitcase came a three-meter long piece of fabric, my silk dress and two or my husband's shirts.

Michich, although he tried very hard to hide his glee at having tricked the "fools," could not succeed. And the chairman stated, that the seller must treat everyone.

When the other collective farm workers learned how Michich had "robbed" us, they came and began to tell us how stupid we had been to have given so many of our good things for such a miserable hovel, which would have collapsed within a year without a *kopek*\* (for who would buy it!).

The chairman also got "his cut": my new winter coat. But, it was up to him to assign repairmen and issue needed materials. Needless to say, we also had "to be good" to the team-leader and somewhat to those people who were assigned to work for their "work days." Since, the compensation for work was not in money but in work, that is, our workdays were transferred to the one, who worked for us personally. Those workdays, at that time, were worthless. The collective farm was not able to settle its accounts with the government, therefore, they practically did not have the means to settle with us for our workdays. A person working for nothing is sluggish and unwilling, but when he gets a little something, his mood is quite different.

To whom and how much to give, advised the chairman, who was experienced and knew his people and their customs well. My poor husband had much worry, much running around and much hardship. I was surprised at his inventiveness and his business capacity. Everywhere we "paved our way" with the things loaded on for us by our good-hearted soldiers when we were deported from Kaunas. What would we have done, had we only taken as much as the CHEKist allowed and as much as we could carry ourselves?

Finally, on the fourth day of October, they transported me to our own abode. I say "transported" since I could still not walk by myself. Although my temperature would jump only to 38 C (101 F), but the malaria had weakened me so much that I could not stand on my feet. My muscles had atrophied, my head felt dizzy and was unbearably heavy, and my legs felt as if they were of cotton.

But Dear God! Who could describe our joy and contentment when we settled into our own home. No one to give us sullen looks, to make reproaches, that we were encroaching on someone else's very much needed space. In the mornings, my family would go its separate way: my husband and my oldest son to work, both younger ones

to school.

What a joy it was, when, on the third day after our move, I got out of bed and without holding on to anything, walked to the table, and after resting, to the stove.

Many people would run over to congratulate us on our moving. Even the commandant himself and the chairman of the collective farm paid us a visit and in honor of the occasion issued ten liters of skimmed milk from the farm.

My training continued. I was becoming stronger. Nobody here was growling at me, I was free. But...again the same worry, - what will we eat?! My poor husband, having begged the commandant for permission, walked to other farms to trade our things for something edible. Sometimes he would bring back half a kilo of butter, other times a pail of potatoes, or a handful or two of flour.

Every day my good doctor Šakenienė would visit me with the hospital assistant Paukson. The latter, having noticed my leather riding boots, began to ask me to sell them to her. At one time, when I lived on the farm, I had purchased them because I used to ride quite often. When I moved to Kaunas, even though they were not needed, I could not throw out such a valuable item. And when we were being deported from Kaunas, my good soldiers, secretly, when the CHEKist was not watching, slipped them into one of the bundles. And here they were such a necessity. What could I answer to my benefactress for all her care and medical attention? How could I refuse? For even now, I was still lying in the bed she had lent me. She could not put them down. She herself was wearing huge, rough, home-made pig-skin boots. Mine were like dolls.

"Only my big foot will not fit into them," she said regretfully, but still offered me 200 rubles. In Lithuania, six years ago, I had paid 12 litai\* for them.

"Don't worry, they only look small, but they are quite roomy. Try them on," I offered.

She took off her boot. Her foot was wrapped up in a heavy bag-like cloth.

"Well, of course, with this wrapping it won't fit." And I gave her some stockings.

Who could describe the woman's delight, when she saw, that her "big" foot fit and felt comfortable in the elegant riding boots.

"Ask as much as you want, but I am not taking them off. You won't need them until the winter and in the winter you'll need felt boots. Without them, you won't be able to leave the *chata*!

Sell them to me! I'll even give you flour and potatoes. I get a flour ration and I plant my own potatoes," she begged me fervently as she caressed the boots.

I had to accept. Food was more important than the boots, even though they were the last ones.

*litas, litai* (pl.)- the monetary unit of Independent Lithuania

## 19. I WORK IN THE OFFICE

I had already become quite strong, but I was still not sent off to work; only my husband and my oldest son. Both younger ones were attending school.

At the end of October, the commandant and the chairman came to see us.

"Well, Žukauskiene, it's time for you to go to work. Do you know what Lenin said?" said the chairman, winking at me slyly.

"That man said an awful lot, there is even a great number of books written. I don't know what you are thinking about," I said, looking him bravely in the eyes.

"This is how it is: 'Who doesn't work, doesn't eat,'" emphasized the chairman firmly.

I did not lose my cool. At the Lithuanian Bank, after the "union,"\* we had been "enlightened" by political instructors and communists. There had even been a lecture on the theme: "The Educated Man and Work." The lecturer, among other things, quoted a saying from Lenin: "In order for work to be worthwhile, each one must work according to one's strength and one's profession." I remembered this. The speaker had also indicated the volume of Lenin's writings, as well as the publication date. I was not certain if I could place it exactly, but I asserted courageously:

"And do you know that Lenin, in the fifth edition, the twenty-second volume, page 236 of his writings, says," and I repeated the saying..

"And besides, the saying: 'Who doesn't work, doesn't eat,' doesn't come from Lenin but from Marx.

They glanced at each other and sat there rather put out, while I went on forcefully:

"I am an educated woman, profession - bookkeeper, second - teacher. Give me a job, which would be "worthwhile," or, in language that would be understandable for you, "productive," and I will gladly work.

I saw that they were thunderstruck by my "literacy".

"All right, let's go," and they left.

After a few days, I received a written order to come to the office to work as the bookkeeper's assistant. And a *post scriptum*: "To be carried out without refusal." The salary, 1.25 workdays.

I was very pleased: I would work where it was warm. Although it was getting quite cold and there were snow flurries, but the work in the fields was still not finished. Not all the frosted grain, lost in the grass, had been gathered. The potatoes had not been dug out. People were working from dark till dark, having no days of rest, but they worked because they were forced to, receiving nothing for their work, and so they worked haphazardly.

Our Lithuanian women made for themselves work

overalls from the sheets they had brought with them. The local people, particularly the men, resented it.

"I cannot watch, when they bind sheaves and dig potatoes. They spread out, they stick out their rear ends... Frogs, yeah, frogs! Tfu!" ranted the team-leader.

"But, it's very comfortable to work in. Men are all in pants, and you don't find it disgusting," I joked. "Look, the Lithuanian girls are earning more workdays than your women with their narrow baggy skirts. After all, they can't go to work in silk dresses."

"What can you do. Every one covers himself with whatever he can," agreed the chairman.

Having gathered in the office, the people of the collective farm listened with interest to our conversation.

