

bridges



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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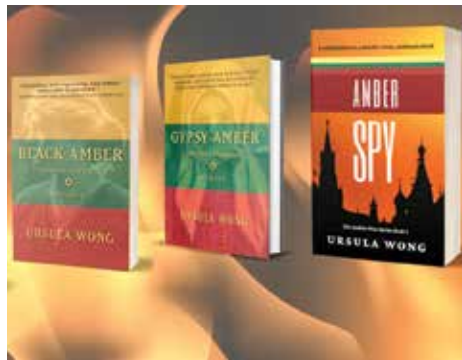
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from the editor

Dear reader,

In your hands, you are holding the September issue of Bridges. Typically, in September we think about the start of the school year



and reminisce about the summer vacations. After the two-year pandemic characterized by all kinds of restrictions, the Lithuanian American Community is back in full swing. The school year has begun, and the communities in various parts of the US are back having all kinds of events, celebrations, and festivals.

However, everything we do now is in the background of the war in Ukraine where courageous Ukrainian heroes are fighting the occupiers. I, like many others, believe that Russia's President Putin would not have stopped with Ukraine. He would have wanted to swallow the Baltic States and, possibly, Poland. That is why we, Lithuanians, have to do all we can to help Ukrainians. Their fight is our fight as well. Just as I am writing this, I hear good news from the front. Ukrainians are advancing in taking back their territory. I am overwhelmed by the sweet feeling of justice restored. Even though I know that nothing is ever black and white, right now, in the background of war, Ukrainians are white and Russians are black. It is also sad to think that this war is so similar to the previous war, the one before it, and all the other wars. Will we ever learn? I hope so.

That is why we have to continue leaving recording the stories of our lives, and our experiences for future generations to read. Who were we, Lithuanians, when we were confronted with war, with injustice? How did we survive the displaced labor camps? How did we survive the hard labor camps? How did we survive the exiles? How do we value and cherish the most important human virtues? In what ways do we value and cherish our culture and our language? Let us keep all that in mind when reading the articles in this issue of Bridges.

I hope you will enjoy and be inspired by the stories from our past and by the activities that we, as a community, engage in presently.

Wishing you a peaceful September,

Karilė Vaitkutė
Editor

Recollections of a Displaced Person Child in Germany, 1944-1949

By Giedrė Kumpikas

I shall begin these memoirs in the vein of the great French writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who began his *Confessions* with a sentence that I will appropriate - "I felt before I thought."

My very first recollections as a child in Lithuania are just vignettes, snippets of life - having received my smallpox vaccine and feeling hot and feverish (although my mother said that I was only about two and a half and could not possibly remember); being placed for a nap in two armchairs pushed together, having them separate and falling with a thud to the floor; playing with my grandmother whom I loved very much; tasting ice cream for the first time when we were in an elegant horse-drawn carriage and stopped by a vendor. That sweet creamy taste still remains with me as I try to recreate it in the ice cream that I buy today, but it is impossible to recreate it, as it is impossible to recreate the past. It remains indelible yet mysteriously gone.

The Russians invaded Lithuania the first time in 1939 and returned its capital, Vilnius, which had been occupied in 1921 by the Poles, to Lithuania. In June of 1940, Lithuania was annexed "unanimously" to the Soviet



Giedrė with Edi Gudaitis, her first boyfriend, Tauragė, 1944

Union. My mother recounted the scenario: My aunt's husband, a former officer in the Tsar's Army, Capt. Liudas Žukauskas, went to vote on whether to join the Soviet Union or not. My mother predicted that it would pass on the first vote. My uncle did not believe her and thought that people would vote against it. Upon returning he described the crowd in the assembly hall as unruly, aggressive, and intimidating. The communist organizer



Giedrė in Neumünster, 1945

went up on stage and announced: "The vote is to annex Lithuania to the Soviet Union. Who is against it?" This was the usual soviet tactic, not who is "for" it, but rather who is "against" it. The normal citizens were looking at each other nervously, fearful of the crowd. No one raised a hand. Then, the next question was: "Who abstains?" Some people raised their hands timidly. Immediately there were shouts from the crowd: "Fascists!" After that, no one objected anymore. It was reported by some that there were men with guns behind the stage curtains in case of a negative vote. And that is how Lithuania "voted unanimously" to join the Soviet Union.

On June 16, 1941, the deportations began. Thousands were taken from their homes, loaded into cattle cars, and shipped off to the cruel and forbidding wastelands of Siberia. My aunt and uncle with their three sons were deported. I have translated my aunt's memoirs, called



Isabel Kumpikas, Giedrė, and Petrauskas Family in Neumünster, c. 1944-45



Farmhouse in Neumünster, 1945

Unexpected Journey, in Lithuanian: *Nelaukta kelionė*. My aunt had read parts of these memoirs to me on my emotional first trip to Lithuania in 1978. At the time, it was still a restrictive communist-controlled country, and I was not able to bring them out with me, but I swore to her that I would publish them someday. Many years later, I obtained the manuscript from her grandson. And I kept my word. The deportations stopped when the Germans occupied Lithuania a few weeks later and forced the Russians out, but my aunt and uncle were already on the train to Siberia. I remember my mother praying all the time that they would survive.

After my father's famous flight in his own open biplane from Prague to Vilnius in 1934, (which I recreated in my film "Wings to Remember" now on YouTube), my father had become well known and had worked to form the Aviation Section of the National Guard. Subsequently, he was appointed to the position of Transportation Director for the Vilnius Region. Even though my father was not a political man, it was a dangerous position under both occupiers. He said that he had to drink heavily with the Russians because if you did not drink, you were not considered trustworthy. At one point, he recalled a conversation he had with a Russian officer. He had asked the Russian, "So, comrade, will you deport me as well?" The Russian answered, "Oh, until then, we will still have the opportunity to drink a lot of vodka." However, he did not say that he would not deport him. My father took note of that.