As I was going to eat lunch, the collective farm worker, Stepanov, caught up with me and said:

"I feel sorry to watch how those women are killing themselves working. What's the use? You think, you will earn something here? On a collective farm, one should not work, only pretend, that you are working. For example, look at your son. He tried beyond his means, and ruptured a hernia. And what did he get for that? the fifth category! Tfu! What good is a high category? A category is not bread! You will quickly ruin your health, but no one will give you bread, there will never be an end to work!"

Such conversations, when the "superiors" were not listening, I heard quite often. They all cursed the collective farm and remembered when they lived free. They had been rich, well-clothed and well-fed. And work progressed differently.

In the office, three of us worked: Tania - "the bookie," I - the assistant, and Natalia - the accountant. It seemed to me that, if it were well-organized, there wouldn't be too much work, but the bookkeeping was very convoluted, a lot of unnecessary writing and accounting. Very carelessly, I said that I did not like "Soviet" bookkeeping because of its unnecessary complexity. This was immediately reported to the commandant. My second *lapis* \* was the following: Our chairman returned from a region, where he took part in an extended Party member and activist conference, and, having come to the office, he recounted who had been criticized, who had been punished, who had been removed. I should have kept quiet, but, taking the opportunity, I stated:

"I am surprised, that two million Party members can hold 200 million citizens in their fist and do with them as they please."

And this also was immediately reported to the commandant. And, in general, every word uttered, especially by us, who had recently been driven here, was known by the commandant. I was at once called to the office of the commandant. There were seated the commandant, the chairman of the collective farm, and, of course,

the informer.

"Well, Žukauskiene, you are engaged in anti-Soviet propaganda? You know what that smells of? You will wind up where Makar does not drive calves!"\*

I was surprised and caught off guard, since I did not know, what the conversation would be about. And that we were constantly criticizing the present order, was a fact, but only we Lithuanians among ourselves. The thought occurred to me, that even among us there were toadies.

The commandant was apparently pleased with the effect his words had on me. But this lasted only a few seconds. I quickly took control of myself and very quietly asked:

"Perhaps you could explain to me when and whom I was agitating. I somehow don't remember."

"Here are the witnesses! When two days ago, the chairman returned from a Party meeting and had the carelessness (an angry look at the chairman), in the presence of 'undesirable elements,' (understandably, in front of me) to relate what had been discussed, you stated, that two million bolsheviks are holding tightly in their fist 200 million free citizens. Well, what do you say? Was it so?"

Zhukov, the informer, was smiling pleased with himself, while the chairman, having glanced at me and at Zhukov, lowered his eyes. He was clearly displeased. I hesitated again a moment with my answer so that I would not make another mistake. After a while, I smiled calmly and said:

"Oh! That's what it's all about! Yes, I remember. But you expressed yourself somewhat inexactly, or, perhaps someone else did not understand my statement the way it was meant, and transmitted it to you incorrectly. Yes! I said that I was surprised at the ability of the *bolsheviks* (that is, their energy and intelligence), that such a relatively small number of them is capable of ruling such a large country with 200 million citizens. Here are two people, who can attest to that. Is this agitation against the government? In my opinion, it is praise."

I was waiting to see what Zhukov would say. He seemed about to say something, but refrained, while the chairman was clearly pleased. The commandant only said:

"Oh, you are intelligent! You may go."

In working at the office, I had the opportunity to get closer to my "superiors," that is, the chairman and his seventeen-year old daughter, Tania, my immediate superior. There was another girl working there - the accountant. We would work from dawn sometimes until midnight, with breaks for lunch and supper.

During the day, I still managed to collect the "documents" amassed from the beginning of the year, - disorganized, messy little slips of paper, written on small scraps of old book pages, I organized them and entered them in the books according to columns. Talna was click-

ing away on the abacus. Talia was counting the workdays.

"Tania, look," I addressed my superior, "here are the slips from the warehouseman for bread, issued to the cook of the kulstan: 16 kg + 19 kg + 32 kg + 11 kg = 78 kg, and in her account, 82 kg have been used up. It appears that more has been issued than was received." Tania jumped:

"Narushka steals. Write down that she wasted 14 kg. Let her pay."

"No, we can't do that. She only used 4 kg too much, not 14 kg. Besides, we have to check with the warehouseman, perhaps a slip was misplaced somewhere," I said.

"We don't have to check anything. Write down 10 kg on the slips of the warehouseman, and that's all!" Tania ordered me, and added to Talia:

"Narushka is disgusting. She bad-mouths me and in addition to that, she's making passes at Petya.\* I'll get her! She'll go to jail for waste." And Petya was Tania's boyfriend

Once it was quite dark, teenage boys would come to the office. They were of the same age as Tania and Talia. They would start flirting. Tania would energetically click away on her abacus in order to show her skills and superiority. At the same time, she would sing as loud as she could verses from modern, popular songs of the day, which were similar to Lithuanian jingles. Talia would not be left behind. The teenage boys would strum the *balalaika*,\* would talk to the girls in ordinary language, would smoke home-grown tobacco, hustling from Tania some small piece of paper to roll a cigarette. Tania would rummage around in the closet, would pull out a few small pages of "documents," as I mentioned, written on old school texts, and "treat" the boys she liked better. It became noisy. They would try to grab the pieces of paper she gave them away from each other, and reproach Tania and so on. This was our "bookkeeping staff," and I had to sit and work. I would return from work exhausted and with a headache.

There was no lack of worries at home either. It was getting more and more difficult with food. My husband, having received the permission from the commandant, was constantly running to neighboring settlements (where there were no deportees), about 12-18 km away, in order to exchange something for food.

As an office worker, I asked and received from the chairman, an order for the issuance of ten liters of skimmed milk. (There was not sufficient skimmed milk to settle accounts with the government.) My husband and my oldest son, "for conscientious work," received a sort of award - the permission to buy two bags, about 100 kg, of half-frozen and somewhat rotten potatoes. We had to pick them up from the kitchen of the pigsty. In "endearing myself" by giving the hog feeder a skirt, she allowed me to pick better, less spoiled potatoes than to take them from

the pile.

The ones that were slightly rotten, I would grate and bake *kugel*\*. On that rare occasion, I would invite to our "May picnic" (that's how we called our reception jokingly) Doctor Šakenienė with her small children. She was getting along very poorly, because, when she was deported, she only took valuable things and essential clothing. She had brought gold bracelets, rings, pins and among other valuables, an expensive gold watch given to her husband as a personal gift by the King of Italy.

Such things had no value here. Had it been heavy fabric, good shoes or warm clothing, then it would have been otherwise, - the local people would have given their last bite just to be able to dress. The doctor would come worn out, pale like a shadow, her children Ritutė and Romukas\* would rejoice. They would warm up, eat some of our "grated delicacy"... And late in the evening, quite often in the moonlight, we would walk them home to their *kolchoz* \* Vostek, 3 km away. Having seen them off, I used to stand for a long time listening to how the inhospitable Siberian snow creaked under their feet. In listening to their steps, I pondered deeply the fate of man, such as even this woman, Šakenienė, whom I had seen off. She was a physician, her husband an engineer, she had been the wife of the Chairman of the last Parliament of Independent Lithuania. They had been honorable, free people. And now, here?

Once we had settled in independently, other Lithuanians also came to our *chata* to look. The wife of the former commandant of Biržai\* and her little daughter, Jūratė, moved in for good. She even contributed to the repairs, just so that she would not have to press together with Russians in one tight-fitting little hut.

At Komarovka, the following Lithuanians had been settled: Vanagas, with two sons, a wife and a grandfather - they were employees; a teacher, Markvėnas, with three children and a wife; a teacher Ignasiūnienė with three children; Nemajūnienė with a nursing infant, who died soon thereafter; Černiauskienė with two children; two childless women - Bronė Lanskoronskienė (her husband was a Colonel) and Genė Snarskienė, whose child was born in Komarovka and died shortly afterwards; the farmers Savickai - three people; two families of Jews - Finkelšteinaĩ with three children, Gerbergai with two children, both manufacturers from Kaunas; four Polish families. From these, two women only with children. Their husbands perished somewhere in the concentration camps.

We placed plank beds along the sides of our *chata* and all seven of us fit freely. "Russians from the old contingent" would come to see us. They wondered:

"Why did you clutter up your *chata* with these bunks. You can sleep on the floor. There will be more light and

more space in the *chata*, secondly, you'll be eaten alive by bedbugs."

"No, we're not used to rolling around on the floor. There's no room to put the bedding anywhere, and this way, there's someplace to sit down. As far as the bedbugs go, we'll protect ourselves so that they won't eat us up."

Where the bedbugs came from, was difficult to say. The dwellings of the old inhabitants were clean. The *chatas* were cleanly white-washed, the floors, even though they were of un-planed boards, were cleanly scrubbed, scratched down with a knife to a bright whiteness. Instead of bedding, they would throw down a piece of felt, and they would cover themselves with whatever they had been wearing during the day, usually a "*kufaika*,"\* a hundred-seamed cotton-wool jacket. Most of the time, they covered only their head.

The older ones slept on the stove, the little ones in rope cribs hung near the ceiling above the doors, and the rest would simply lie on the ground.

In the corner, under the icons, against the walls stood benches and a table. Everything was spotlessly washed, shaved, and, whoever had one, covered the table with a tablecloth. And still, there were bedbugs, here and there.

When the first inhabitants were driven here from the Altai Territory, where they had lived freely and rather prosperously, they brought little with them, but all brought icons. And they, as we, dreamed of returning to their own country. The earlier deportees were officially called "the old contingent," while we were called "the new contingent." We of "the new contingent," people brought from the Baltic countries, wore beautiful, expensive clothing, because, when being deported, each one took what he had that was the best.

The local inhabitants looked at us with envy and astonishment, that we went to work with such fancy, impractical clothing.

"Oh! We also had everything. Of course, we did not wear silk, but clothing of good material, made by ourselves or bought," they would sigh and would tell us how they had lived free in the Altai, how much bread they had, and meat and other good things.

"The land was not measured there. As much as one could cultivate, that's how much was used. And there also our section of land was far away, 15-20 *versts*."\*

"So how could you reach it, since it was so far away? Because just to go there on foot and come back you couldn't make it in one day, and what about working?" we asked.

"Oh! we did not go on foot. We had good horses. The whole village would drive to work in horse-drawn wagons. We would work all week and only come back to the village on Saturdays."

"So there was a *kolchoz* there also?" we asked.



"What *kolchoz*? We all worked there on our own. Of course, we all helped each other, but each one had his own land and work. And grain, we threshed mountains of it!"

"And who guarded your grain when you went back to the farm?"

"Who?" they were surprised. "No one! Since we all went there together and returned together. Who would steal anything, since we all had plenty."

"And where would you put your goods?"

"That's what winter is for. As soon as it snows and the road can be traveled by sleds, and that lasts from November until April, we pile everything onto the sleds and take everything down to the wharf. I myself used to drive a twenty-horse team," recounted our former landlord Bichkov.

"What do you mean, twenty horses? Alone?"

"No, with a worker. A whole caravan moves. We load up about 15-20 sleds. On the first one, you sit yourself, and on the last one, sits a second person. To every other sled, you tie a horse. And so on till the end. The man sitting at the end watches, so that the sleds do not turn over or that the bags do not fall out."

"What if the horse shies and turns off the road?" we asked naively.

"Why should they shy? There is nothing but snow all around. You couldn't push a horse off the road into the snow even by force. We lived well: we transport the grain, butchered meat, wool, honey...we had everything. We go back bringing warm scarves for our old ladies, woolen cloth, machinery, dishes and other necessary items, which the merchants deliver by boat until the frost, and, in the spring, with the same boats, they take away our goods."

And he talked and talked about his former life, about his resources, about how they were destroyed, impoverished, and how they were clinging onto life once again. Who had been killed, who had been brought here to the *taiga*...

"And you see how we live here. From the hundred people who were brought here, there are perhaps six or seven left. And of those, go through the settlement, and you will not find a single man who has not been in jail." And he started counting off the names, who had served, how long.

"In the Altai, we did not see the government. We elect an elder in the village. He is both judge and advisor. He collects the taxes, who owes what, takes it to the government at Bijaka."

The old inhabitants advised us not to save anything, to buy as much food as possible, because, they said, the first ones to die were the ones who cherished their wealth. Having gold, they died of starvation, since gold had no value here.

\**lapsus* - "*lapsus linguae*" (Lat.) a slip of the tongue

Makar - possibly a reference to a character in a short story by Maxim Gorky; the reference here, would be to send someone to the North, towards the Arctic Circle.

\**balalaika* - a three-stringed musical instrument, similar to a guitar

\*Narushka - a diminutive of Natalia

\**kugel* - a baked potato pudding

\*Rituté - diminutive of the girl's name Rita

\*Romukas - diminutive of the boy's name Romas

\*Kolkhoz - a Soviet collective farm

\*Biržai - a town in Northeastern Lithuania

\**kufaika* - a tufted cottonjacket

\**verst* - an obsolete Russian measure of length, about 1 km or .06 mile.

\*Bijaka - a town in the Altai Region, in Central and East Asia

## 20. COLLECTIONS

It was getting quite cold, there were snow flurries in the air. It was becoming more and more difficult to obtain food. Two old men began to go around begging, for the moment, among the Lithuanians. But how could we give charity, when we ourselves were living half starving. And yet, we still shared our last crumbs.

The Germans were pushing unstopably to the East. We all hoped that the war would end soon and that we would return home. The commandant and the militia-man became milder. But we were overrun by collectors of taxes and donations to the army. And these collections were always carried out at night. Why?

"To stun on the spot." To "stun" meant, that the exhausted person, who has worked all day, is awakened from sleep, forced to go to the office and then they demand money and things from him. He is confused, has little resistance and, wanting to get rid of them more quickly and go home and rest, promises more easily to settle the payment in the morning.