When the Russians invaded Lithuania the second time in 1944, my father felt that he would not be able to avoid deportation and told my mother to pack what she could and be ready to leave in a few hours. However, leaving was not so simple. Some sort of transportation was needed. Few people had private cars. Gasoline was also a concern. Many left in horse-drawn wagons; some hitched rides on trucks; others simply made their way

on foot to the German border. I remember my mother's heartbreaking farewell to my grandmother who fell on her knees begging my father to take her with us. I did not understand the full impact of that scene, but I felt its emotion. It still brings tears to my eyes. However, the driver who gave our family space in his truck refused to take my grandmother. My mother offered to stay with me and to let my father leave alone, but he refused. He said that either we all go, or we all stay, but he would then join the partisans in the forests to



Four little DP girls, Pfullingen, 1949

fight the Russians because being deported to Siberia was almost a certainty. He said to my mother that he was young and strong and that it would be very hard for him to die. And so, we left.

Our first stop was Birštonas, a town on the Nemunas River. It was a sort of resort. We did not stay there long. But since it was summer and my father was a good swimmer, he frightened my mother by swimming across the swift-flowing Nemunas, at one moment even going underwater. I remember her cry of alarm that my father



Giedrė and father, Mähringen, 1947

had been swept away by the current but he resurfaced on the opposite bank. We left some of our furniture with a lady, who promised to keep it safe. My mother said that it was very beautiful, a small table inlaid with brass designs which had been awarded first place in Paris.

I do not remember precisely how we reached the German border at Gardinas where we were stopped with many others who were fleeing. My father's sister, Jadvyga Trimakienė,



Giedrė with Mrs. Stonkus, 1947

was also there with her two young sons and diplomat husband, Dr. Antanas Trimakas who spoke German fluently, as did my mother. Eventually, the German border police let us pass and I remember that we were riding in a wagon drawn by horses. I heard the driver make a clucking sound to the horses and they would

stop. Imitating him, I made the same sound and the horse stopped. The German was very angry at me, and I thought that he would hit me. In Germany, children had to be obedient.

My next recollection was sitting on a bench in the railroad station in Hamburg. Curtains were fluttering through bombed-out windows. It looked desolate. There was a lot of noise, clanging of train wheels, smoke from the locomotives, great activity, and an atmosphere of fear. Hamburg had just been bombed and people were worried that the departing train would also be bombed. Somehow, we got out of Hamburg by train and went north to Neumünster, near the port city of Kiel.

We stayed a short while in a farmhouse shack. I remember that there was only a small cot for the three of us. I believe that my father slept on the floor. I heard my parents talking that the son of the owner was in the *Hitlerjugend* and that it was dangerous to say anything against Hitler because the boy might report us, and even his parents were careful in what they said to him.

Later, we were given a small room on the ground floor of a house in town, but there was a large black mold area growing on the wall. The German women warned my



At the hospital, Mähringen, 1947

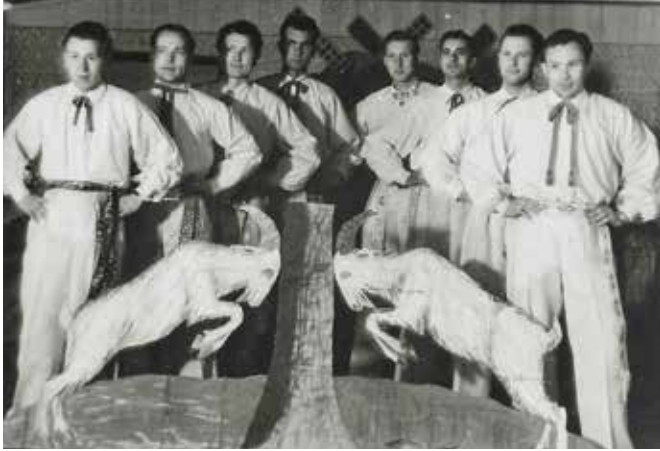
mother that it was *giftig* (poisonous). Without hesitation and without gloves, my mother washed it off, because leaving it would have been more dangerous.

In Neumünster, bombings were frequent, and people would seek shelter either in the basement of a house or by exiting the city. There were only about fifteen minutes between the alarm and a bombing. The first time we were in a basement shelter, children were crying, and I remember thinking that this was not a good place to be. If the building were bombed, we would all be buried. I am surprised that I thought so then; after all, I was barely four years old. Even up to this day, I react when I hear a noon-day siren.

During subsequent bombings, my father, who had traded some clothing for a bicycle, would put my mother and me on the bicycle and wheel us out of the town. Many people would file out quietly, without panicking or pushing. It was very orderly and organized. I believe that organization and orderliness are inherent traits of the German people. This was attested to by the Roman philosopher Tacitus two thousand years ago in his work *Germania* in which he stated that he had never seen



Julius and Isabel Kumpikas, Mähringen, 1947



Mühldorf DP Camp Folk Dance Group, 1947

such exceptionally disciplined and organized people even though they lived in forests and were considered uncivilized by the Romans. My father lost his watch on the road during one exodus and put an ad in the town paper. A lady responded and asked him the make of the watch. He could not remember, but when he went to see her, the watch was his and she gave it back to him and accepted no reward. During another flight, my parents obtained a baby carriage and put me in it to make our exodus easier, but I was already too heavy and when they let go of the handle I would tumble out on my head. People sometimes would seek shelter in the cemetery, thinking that it would be safe, but the Allies bombed it one day. Some people were killed and quite a few coffins flew into the air.

Food was also a problem. The Germans did not have sufficient food for themselves, but we, *Ausländer* (foreigners), to the resentment of many Germans, were still given food ration cards, allotting 600 grams (1.3 lbs) of meat per family a day. It was enough to sustain us, because my mother did not eat much meat, nor did I. Usually it was ground meat and my mother would make four small hamburgers, Lithuanian style, with bread - two for my father, one each for my mother and me. One day, all that my mother was given at the butcher's, was a pig's ear. It was big, white, and still had hairs sticking out of it. My father ate it; my mother and I could not. The image of that slimy ear has stayed with me to this day. Upon leaving Lithuania, my mother had packed a

side of smoked bacon, some flour, and a tub of lard, which helped us greatly. People reading this today will think that these items are unpalatable; but to hungry people, they were luxury items.

There was no fruit. Being worried about the lack of Vitamin C for me, my mother traded one of her summer coats for a carton of apples, and every day, she would send me into the other room, away from the makeshift kitchen and I would have to call for a little apple to come to me, and a little apple would appear. Then only a small half apple would appear until they were all gone.