The army was retreating, it was nearing Moscow. From the Front came frightening news. Even though not everyone was permitted to subscribe to newspapers or read them, but the news and even "embellished news" would penetrate down into the masses.

Only the commandant had the right to subscribe to a paper, "The Soviet North" and the chairman of the collective farm to "Soviet Siberia." The army needed more and more clothing, shoes and arms, but the government, apparently, had no reserves. And so everything fell on the shoulders of the people. A certain amount of funds was required of regions who would assign the task to districts, and the districts to the settlements. The "government" of the settlements, would impose payments on its inhabitants. And these poor people were themselves hungry and ragged. Because they received nothing for their workdays, and the collective farm was not strong enough to settle its account with the government. The collec-

tive farmers had only individual plots of land consisting of three ares.\* They were only allowed to have one cow and chickens. It was only permitted to gather hay from "unused land" and "at a time free from work." And when was that "time free from work?" People worked day and night, not limiting their hours.

The agents who arrived remained hidden at the commandant's or the chairman's house and at night began "the search." Our family received the first urging to give to the army: one set of warm underwear, one sweater, hard felt-boots, a warm cap with ear flaps and gloves.

We sat there, worried. What would happen? Where would we get these required things? I went to the office alone. They were tougher on the men.

"So, what did you bring?" asked the collector. The commandant and the chairman sat nearby.

"What can we possibly give the army, because we ourselves do not know how to defend ourselves from the Siberian cold. We did not bring any sheep in our pockets. From where could we possibly have such things as hard felt-boots, warm gloves, caps with ear-flaps? After all, we did not live in Siberia and we had never even heard of such things," I tried to protest.

"Here, ask the chairman. He'll issue 2 kg of wool, and you'll pay. You have sweaters, you can give one, underwear as well. Instead of a cap, you can give material, sheets..." he counted our possibilities.

When I returned home, I collected one sweater, two sheets, a towel, warm and plain underwear of my husband's and almost our last 200 rubles for wool.

"Take this, Liudeli,\* to those crocodiles." My husband took up the things and left for the office, while I sat and wiped away my tears...

It seemed that others were more intelligent. "I don't have any and I won't give any." And what can they take. They could not rip off the last piece of clothing from your body. It was forbidden.

The appeal by the government was that the citizens would give everything voluntarily. But, the local administration receives the plan and must carry it out. They must collect as much as is required from that region. But the "volunteers" are naked themselves, so there is a certain coercion used.

We thought that we had gotten rid of our problem: we gave up what was requested and thought that no one would ravage us any more. But, we were greatly mistaken. The Soviet Army was heroically defending Moscow. Winter was approaching. The army had to be more warmly clothed, better fed. Leningrad under siege was also clamoring for help: arms, clothing, food - they were short of everything.

The Germans were advancing toward Stalingrad. Their aviation and their motorized forces were considerably

more sophisticated and they were crushing the Soviet Army with ease. The Soviets needed to reinforce quickly their defense with planes and tanks. Again the agents, again the collections. At this point I was already stronger and was working in the office. Having returned home in the evening, I fed my family as best I could. Hardly had we fallen asleep when we heard a knocking at the door: "Immediately to the office!"

I got dressed and went there. I stepped into the chairman's office. There were sitting the chairman, the commandant and the collector-agent.

"What's your last name?" even though the chairman and the commandant knew my family name and my first name perfectly well.

Very seriously and coldly I gave my last name, first name and father's name. The agent ran his finger over the page. He found only my husband's name and asked:

"Why didn't the 'muzhik'\* come?"

"He's sick," I answered. A hail of words poured out:

"You know that our army is fighting heroically against the Fascists. We all have to help."

"Yes, I know, I agree. But how can we help when we ourselves don't have anything? What we could, we gave," I answered not very belligerently.

"What you gave, I don't know. Now we need money for tanks and planes."

"And what did the Soviets do for 24 years? When we were passing Novosibirsk, I pointed out to the commandant of the echelon the dilapidated houses and I objected, that, after the Revolution, everything was being destroyed, and he answered: 'We work only for defense: we have many enemies.' Why is that, over a period of 24 years, all of the Soviet Republics were not capable of preparing the defense? The war is here. The enemy is moving forward. Where is the defense? Do you think that a handful of Lithuanians will repair your tanks and planes?! I quoted a Russian proverb: 'Winter caught you off guard in a summer dress.'" I poured out my words in one breath.

"Don't talk so much here. The army is defending us from the enemy. We must help in every way we can," said the commandant.

"Thank you! You defended well! "Your "courageous army" abandoned Lithuania to the Germans within three days. I wonder if it will defend Moscow and Leningrad successfully?"

"Enough of this agitation, go and get the money immediately!" stormed the commandant, since no one had ever spoken to them like this.

Yes, the commandant and the chairman knew that the inhabitants had nothing to spare, but the plan had to be carried out. Besides, those demands to support the army constantly came from above.

Everyone was called to the office and, as I already men-

tioned, at night. People would hide, they did not want to listen to any insults or to be threatened with jail, and so on. And they had nothing to give.

There was supposed to be a meeting at the office. The agitator was to make a speech and after that everyone would have to sign a promise, what they have to give to the army. One thing was obligatory to everyone. To dry 10 kg of potatoes from each "yard."

The Lithuanians, of course, did not have any. I decided to defend the cause of the Lithuanians.

"Where could we get so many potatoes that we would produce 10 kg of dried potatoes? We cannot get even two potatoes to throw into the soup for our children, and for this, we would need almost a whole sack. In Lithuania, even 100 kg would be no problem."

It was almost midnight, but there was a poor showing of people. "The superiors" were becoming nervous, the agitator impatient. Then, the chairman ordered a horse to be harnessed to the sleigh and sent a couple of strong men, so that they would force whomever they found into the sleigh and would bring them to the office.

The first person they brought in was an elderly woman, Fiona Arzhenikova. She was blue from the cold. She was wearing a frayed "kufaika" from which was protruding worn, grassy tow-cloth, a skirt worn at the knees and through the holes, one could see her bare skin, on her feet, bast-shoes, and it was difficult to say what was wrapped around her head: it wasn't exactly a cap, but rather a bunch of grassy tow-cloth.

She was shivering from the cold and from fear. Outside it was -43 C.\* Tears were not falling but streaming from her eyes. It was a terrible sight. Probably, a cavewoman would have looked better.

"What can I give? I am naked myself. You know that we get nothing for our workdays. I planted no potatoes. No one lent me spuds nor a spade to dig up the soil." Sobbing, she voiced her troubles of which everyone was aware anyway.

"You lazy creature, you scum! You bourgeois snout! You are sabotaging us! We will settle with you later! Get out!" yelled the commandant.

The woman, stumbling, rolled out into the cold...

"Stepanov!"

Up to the front came a solid-looking, strongly built man of about 60, with a wide, slightly graying beard covering half of his chest, a true Siberian muzhik, wearing a long, fairly good fur coat.

"Well, you will have to give your "shuba."\*

"You know that I only have this one coat. If I give it to you, how will I go to work?"

"You'll take the old lady's "kufaika." She only sits by the stove anyway, she won't be cold."

"You can't be serious! You're comparing me with my old

lady! She's like a stick, skinny, small. How can I fit into her clothes?" protested the man calmly.

"Don't talk so much! Step right up here on the platform." The unwilling man clambered up on the stage. The agitator-collector came up to him.

"Listen, Stepanov! We are speaking to you nicely. You are afraid to stay here at home without your fur, but you don't think about how our defenders are freezing in the snowy trenches," the agitator stated, changing his approach.

Stepanov spread out his hands helplessly:

"Can we, being naked ourselves, dress the army?! Everything we had, we left to the government in Altai." There was an approving rustling in the hall.

"Aha! You are agitating others to sabotage!" shouted the commandant.

"Take off your fur at once!"

"No, I will not take it off myself! If you want to and if you have the right, then rip it off!" and becoming red in the face, he spread out his hands.

"Take it, rip it off!" he stated resolutely. The agent and the chairman looked at the commandant: to undress him or not? The latter, becoming red with fury, shouted:

"Out of here, you bourgeois snout, saboteur!"

Nevertheless, in front of so many people, they could not determine to rip off the fur by force, since it was ordered to collect things from people "voluntarily."

Low murmurs were heard in the hall. They knew that to use force meant nothing. They had experienced that more than once. The administration knew that no one would file a complaint. It was not clear quite why they had not undressed Stepanov.

Here and there people were signing up and bringing things, whoever had something, but it was far from completing the plan. Then, the order was given, that whoever had a dog, had to strangle him and bring the fur to the office.

The following day, two adolescents were assigned to strangle the dogs and strip the coats. The settlement was permeated with the pitiful howling and barking of the dogs being dragged to the gallows, sensing their fate.

It was unnerving, really dreadful.

\**Liudeli* - an endearing diminutive version of the name Liudas

\**muzhik* - low-class village person

\*-43 C = -45,4 Fahrenheit

\**kufaika* - tufted cotton jacket

\**shuba* - fur coat

## Mother's Day Celebration

By Aušra Lelis Clifford



On May 8, 2021, the students of the Edward Gervickas Lithuanian Heritage School in Rochester, NY celebrated Mother's Day. During the previous three weeks, under the guidance of volunteer Giedrė Logminaitė, students worked diligently on their Mother's Day gifts. They sketched, painted, and wrapped beautiful vases, paperweights, and cards. On this special day, the vases were filled with yellow, pink, and white carnations. As our honored guests arrived, they were treated to a glass of champagne.



School principal Aušra Clifford welcomed guests to the annual celebration as students presented their gifts. Aušra also acknowledged volunteer AJ Mitchell for his work during the school year and Corie Jenkins, teacher's aide, who is graduating high school and will be studying at Duquesne University in the fall. Sue Jenkins, Parent Committee Chairperson, thanked Aušra for her work at mokykla and gave her flowers and a gift card on behalf of school families and teachers.



Not only did our mothers get gifts, but they also were treated to student-made kugelis! Teacher Virginija Mockevičius helped the older students with the process. She also made a delicious torte for all to enjoy. Thank you to all the wonderful teachers - Lina Mitchell, Nida Lelis, Skirmantė Juodeikytė Philipponne, Virginija Mockevičius, Birutė Litvinas - and volunteers Regina Juodeikienė and Giedrė Logminaitė for their hard work and commitment to the Gervickas School during this unusual Covid-19 school year.

our community



# our community

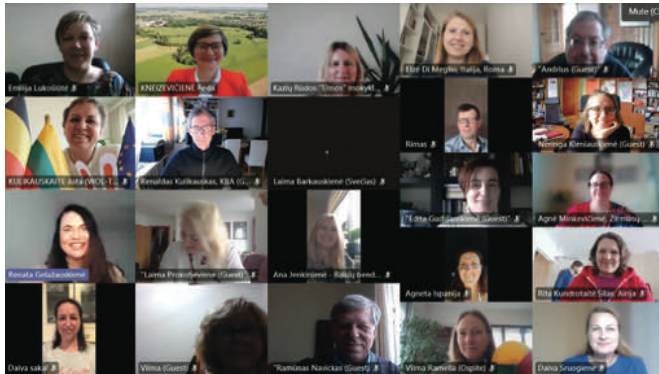
## The Lithuanian American Community News

On April 2, 2021, the LAC President Arvydas Urbonavičius met with Don Bacon, Co-Chair of the US Congress Baltic Caucus from Nebraska, Omaha, where the current LAC President also lives. During the meeting, the current situation in Lithuania and the relations between our country and the USA were discussed. The member of the Congress was interested in the activities of the Lithuanian American Community, the participation of Lithuanian Americans in the political, economic, and cultural life of the country. Don Bacon, a former officer, mentioned the excellent level of preparation of the Lithuanian Armed Forces and welcomed the progress of cooperation between the United States and the Lithuanian Armed Forces.



On Friday, April 9, 2021, Lithuanian communities around the world built cooperation bridges from Taiwan through Europe to the United States. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Lithuanian American Community and Lithuanian communities in Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Italy, Belgium, Spain, France, Germany. Representatives talked about their activities, and future plans were discussed. Many beautiful ideas and suggestions about joint events were expressed (virtual concerts, dance festivals, charity and support campaigns, cooperation between schools).

On April 8, 2021, a remote seminar organized by the Lithuanian American Community took place. Tadas Povilauskas, a well-known economist from SEB Bank in Lithuania, presented an overview of Lithuania's economic development and shared the latest information on the impact of the pandemic on various sectors of our country.

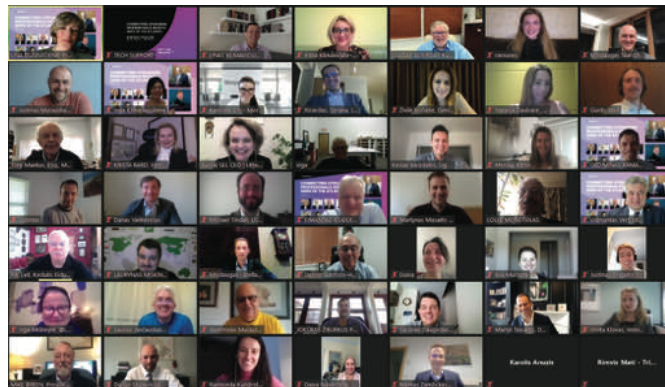


On April 21, 2021, a business forum "Connecting Lithuanian Professionals on Both Sides of the Atlantic" was held remotely. It was organized by the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Washington, DC together with the Baltic American Chamber of Commerce based in New York. The Lithuanian American Community, represented by Inga Klimašauskienė, Vice-Chairwoman of the National Board of Business Affairs, and Krista Butvydas Bard, Chairwoman of the Public Affairs Council, was also involved in the organization of the forum. The main goal of this event was to invite American Lithuanian professionals to get acquainted and exchange experiences and success stories with Lithuanians who are planning to enter the US markets, promote dialogue between the business and government representatives, hear govern-

ment plans, help develop US-Lithuanian businesses more effectively and attract investments from the USA to Lithuania.