Mühldorf DP Camp Folk Dance Group, 1947



Schönfeld DP Camp, First Communion Class, 1948



Mrs. Kumpikas, Petras Ulėnas, Birutė Ulėnaite, Giedrė, Rasa Prižgintaitė, and Danutė Strimavičiūtė, 1948

My father, being a good mechanic, was employed in a garage. It was winter and from the cold and dampness working in an unheated area and standing on a cement floor, he developed an ear infection. It became suppurated. At the hospital, he was told that they would have to operate, cut through the bone, and that he would have to be hospitalized for at least six weeks. How would we survive without him? My mother wrote to a Lithuanian doctor friend who had escaped to England, and he sent her some very strong medication (I believe the name was Cardiazol, but perhaps I am mistaken) and told him to take double doses for one week. My father was strong and tolerated the dosage, and the infection cleared up. I must mention something very important: throughout the bombings and lack of many

foodstuffs, the German infrastructure never ceased to function - the postal service delivered mail, the newspapers were being published, hair salons serviced their customers. There were public bathhouses. We were given disinfectants and could take baths. People tried to go about their lives as normally as possible. Children went to school; their clothes had patches upon patches, but they were clean.

While still in Neumunster, I experienced my first adult injustice. My father gave me a small toy plane. It



Dr. Antanas Trimakas, Liechtenstein Castle, c. 1948

was light-colored and very pretty. I was outside playing with it when an older German came up to me and took it out of my hands and said, "*Willst du es fliegen sehen?*" ("Do you want to see it fly?") He threw it up in the air, the little plane landed on the ground and a wing broke off. He laughed and went away. I cried holding my little damaged plane and wondered why he had done that. It is interesting that children remember such hurtful actions. I was only four.

Our stay in Neumunster lasted until the end of the war in May 1945. We had survived numerous bombings, while many people had not. There were a few cases when people hiding in the fields could not stand the sound of the bombs above their heads and would start to panic and run. One woman was seen running and the plane dropped a bomb near her, killing her. Many were wounded by shrapnel and had to undergo multiple operations. My mother's nerves were so badly affected by the bombings that for the rest of her life, dur-



VIP gathering in Tübingen, c. 1945

ing a thunderstorm, she would sit in a corner of the couch with her Rosary and pray. I suppose today, it would be called post-traumatic stress disorder. But in those days, it was just considered nerves.

All in all, my family spent five years in Germany – first in Neumünster, then Tübingen, subsequently



Dr. Domas Jasaitis with his wife and son; Dr. Antanas Trimakas, Representative of BALF, Tübingen, c. 1948

Mähringen, and finally Reutlingen. We never lived in a Displaced Person Camp, although I would have liked to because there were so many children there. However, I would take the tram to the DP Camp in Pfulingen from Tübingen and meet my little girlfriends. Birutė Ulėnaitė and I were best friends and went to Third Grade at the DP Camp elementary school. We did not like the math teacher. I remember he had big hands with small tufts of red hair on them. As he walked up and down the aisle and looked at our copybooks where we were solving arithmetic problems, a big hairy finger would descend onto my page and point to a mistake. I was petrified of that hand and that finger. One day, Birutė and I somehow stayed behind in the classroom after everyone had rushed out at the end of school. We



Lithuanian V.I.P.s in Germany, c. 1948



V. Jakubauskas, Stelė Jakubauskas, and Al. Lieponis, Tübingen, 1948

saw the key to the door still in the lock, so, we decided to lock the school door from the inside and jumped out the small bathroom window. The next day, the teacher could not open the door and he blamed an older boy, Vigis, who had the reputation of being somewhat of a rascal. I remember his mother shouting angrily out of the third-floor window that everyone was always blaming her son. Birutė and I were as quiet as two little mice under a broom. The door was finally unlocked and we, unfortunately, had to go to class.

I loved living in Mähringen. I played in the fields with the German children; spoke fluent *schwäbisch*. We used to go glean the remnants of the stalks in the fields after the men with scythes had gone; we used to ride on top of wagons piled high with hay. Oh, the invigorating smell of fresh hay! Once, my little friends dared me to poke a hole in a wasp nest in the field, which I did and ran like the dickens but was not stung. While still in that town, on Christmas Eve, Santa Claus came to visit us. Like most children, I was looking forward to receiving gifts, but instead, this Santa Claus, not round and jolly, but tall and thin was mean. He scolded me and

asked if I had been a good girl. He even shook a stick at me. I was terrified and I recognized one of the village men. I then realized that there was no Santa Claus.

As a small aside, I must mention that I had my first “date” while in Reutlingen. Our German neighbor’s son, a boy of eight, liked me and asked me to go with him to see a children’s play. It was not far, and my mother allowed me to go. But those were different times.

Some of these memories may seem silly, but there



Jonas Valaitis, Reutlingen, 1949

were other more serious things going on, serious cheating, even stealing. The Red Cross was sending medication to the Lithuanian DPs but frequently the medication destined for tubercular patients would be unavailable. Rumor had it that the people in charge were selling it on the Black Market. Since my father was working as a driver for the Red Cross, he would hear stories. Being a fighter for the right, he even went to a meeting, and according to my mother, questioned the disappearance and unavailability of the medicine. The same happened with dollars. When the dollar exchange was high, they were available; when the rate was low, they were not.

And so, some people came to the United States already well prepared for their new life; most, however, were not, but rather depended on their sponsors, who, in many cases, did not supply support, but had only signed the official visa documents.

Before continuing with more details about our life in the United States, let me go back to our time in Germany. During those five years in the DP camps, the Lithuanians organized folk dance groups, concerts, choir, and song festivals. They traveled from DP camp to DP camp and socialized. There were art exhibitions. Many young people enrolled in universities. Interestingly, medical doctors were allowed to practice in German and Austrian hospitals. People received CARE packages from the United States with good used clothing. Because of

his Red Cross employment, my father had access to the clothing depot and invited my cousin, who was a young, pretty girl to come and pick out some clothes. She did, but on the way back to her camp in Scheinfeld, her suitcase was stolen on the train. She shed many tears.