The meeting was attended by representatives of various companies, from start-ups and individuals planning to have a business to large companies. At the event, panel discussions were moderated by Eimantas Kiudulas, Head of Klaipėda Free Economic Zone, and Arūnas Šlekys, Vice President of Hughes Network Systems. Representatives of the Lithuanian government also took part, the main guest was the Minister of Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania Aušrinė Armonaitė. There were also separate group discussions, participants had the opportunity to exchange contacts and share their experiences. This event is a preparation for the live North American-Lithuanian forum (more about it here <https://nalbforum.com>), which is planned to be held at the end of this year if the pandemic situation allows.

You can watch the recording of the event online here: [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=757876338206647&ref=watch\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=757876338206647&ref=watch_permalink)



The LAC 70th Anniversary Flag has been signed in the communities of Cincinnati and Connecticut.



On April 25, 2021, Fr. Joseph solemnly consecrated the LAC 70th anniversary flag at St. Peter's Lithuanian Mission Church in South Boston. He congratulated all those present and expressed the hope that in the future, 30 years later, Lithuanians will participate in the Mass, when the LAC flag will be blessed celebrating the LAC 100th anniversary, and the younger generation will maintain and continue the traditions of their parents and ancestors and will nurture Lithuanian heritage and culture and pray in Lithuanian. After the Mass, participants were photographed with the flag.



The Lithuanian Foundation Board with congress guests. Pictured from the left: LAC President Arvydas Urbonavičius, Antanas Razma, Juozas Kapačinskas, Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago Mantvydas Bekešius, Marius Kasniūnas, Saulius Čyvas, Daina Dumbrys, Audronė Pavilčius-Karalius, Dalius Vasys, Milda Davis, Minta Davis, Gintaras Vaišnys, Lina Žlioba, and Taurus Bublys.

# our community

On May 1, 2021, at the World Lithuanian Center in Lemont, the 58th Annual Congress of the Lithuanian Foundation took place. The LAC President Arvydas Urbonavičius participated. In his congratulatory speech, he emphasized that the LAC and the LF have one goal in mind - to preserve the language, culture, and to acquaint young people with these activities.

On May 3, 2021, at the commemoration of the 230th anniversary of the May 3 Constitution of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a solemn flag-raising ceremony of Lithuania and Poland was held in Chicago, Daley Plaza, where the LAC President Arvydas Urbonavičius delivered his congratulatory remarks. He also delivered a greeting at Holy Trinity Church in Chicago.



Participants of the celebrations.



A. Urbonavičius gives a welcome speech to St. At Mass, St. Trinity Church in Chicago.

On September 10-12, 2021, the first session of the LAC XXIII Council will take place in Lemont, Illinois, at the World Lithuanian Center. That weekend, the WLC will also host events dedicated to the LAC 70th anniversary: a festive banquet, an open-air feast, a youth sports festival, a fair of ideas, and the unveiling of a fresco.

## Culture

On April 10, 2021, at the World Lithuanian Center in Lemont, Illinois, the traditional poetry spring "Laumės Juosta" took place. It was also supported by the Lithuanian American Community. Giedrė Knieža, Chairwoman of the Culture Council, participated in the event and thanked the poets.



The "Children's Talent Competition 2021" organized by the Cultural Council has gained momentum! We sincerely thank everyone who participated in the first rounds of the competition and congratulate the finalists! We wish you good rehearsals and good luck in the finals.

## VAIKŲ TALENTŲ KONKURAS antras turas



### SVEIKINAME ANTRO TURO NUGALĖTOJUS

Erikas Sileika	48.5
Greta Grigas	48
Gabija Bickus	46.5
Meja Medingyte	44
Sofija Tunkevicius	43
Gabija Zukauskaitė	42

\*Penkių komisijos narių vertinimai 10-alyje sistemoje



The Lithuanian American Community is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year! On this occasion, we are looking for poets/writers living in the United States to create poems that will become our anthem. The lyrics of the song must reflect the greatness and unity of our nation. Although we are far from Lithuania, we will always remain Lithuanians, united by our language, culture, and the common goal to maintain Lithuanian traditions in the US. The text should be uplifting, positive, and dominated by vowels. Please send your poems to [kultura@javlb.org](mailto:kultura@javlb.org) by May 30th. The premiere of the song with music written especially for it will take place in September of this year during a festive concert.

The musical "I am different" created by three American Lithuanian artists and curated by the Culture Council will be released at the beginning of 2022! We invite everyone who is not indifferent to art to join in supporting the musical: <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/miuziklas-as-kitoks...>

The Cultural Council, the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago, and the World Lithuanian Center will organize an extraordinary St. John's Day party for you. It will take place on June 26 in the beautiful Forge Park in Lemont, Illinois. There will be bonfires, the largest attractions for children and adults in the Midwest, and a festive concert.

The 16th North American Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival will take place on July 1-3, 2022 in Philadelphia. Approximately 10,000 attendees, spectators, and guests from around the world will gather. Concerts, art exhibitions, and banquets are planned for the weekend of the event. The culmination of the celebration will take place on Sunday, July 3. Almost 2,000 dancers will merge into a colorful and dynamic Lithuanian dance. We look forward to seeing everyone in historic Philadelphia!



## Education

On April 16, 2021, a meeting of the LAC Board of Education was held during which the 2020 "Meritorious Educator" and "Amber Apple" awards were awarded. The following teachers took part in the Amber Apple competition:

1. Aurelia Bolšakova, Genys Lithuanian School, CA.
2. Jolanta Koller, Maironis Lithuanian School, IL
3. Ramunė Keagan, Boston Lithuanian School, MA
4. Vanesa Kašelionytė, Genys Lithuanian School, CA.

The winner was Vanesa Kašelionytė, Genys Lithuanian School, CA. She was awarded the \$1,000 prize and the Amber Apple Award.

The title of "Meritorious Educator" and \$1,000 prizes were awarded to the following teachers:

1. Gailė Radvenytė Hayden, St. Casimir Lithuanian School, CA.
2. Dr. Aldona Lingertaitienė, Boston Lithuanian School, MA.

Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to the teachers for their dedication and sincere work in Lithuanian education. The Board of Education sincerely thanks the Lithuanian Foundation - the sponsor of the prizes. We believe that our unity and work will serve the noblest goal - the preservation and nurturing of Lithuanian culture and traditions.



# our community

The drawing competition "The Ring of Lithuanian Unity" organized by the Board of Education to commemorate the LAC 70th anniversary has ended. Congratulations to all participants and winners. The drawings were evaluated by Rolandas Dabukas, an artist and book illustrator, Lina Giusti, an art teacher and ceramicist, and Rita Clemens, a designer and art teacher. The winners of the competition will be awarded letters of thanks and cash prizes. The sponsor of the awards is the Lithuanian Foundation. The works of the winners of the drawing competition can be viewed at <https://svietimotaryba.org/pasindti-2021-metu-piesiniu.../>



The Board of Education also organized an essay competition to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Lithuanian American Community. Congratulations to the participants and winners! They will receive letters of thanks, cash prizes, books with their drawings and essays, and a digital book. We thank the principals and the teachers of Lithuanian schools who organized a competition for the students, families, and community of their schools.

At the end of August of last year, remote Lithuanian language courses for adults organized by the Education Council started. They attracted a lot of interest. Almost a hundred students enrolled in the first lecture. They were grouped into two beginners and one advanced group and successfully completed the first semester. This year the course started on January 9th and will continue until the end of May. Lithuanian is taught by Dr. Daiva Litvinskaitė and Vilma Leonavičienė, Head of Lithuanian Language and Culture Summer Courses at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU). Lithuanian language lessons take place on Saturdays via the Zoom program. They start at 9 and 10 a.m. Central Time and last for an hour. Those who do not connect directly have the opportunity to view lesson records at their convenience. During the lectures, grammar is presented, homework is checked, questions are answered and Lithuanian is spoken. During the week, students do their homework independently and check the answers. Those with more knowledge have the opportunity to study faster, as pre-arranged lessons are available for their convenience on the Education Council's distance learning website <https://svietimotaryba.org/LongDistance/>.

The Board of Education plans to continue teaching the

courses. In the summer, registration for the fall courses will be announced. Beginner and advanced levels will be offered. More detailed information about the courses will be available.



On May 22, 2021, the Board of Education organized an educational training "Let's Grow a Tree of Unity" to commemorate the LAC 70th anniversary. The training was led by Odeta Tumėnaitė-Bražėnienė, a lecturer, one of the country's most famous folk artists, a certified master of traditional crafts, a laureate of the Golden Wreath and the Ministry of Culture awards, an educator and the author of many books of poetry and folk art.



Odeta Tumėnaitė-Bražėnienė



## Youth

The Lithuanian American Community, together with the Lithuanian American Youth Association and thanks to the gracious financial support of the Lithuanian Foundation is proud to present a new project, "Roots". The project will take place August 12-16, 2021 in southern Illinois. All Lithuanian American youth (18-30) is eligible to apply. Please submit applications by May 30th. Participants will spend their time in Ledford, Illinois looking for, maintaining, and identifying Lithuanian cemeteries and graves, while discussing the importance of preserving Lithuanian American history and heritage. This project will help Lithuanian American youth rediscover the roots and history of our community and experience it in a brand new way. Find out more about the project objectives, scope, and program in the questionnaire: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScCXRbd3eYUfln7DiAplChXMsDuHvTzFO-aR26jrw92f23YTA/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScCXRbd3eYUfln7DiAplChXMsDuHvTzFO-aR26jrw92f23YTA/viewform?usp=sf_link)



## Under the summer sky

On the occasion of the LAC 70th anniversary, the Lithuanian American Youth Association, together with the LAC, is organizing an impressive party this summer, during which recordings of past North American Lithuanian dance and song festivals will be shown. These celebrations have been and are a special part of the history of the Lithuanian community in the United States. We invite Lithuanians from the Lemont and Chicago area to gather under the open summer sky on the lawn of the Lithuanian World Center and enjoy the moments of past song and dance festivals. We invite other Lithuanian communities in the United States to join this initiative and hold outdoor parties in their areas at the same time. Several communities have already joined!

The first party will take place on Friday, June 4, at the World Lithuanian Center. The recording of the 2015 North American song festival will be shown. Bring family, friends, don't forget your chairs, blankets, and cash! There will be a bar and the "split the pot" lottery. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1192869981154467/>

Other viewings of song and dance festival recordings will take place on July 30 and August 6. (separate Facebook events for these parties will be created and announced in the future). For other communities wishing to join the initiative, please email [mayachiapetta@comcast.net](mailto:mayachiapetta@comcast.net) (Maja Chiapetta, Vice President of LSU, USA).

An online calendar of events for the entire Lithuanian American Community! We invite you to post about your events: <https://renginiaiav.org/>

The LAC Social Affairs Council provides social services at the World Lithuanian Center (14911 127th St, Lemont, IL 60439). Visitors are welcomed on Tuesdays and Thursdays, pre-registration is required. Call at 630-257-8788, leave a message with information. More information is available by email [soc.paslaugos@javlb.org](mailto:soc.paslaugos@javlb.org)



# current events

## Security

...More than 100,000 Russian troops backed by heavy armor, airpower, and naval forces in the Black Sea massed in Crimea and along the border with Ukraine as part of military exercises, which pulled back under orders of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Ukraine has American-made Javelin anti-tank missiles to face modern Russian battle tanks and has requested a battery of Patriot missiles be redeployed from Poland to Ukraine.

...The U.S. State Department has expressed deep concern over Russian plans to block foreign naval ships for six months from parts of the Black Sea near Crimea and zones near the Kerch Strait, which affects access to Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov. Russia has closed the Kerch Strait to non-Russian ships until October 31, 2021. A planned transit of the Black Sea by U.S. destroyers, the USS Donald Cook and the USS Roosevelt, was scrapped by Pentagon officials to avoid needlessly escalating the situation.

...According to the Baltic News Service, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis will propose to NATO allies that a Membership Application Plan be presented to Ukraine and that when implemented, Ukraine would become a member of NATO. According to Landsbergis, that would be "a strong signal to Russia that Ukraine's chosen transatlantic direction is appreciated and resonates among NATO states". Article 5 of the NATO treaty is that an attack against one member is equivalent to an attack against all. When the U.S. was attacked on 9/11, our NATO allies joined us in responding to Afghanistan where over 1000 NATO troops have lost their lives over the past 20 years.

...The Russian Navy-guided missile cruiser, Moskva, test-fired a P-1000 supersonic anti-ship cruise missile in the Black Sea. It landed about 19 miles downrange. The Moscow Times calls the Moskva an "aircraft carrier killer". It and other warships and military helicopters were involved in live-fire naval combat exercises.

...The U.S. Coast Guard cutter, Hamilton, moved into the Black Sea as part of the six-week Defender Europe 2021 exercises that will involve 26 nations and 28,000 troops led by the U.S. Army. The NATO Black Sea partners, Bulgaria and Romania, have shown enthusiasm for NATO by spending more than 3% of GDP on defense, much higher than the recommended 2%. The U.S. European Deterrence Initiative has spent \$20 billion over the past six years on roads, ports, and military infrastructure in

response to the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014.