Schools were established to teach foreign languages to the refugees for their future emigration. There were classes in English, French, and Spanish. My mother was hired by the French government to teach French to people who were thinking of staying in Europe, specifically in France, because we were in the French Occupation Zone. She had about five students. Many people enrolled in English classes, but the teacher was demanding and wanted his students to learn 20-30 words for each class. It was not difficult for my mother because she had a good memory and was a French teacher. Besides that, she spoke fluent Russian and German, understood Polish, and had studied Latin. However, for the non-linguistically inclined, it was too difficult, and many dropped out so that the English classes were canceled. My mother was very critical of these people, most of whom were



Julius Kumpikas (center) and Maj. Adv. Vincas Sruoginis (right)



Mr. Bagdavičius and Isabel Kumpikas, Pfullingen DP Camp, 1949



Camp Grohn



Camp Grohn barracks

waiting for visas to the United States, because they were not preparing themselves seriously for their new life.

The V.I.P.s were former diplomats, like my uncle Dr. Antanas Trimakas, Vaclovas Sidzikauskas, Dr. Domas Jasaitis, Dr. Karvelis, and Kęstutis Valiūnas who married the very young Jasaitytė and later joined forces with Juozas Kazickas to form Neris International, an import-export company in New York. With others, they were all part of VLIK's (the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania). They held meetings, discussed the political status. There is much information about those years and people in various sources, but I am limiting myself to what I personally recall or heard from my parents. One incident which I recall very well is when my father sold his DKW, our small truck. A young unknown woman refugee came to our apartment in Reutlingen and asked my mother to give her some money because she had heard that my father had sold his car. My mother answered that she had no money, that it was her husband's. When she asked the reason for the money request, the young woman answered that she wanted the money to buy some French cosmetics from Paris. Of course, my mother

refused and was shocked by the brazen request.

The first country that offered us visas was Colombia in South America. My father was eager to accept. We received visas with the names Don Julio, Dona Isabela, and Dona Maria, using my middle name because no one could pronounce Giedrė. However, my mother, who had a weakened heart since my birth, was afraid of going to Colombia because of the high altitude. So, we declined.

Next, came the visa offer from Australia. Once again, my father obtained a visa for us, but once again, my mother dissuaded him, having heard that the crossing was arduous and the weather extremely hot. And so, my parents waited. There was even an unheard-of event in the Lithuanian community - during the crossing to Australia, a man who was disliked by many for being a demanding official, was beaten on the boat.

When we finally received our affidavit of support from a lady in Chicago, and a visa from my aunt and uncle, (although I do not really know how it worked officially), my father was very happy. My mother wanted to stay in France, because she had French background from her mother's side, and she spoke French. She also felt that being European, it would be easier culturally to stay in Europe, perhaps not Germany,



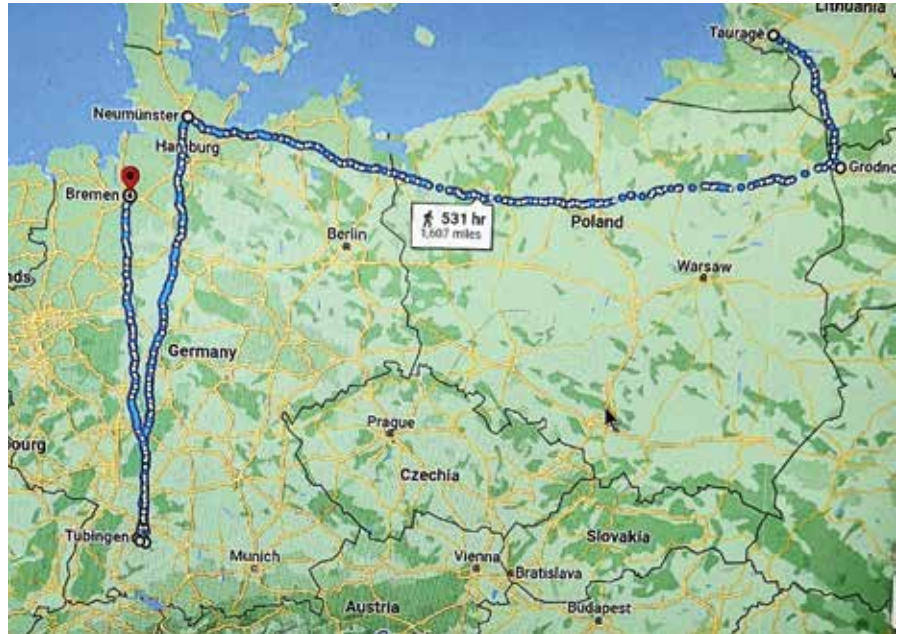
USNS General S. D. Sturgis

because soldiers were returning from the war and there might be difficulties with employment. My father had a very warm and friendly personality, and while we were living in a small town, actually a village - Mähringen - our landlords tried to dissuade him from emigrating saying that he would only be a *Fabrikmann* - a factory worker. They said that they would give him some land in the community and help him build a house. However, my father was undeterred. His sister and family had already left two years before and he believed in a bright and limitless future here.