...Because Lithuania showed solidarity with the Czech Republic's assertion that Russian intelligence was behind a deadly 2014 blast at an ammunition depot, two Lithuanian diplomats were given one week to leave Russia. The Czech Republic expelled 18 Russian diplomats and in turn, Russia expelled three Slovak, one Latvian, one Estonian, and two Lithuanians. The two bombing suspects, "Rusian Boshirov" and "Alexander Petrov" are the same individuals charged by Britain in the attempted murder of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury in 2018. In 2019 The New York Times identified them as being part of Russia's special military intelligence GRU Unit 29155. In turn, the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry declared two employees of the Russian Embassy to Lithuania "personae non gratae" because they had carried out activities incompatible with their diplomatic status and were given seven days to depart Lithuania. The Lithuanian Embassy in Russia expressed readiness to help the Embassy of the Czech Republic to Russia perform the functions that could be disrupted by Moscow's order reducing the Czech Republic's staff.

...Portugal will send 146 soldiers on a NATO mission to Lithuania during June-August, 2021. It participated in 2018 and 2019 exercises but skipped 2020. The Portuguese troops will include marines and divers-sappers who will focus on amphibious operations and combat shooting and close combat in beaches and dune systems.



## COVID-19

...The ban on non-essential travel between municipalities has been lifted. Stricter quarantine rules will affect citizens from the following seven countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Kosovo, Jordan, Lebanon, Montenegro, and Seychelles.

...Lithuania has started vaccinating military personnel against COVID-19 using the AstraZeneca vaccine. All personnel who were leaving for missions have been vaccinated and now military medics will be receiving weekly allotments for nine major units in Alytus, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Marijampole, Panevėžys, Rukla, Šiauliai, Tauragė, and Vilnius. The European Union recently opened legal action against AstraZeneca for shortfalls in its vaccine delivery.

...Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė had a virtual meeting with the European Commissioner for Internal Market Thierry Breton to discuss Lithuania's world-class biotechnology industry and Lithuania's prospects for producing COVID-19 vaccines. The Prime Minister invited the Commissioner to visit Lithuania in the near future.

...Lithuania plans to add 500 million euros to the approved state budget to continue the fight against COVID-19. The total allocated will be 1,600 million euros. This added spending will increase the budget deficit from 7 to 8.1%. If the Seimas adopts amendments on a temporary reduction of the Value-Added-Tax (VAT), the deficit will increase to 8.3%.

...Worldometers registered 242,926 cases of COVID-19 in Lithuania (at a rate of about 500 per day) with 3,877 deaths.

### Business

...KPMG, a network of firms in 147 countries with 227,000 employees, will expand its Lithuanian force of 190 by adding 10 to 20 IT professionals in 2021 plus IT support specialists, computer infrastructure engineers, cybersecurity, data analysts, and experienced team leaders. KPMG in Lithuania and Latvia have recently become part of KPMG Sweden, and the resulting IT competence center will be established in Vilnius due to its skilled and multilingual IT talent pool. The center will provide back-office IT services, cybersecurity, and data analytics for operations in Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania, and other Nordic countries.

...Under the auspices of The Lithuanian Ministry of the Environment, the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant (INPP) and the Lithuanian Geological Survey (LGS) will develop a deep burial site for radioactive waste in 2021-2030. The LGS will prepare the main geological eligibility criteria for the repository, supervise the investigations, analyze the research data and provide consultation to INPP. During INPP's operation, it accumulated 14,000 cubic meters of processed radioactive bituminous waste. The INPP com-

prised two water-cooled graphite-moderated channel-type RBMK-1500 reactors. Unit 1 came online in 1983 and Unit 2 in 1987. Following the Chernobyl accident, both units were de-rated to 1360 megawatt, electrical (MWe). Since the units lacked containment, the European Union deemed them unsafe and required their closure. Unit 1 was closed in 2004. Unit 2 was closed in 2009, which accounted for 25% of Lithuania's electricity generating capacity and supplied about 79% of Lithuania's electrical demand. Consequently, Lithuania has very high electricity rates and subject to spikes in price.



...The video game developer and publisher, Wargaming, headquartered in Cyprus, will open its 18th hub in Vilnius and add to its 5,500 employees. It will join other gaming companies in Lithuania, including Unity, Nordcurrent, and Game Insight. Founded in 1998, it supports games "World of Tanks Blitz" and "World of Warships" and has 200 million players and hubs in Minsk, Belarus, and Moscow.

...A Silicon Valley accelerator program, Y Combinator, has selected a Lithuanian data science startup, Turing College, for W21 funding of \$125,000. So far, Turing College has received \$1.2 million, including pre-seed money by Startup Wiseguys. W21 Y Combinator has 350 startups from 41 countries; Turing College is the first Lithuanian company to be selected. Alumni include Airbnb and Scale AI, as well as digital pharmacy Truepill and at-home workout service, Pivot. Turing College is a data science and artificial intelligence education technology platform that enables students to learn at their own pace on a peer-driven remote learning platform. The Vilnius-based company works with companies (Hiring Partners) such as Biomapas in Kaunas to guide students to learn the necessary skills to get hired. Tuition can be paid via an Income Share Agreement wherein learners can defer payment until they are at work and earning a predefined amount.

# current events

## General

...Lithuanian ultrarunner Aleksandr Sorokin broke the world records in 100-mile (11:19:18) and 12-hour run (104.88 miles) at the 400-meter all-weather outdoor Centurion Running Track in Ashford, Kent, England. He broke American Zach Bitter's records of 2019 set in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at an indoor ice skating track with the air temperature set at 55 F. Aleksandr (called Sania by friends) works as a croupier in a casino. He finished his training on a treadmill due to being quarantined in the U.K. prior to the race.

...In 1994 Polish President Lech Walesa and Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas signed a treaty of friendly relations and good neighborly cooperation. A Member of Parliament, Rita Tamašunienė of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Christian Families Alliance, is concerned that national minorities in Lithuania are still waiting for a law guaranteeing their status and rights for students to take state-level school-leaving exams in their native language. Lithuania has had no law on national minorities since the original wording of the legislation expired in 2010. Currently, school-leavers in Lithuania can only take a school-level Polish language exam. In September 2020, the Polish and Lithuanian education ministers signed a plan for the education of the Polish national minority in Lithuania and the Lithuanian national minority in Poland but the plan will only be implemented by 2022

for the state-level secondary school-leaving exam in Polish as equivalent to other state-level Matura exams while applying to a university in Lithuania.

...For the past 15 years, Mission Siberia has been organizing annual expeditions to tend graves of Lithuanian deportees in Siberia. It has recently announced the end of the effort due to COVID-19 and deteriorating Russian-Lithuanian relations. Recent trips have gone to Kazakhstan when Russia would not grant visas. From June 14, 1941, almost 275,000 people from Lithuania were sent to forced labor camps or deported during Soviet occupation. More than 170 Lithuanian burial sites in Siberia and other former Soviet republics have been visited during 18 missions since its inception in 2006.



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