Of course, it was exciting - going to America! I had

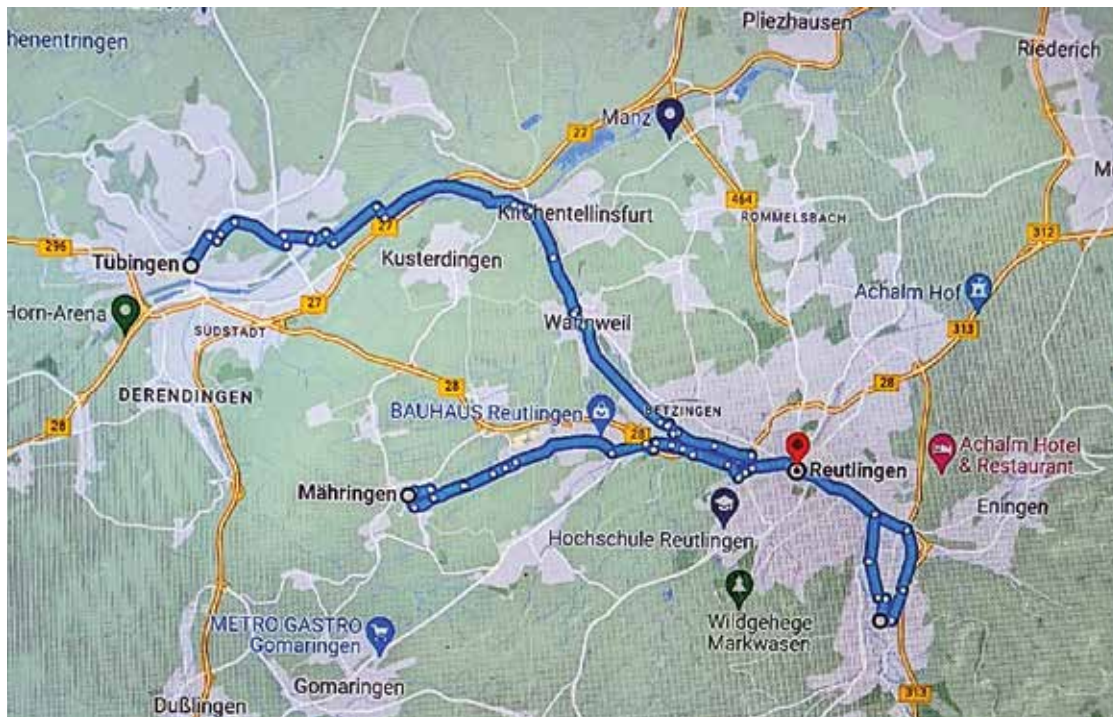
been fascinated by a picture I had seen of children in America pledging allegiance to the flag in a classroom. Little did I know then that I would spend decades teaching America's young people. We went by train to Camp Grohn in Bremerhaven, the departure port for the United States. We were housed in barracks and spent several days being processed and checked medically. My mother had given me a child's wristwatch and one morning, while we were washing our hands and face in a common bathroom, I took off my watch and put it on a shelf but did not notice that a woman next to me had put a towel over it - and my little watch was gone. That was my first experience with theft.

We boarded one of the Liberty Ships sent by the United States, *General S. D. Sturgis* (which sounded like a Lithuanian name), on June 30, 1949. I do not remember how many people were on board but we slept in three-tier bunks and had rough army blankets with which to cover ourselves. I had three friends, the



Kumpikas family journey from Tauragė to Grohn, Bremen after World War Two as seen on the modern-day map

Gaižutis brothers, who laughed at me and said that I would be seasick. I was very happy when all three wound up in the sick bay, and I was never sick, even though we ran into some choppy seas in the aftermath of a storm. We passed the White Cliffs of Dover; we saw a whale spouting on the water. The young people performed folk songs for the captain and the crew. My father was chosen to be in the Military Police and wore an MP armband. We were very orderly people, and there was really no need. We received three meals



Places in which Kumpikas family lived in Germany after World War Two before emigrating to the US

a day but most people could not eat anything because they were seasick. It was my first taste of scrambled eggs and soft white American bread. It was quite a novel taste because bread in Germany was solid rye or Pumpernickel. I was looking forward with anticipation to seeing the Statue of Liberty, but instead, to my dismay, our ship docked in Boston.

Amber War Series Books by Ursula Wong

Since 2016, Ursula Wong (maiden name Sinkewicz) has been writing novels about Lithuania. Her Amber War series of historical thrillers capture Lithuania and her relationship with Russia since the Soviet occupation in WWII. In her latest book, *Amber Spy*, Ms. Wong's tall, fair-haired hero, Lithuanian-American Vit Partenkas, has to choose between saving a Russian whistle-blower or his friend, a basketball coach from Lithuania who is the target of an espionage ring.



From the *Amber Spy* book jacket: "Investigative reporter Vit Partenkas receives a tip that could mean the end of the current president of Russia, a woman who rules with an iron fist. Destroying her would save his home in Eastern Europe from possible invasion and give Vit the acclaim he has always wanted. But at what cost?"

Bridges: Ursula, what made you create a female leader of Russia?

Ursula Wong: First, I'd like to point out a woman, Dalia Grybauskaitė, served as president of Lithuania from 2009 to 2019. I don't write about her specifically, but I refer to a female leader of Lithuania in my books.

There have been many powerful women in Russia including Catherine the Great, Valentina Ivanova Matvienko, a former governor of St. Petersburg, and Elvira Nabiullina who currently heads the Central Bank of Russia. With that legacy, I believe a woman could eventually become president of Russia.

Bridges: You have 6 books that feature Lithuania, but the stories are so different. How do you decide what to write?

Ursula Wong: My uncle was in the armed forces in Europe during WWII where he met many Lithuanians. He kept in touch with some of them, and after he died, I found among his papers a collection of manuscripts that told the story of the occupations in Lithuania, all written in English. I believe he was translating the material.

The stories were incredible and I wanted to learn more, so I did some research. The process was difficult because I had to rely on English language resources. In many, Lithuania was little more than a footnote. But with the help of memoirs like *Leave your Tears in Moscow* by Barbara Armonas, some interviews, and a lot of reading, I learned a great deal about Lithuania.

It occurred to me that there were Lithuanian-Americans like myself who couldn't read Lithuanian, and didn't know much beyond the family stories. I decided to write books for the generations of Lithuanians who could benefit from the painstaking research I had done. I wrote about everything I had learned. To make the read enjoyable and interesting, I used made-up storylines, and fictional Lithuanian heroes and heroines who lived through the history.

Bridges: Tell us about your books.

Ursula Wong: The series starts with *Amber Wolf*, the heart-wrenching story of the partisans who fought the Red Army occupying Lithuania during WWII. A young woman, Ludmelia Kudirka, must decide whether to hide from the Soviets, become a communist and cooperate with them, or join the Brothers of the Forest and fight the invaders.

Amber War, the second book, shows the violent steps the Soviet Union took to quell the resistance that continued after WWII ended, including sending spies into the partisan camps.

The rest of the series is set in modern times when Lithuania is free. In the third book, *Amber Widow*, the actual theft of nuclear waste from the Ignalina power plant in Lithuania prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union becomes the basis for a fictional terrorist plot. I introduce Vit Partenkas and his love interest, Zuza Bartus, an agent with the Lithuanian Police Anti-Terrorist Operations Unit, ARAS. The pair have many exciting adventures together.

Black Amber, the fourth book published in 2020, showcases Lithuanian (and world) reaction to Nord Stream, the Baltic subsea pipelines bringing vast quantities of natural gas from Russia directly into Germany. In the novel, governments are concerned that Russia might use energy as a weapon; something Putin did in his 2022 invasion of Ukraine. I include pipeline cyber terrorism or hacking inspired by the actual power grid outage in Ukraine in 2015.

In *Gypsy Amber*, the fifth book, Russia unleashes a devious plot to stop China's alarming (and real) expansion into Central Asia, and regain land lost after the breakup of the USSR. At its core, this is a story about Russian territorial aggression, a real concern for Lithuania given recent events in Ukraine. Vit gets involved

when he investigates the death of his friend Max in a mysterious jetliner crash in Uzbekistan modeled after the attack on Malaysian flight 17 by a Russian-made missile in 2014.

Amber Spy, the latest book, combines the worlds of Russian espionage and Lithuanian basketball. I talk about the history of basketball in Lithuania, and the talented team who in 1992, wanted to attend the Barcelona Olympics but couldn't. The newly formed Republic of Lithuania couldn't afford to send them. The Grateful Dead rock group heard of the plight and funded the trip. In Barcelona, the Lithuanians played against the Unified Team made up of states from the former Soviet bloc, winning a bronze medal in a nail-biter that symbolized Lithuania's fight for freedom.

Bridges: I think it's great you are writing about Lithuania for the English-speaking community, but you have a Chinese name. Are you Lithuanian?

Ursula Wong: I'm a second-generation Lithuanian-American who married a Chinese-American man.

All of my grandparents left Lithuania for the US before WWI. My father's parents settled on a dairy farm in central Massachusetts. My mother's parents bought a house in a nearby mill town. My father unfortunately passed away when I was very young. My mother continued to work the farm where my brothers and I did chores every day after school. Later, I worked my way through college, and attended graduate school, where I studied applied mathematics. I entered the computer industry and had a long and wonderful career. I met my husband Steve at a tech company. We have one daughter, Stephanie, who lives in California. After Steve and I retired, I took courses on creative writing, and soon began work on my first novel.

Bridges: Will there be a seventh book about Lithuania?

Ursula Wong: Absolutely. I'm currently doing research for my next book, *Amber Exile*. It's inspired by my uncle's time in Europe during the war. I plan to incorporate information about the Displaced Persons (DP) camps and the experience getting to the US. I'll include some WWII era espionage loosely based on recently declassified material from the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Somehow, I'll weave in the story of a modern Russian leader who is out of control. Target date for publication is late 2023.

If anyone wants to share their or a family member's experience in Europe during WWII, please contact me through my website at <http://ursulawong.wordpress.com>. I'm always looking for stories and I'd love to hear from you.

Bridges: Where can readers find your books?

Ursula Wong: All of the books are available on barnesandnoble.com, kobo.com, books.apple.com, and amazon.com for Kindle and other electronic devices. Paperback copies are available on amazon.com. Search for Ursula Wong to find them.

In closing, I'd like to thank everyone who encouraged me to keep on writing books about Lithuania. I'm honored that so many people find them entertaining and informative.

I'd also like to thank *Bridges* for their support in presenting this article.

Finally, I'd like to share an excerpt from *Amber Spy*. In this passage, Nick Banis, a Lithuanian-born coach of the fictitious Montana Lynx basketball team, is in Vilnius investigating a damaging story about his father.



Amber Spy

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Immediately after Nick checked into his hotel near the National Cathedral in Vilnius, he went up to his room. The imperial mix of old and new glamour, the silks and dark wallpaper, the spa, and the magnificent restaurant were lost on him. He wasn't in the mood to enjoy any of it.

He called his cousin and explained that he wanted to learn more about his father. The cousin suggested talking to a few older members of the family who were alive during the war. They were in their late eighties, and they'd be happy to talk. Nick said he needed to look at official documents. The cousin wanted to wait until morning. Nick said he had to start as soon as possible. After considerable discussion, they agreed to meet in a few hours in a nearby park.

Nick arrived at the appointed time carrying his laptop and the package of papers he'd received about his father in a shoulder bag. His cousin was waiting for him. Nick had expected to see one or two relatives, but no one else was there. When Nick asked where they were, his cousin told him not to worry. The two men sat on a park bench. The area was open, and the grass neatly trimmed. A row of trees edged a walkway illuminated by streetlamps. Few people were out, because it was the time of day when children were home and almost everyone was thinking about dinner.

Nick's cousin chatted about the family, occasionally glancing over his shoulder. After a few minutes, he jumped to his feet and told Nick to come with him.

They went along the pathway to an old man. He was unshaven, and dressed in a black coat that went down to his knees. Under it, he wore an ill-fitting suit. Nick's cousin spoke in Russian. Nick understood almost everything, even though he was rusty. The man gazed into Nick's face, bringing back memories of the Soviet officials who had roamed the city during the occupation.

"You're a tall one," said the old Russian.

Nick frowned.

The old man said he would show Nick the files he needed, but it would be expensive on such short notice. The price was five hundred US dollars.

Nick pulled his cousin off to the side.

"Why does he want so much money? Aren't archives available to the public for free?" whispered Nick, his gaze on the old Russian.

The cousin shrugged. "He can get what you need. Tonight. He has a partner on the inside who can put together everything about your father. It'll take a lot

longer to find everything yourself. You told me you didn't have a lot of time."

"Can I take the files with me?"

"No, they're just for you to read. You can take pictures with your mobile phone. He can let you have four hours." The cousin leaned in. "No one can know about this. Just us. You'll have to go with him."

"Where?"

His cousin shrugged. "To the files."

Nick shook his head. "How do you know he's legit?"

"People know. They talk. I listen. He's a retired janitor who kept his keys. He can get what you need. Trust me."

"You're coming along, right?"

The cousin glanced at his watch. "I have to go home."

"What if this guy is FSB? What if it's a trap?"

"Don't worry. It's OK."

"How can you be sure?"

The cousin shrugged.

Nick had no choice. He gave his cousin the money. Five hundred dollars for peace of mind seemed like good value. He made a mental note to go to the bank tomorrow. Paying off the Russian had almost cleaned him out.

They went back to the old Russian and Nick's cousin handed over the bills. The man counted them slowly. When he was done, he put the money in the inside pocket of his suit jacket.

"Follow me," said the Russian.

Nick clenched his fists and followed the old man. After leaving the park, they crossed a street and went through an alley. They walked for a few minutes before crossing another street. They stopped behind an old building and went down some steps to a metal door leading into a basement. Nick had no idea where they were, other than in the general area southeast of the park.

The Russian reached into his coat and pulled out a keyring containing dozens of keys. He selected one and unlocked the door. He held it open. Nick took a deep breath and entered a dark hallway.

The Russian followed him inside. The door slammed. They were in absolute darkness. The Russian clicked a switch. Electric bulbs buzzed to life along the ceiling, flooding the area with light. The long hallway held several closed doors. If the old man locked Nick inside any one of the rooms, no one would ever find him.

At the end of the corridor, they entered a windowless room containing a table and four chairs. A single bulb hung down from the ceiling. The room smelled of mold and dust. The Russian took out a handkerchief and wiped off the seat to one of the chairs. He motioned Nick to sit, and left.

Security

In accordance with the latest European Union sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, Lithuania is restricting the flow of certain goods through its territory to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, which fronts the Baltic Sea and is the headquarters of Russia's Baltic Sea Fleet. Current sanctions include iron, steel, and ferrous metals. In July, sanctions will include cement, alcohol, and luxury goods. In August, coal and solid fossil fuels will be added and in December, oil will be sanctioned. Rail passengers, food, or medicines will not be banned. Sanction goods can be delivered to Kaliningrad via air and sea.

Russia's European Pravda reports that the First Deputy Chairman of the Committee of the Federation Council on International Affairs, Vladimir Dzhubarov, said that the blockade of Kaliningrad could lead to armed conflict with Russia.

In an interview, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, former Prime Minister of Denmark and Secretary General of NATO (2009-2014), said that Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine got exactly what he didn't want - an expanded NATO with Finland and Sweden on the verge of becoming members. He went on to say that if Putin succeeds in Ukraine, he won't stop in Ukraine. His next goal would be Moldova, then Georgia, (former members of the Soviet Union but not members of NATO), and finally the Baltic nations. However, that project has now been made much more complicated for him because, after the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the Baltic Sea will

now be a NATO sea. He said that NATO will be better able to defend the three Baltic nations by blocking sea entry and exit to Russia through St. Petersburg.

The Russian hacker group, Killnet, confirmed that it had launched a denial-of-service cyber attack against the Lithuanian state and private institutions in response to Lithuania's implementation of the EU sanctions. The Lithuanian National Cyber Security Center said that secure networks used by Lithuanian state institutions were among those affected. The Center said, "It is very likely that attacks of similar or greater intensity will continue in the coming days, especially in the transportation, energy, and financial sectors".

Yevgeny Fyodorov, a deputy of Russia's State Duma and member of Putin's United Russia Party, submitted a bill saying that the decision by the State Council of the USSR to recognize the independence of the Republic of Lithuania in 1991 was "illegal" because the State Council was not authorized by the USSR Constitution. He further claimed that the Russian Federation is the "legal successor of the USSR." Just before Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Putin claimed that Ukraine was "historically Russian land" and the granting of sovereignty to Soviet republics "truly fatal" and "historic, strategic mistakes." The Lithuanian Presidential press service refrained from commenting on Fyodorov's bill, saying "We will not comment on the absurd." Lithuania held an independence vote on February 9, 1991, with 91% supporting independence.

Ukraine

Only a week after announcing the transfer of 20 M113 armored personnel carriers to Ukraine, the Lithuanian Defense Ministry announced that it would be sending anti-drone and thermal imaging equipment to Ukraine. It said that the military assistance to Ukraine amounts to about 115 million euros and includes Stinger air defense systems, anti-tank weapons, body armor, helmets, 120 mm mortars, small arms, ammunition, drones, and surveillance radars.

Lithuania proposed that Russian Orthodox Church leader Patriarch Kirill be blacklisted in the sixth package of European Union penalties against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. Kirill and Putin have a long-term relationship, and he has supported Russia's invasion. The proposal was dropped to secure Hungary's acceptance of the penalties. Hungary is dependent on Russian energy supplies.



Sweden's Foreign Minister Ann Linde and Finland's Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto attend a news conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, after signing their countries' accession protocols at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels, Belgium July 5, 2022. REUTERS/Yves Herman/File Photo

The proposal to blacklist Kirill may be re-introduced in future sanction tranches.

The Lithuanian Development Agency, Invest Lithuania, has an information site: Coming to Lithuania: a guide for Ukrainians which is updated regularly. Most Ukrainian refugees enter Lithuania via a land route from Poland, and they do not need a visa, travel documents, health insurance, and other standard documents. They may stay for up to 90 days but no action will be taken by the Migration Department if they exceed the deadline.

Lithuania has so far provided more than 500 million euros worth of assistance to Ukraine, including hosting war refugees. Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė met Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal in Lugano, Switzerland at the Ukraine Recovery Conference, and regarding Russian assets frozen under current sanctions, she said “We cannot resurrect the people killed by Russia, but we have a real opportunity to make the aggressors pay reparations.”



Covid-19

Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė tested positive for Covid-19 in mid-June and had to postpone her scheduled visit to the United States. She was fully vaccinated with three doses, the last of which was administered in mid-November.

More than 1 million people in Lithuania have tested positive for Covid-19. About 69.9 % of the population have received one Covid-19 jab.

According to World Meter, there are 20,341 active cases and there have been 9,172 deaths in Lithuania since the start of the pandemic.

Business

To match Taiwan’s new trade office in Vilnius, Lithuania plans to open a reciprocal representative office in Taipei in September. China has curbed the purchase of Lithuanian goods, e.g. beer, dairy, and beef to almost zero. Taiwan has increased its imports of Lithuanian rum. The European Union, on behalf of member Lithuania, has launched a challenge at the World Trade Organization accusing China of discriminatory trade practices against Lithuania that threatens the integrity of the EU’s single market.

The Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania has rejected the Chinese-owned Energetikos Tinklų Institutas (ETI) attempt to overrule Lithuania’s power transmission operator, Litgid’s rejection of ETI’s bid to reconstruct the Lentvaris 110 kV substation on the grounds of national security.

Regarding the collapse of the Snoras Bank in 2011, the ICC International Court of Arbitration has refused to hear a lawsuit filed by Russia’s Fund for Protection of Investors’ Rights in the Foreign States against Lithuania for more than 1 billion euros in damages for Russian citizen Vladimir Antonov. Lithuanian prosecutors collected evidence of large-scale embezzlement of Snoras assets by Antonov and Raimondas Baranauskas, former executives and shareholders. In 2015 British courts decided to extradite them from London to Lithuania but they fled to Russia and were granted asylum. On June 13, the US Supreme Court rejected the Russia Fund’s request to order the former interim administrator, Simon Freakley, to provide data on the bank’s interim administration in 2011 and other circumstances, and also to question him.

Lithuania’s Vinted, Europe’s largest customer-to-customer platform for second-hand clothes, expanded to Portugal and Canada while increasing its investment in Italy, Poland, Spain, and the UK. Its revenue increased



current events

63% to 245 million euros but its loss increased to 105 million euros from 21 million euros due to its expansion.

BMI Group, Europe's roofing, and waterproofing system expert will open its Global Business Services center in Vilnius where it expects to hire 150 specialists in HR, Finance, IT, and Data Management. BMI Group is Europe's largest manufacturer of combined flat and pitched roofs with significant sales in Africa and Asia. It has 9,800 employees with operations in over 40 countries, 116 manufacturing facilities, and R&D operations in 4 countries. It has materials that absorb pollution and green roofs that provide gardens in urban areas. BMI Group is part of Standard Industries, a privately-held global industrial company that includes real estate and innovative solar technology.

General

Annual inflation has reached 18.9% and is expected to remain high throughout the summer. Consumer goods including meat, milk, oil, bread, solid fuel, electricity, and vegetables rose 22%, and services including car maintenance rose 11.5%.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled against Lithuania for not providing alternative civilian

service (ACS) for a Jehovah's Witness minister who was called up for military service. Similar judgments were made against Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. Lithuania was ordered to pay Stanislav Teliatnikov 3,000 euros. EHHR reiterated that all member states of the Council of Europe need to offer an alternative to military service that is non-punitive, non-discriminatory, and actually civilian. Lithuania recognizes members of 9 religions as eligible for ACS but not Jehovah's Witnesses.

Belarus, a strong ally of Russia, wants to re-establish passenger rail service between their capital, Minsk, and Vilnius, Riga, and Warsaw which was suspended in 2020 due to the pandemic. Buses now run daily between the cities but a spokeswoman for LTG Link, Kotryna Dzikaite, said, "In light of all the circumstances, no services between the capital of Lithuania and Belarus are planned."

In spring every year since 2017, the people of Kaunas assemble a mile-long table and dine together in the spirit of peace. Known as Neighbors' Day during the annual Courtyard Festival, it takes place on the pedestrian-only Liberty Boulevard in front of the Church of St. Michael the Archangel. This year the festival had a distinct Ukrainian flavor in solidarity with the 11,000 Ukrainian refugees living in Kaunas. There is a music video of the Kaunas Neighbors' Day on Youtube.



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

45. FIRST CONFLICT WITH THE NEW "NACHALSTVA"*

The barges came up. The water in the river had already receded quite a bit, the bank was steep, slippery from the remaining mud. Once one descended the bank, a space of about four meters remained between the barge and the shore. Over this space, were thrown two planks, slippery with mud from passing feet.

With rather heavy 40-kilogram bundles of tobacco, we were slipping and rocking like acrobats, lugging the bundles onto the barges.

The workers, most of them women, were subsisting practically only on that bread ration, which we were able to buy in a store two kilometers away. All of us, except the four orphans, were arrivals from somewhere else and had nothing of our own yet. So then, the food was poor, and the work quite strenuous. We would become very tired. We would often stop to rest. For this, the director would curse us often: He constantly shouted:

"*Skoria, bystria*" (Hurry, faster!) he was from Prem and spoke with a dialect, instead of saying "*skoreje, bystreje*." We found this very amusing and would shout "*Skoria, bystria*" at every opportunity.

The director was right. If we rested too long, the barges would overstay their prescribed time. The station would have to pay a fine. The director was responsible, although the money would not be paid from his pocket, but he would have enough problems.

The supplemental grain "to for-



Siberian Sky. Photograph by Rolandas Žygas

tify us" had already been ground, but the director was in no hurry to distribute it to us. We workers decided to remind the director of what he had promised us.

I was the "scribe" so everyone commissioned me to write a statement to the director that we should be given some of the promised flour.

I wrote it but we all signed, about twenty people.

What a storm arose!

The director immediately called a meeting with the bookkeeper. The director, and then his "bookie" laced into us with such accusations that only prison or something worse could be our fate:

"...there are agitators, who instigate workers to demand that to which they are not entitled...there are those, who sniff out everything...who know everything..."

I sat with an impassive face and waited for the meeting to end so that we could go and rest, but I noticed that the eyes of the red-haired favorite and the director were flashing at me.

Others began to glance in my direction. I pretended not to notice; I did not react. Then the director, without any allusions, addressed me directly:

"*Vot Žukavskaja** is sitting as if nothing happened, while she is the one who instigated the workers to write a collective statement. Do you know what that smells of? You were entrusted with the fanning of grain, and you immediately sniffed out which was the good grain. Right away you instigate the workers. The workers receive what is due to them, that is, the government ration, and what is in which sack is neither your business nor that of any of you others! The remainder was given not to you, but to feed the horse."

The director's favorites were glancing triumphantly and angrily at me. My children and my husband were visibly worried. I looked at them calmly. I had never been able to remain silent in the face of injustice, as if I were a complacent sheep, and so I became fired up this time again. Having glanced at Stasiukas, who was looking at me imploringly and with disquietude, I regained my balance and stated:

"You have been reading off my "sins" at length, but I have not grasped that this concerns me." The director began to shout:

"And now you have grasped it? So, what do you have to say?"

"Please be patient," I answered, "I shall tell you. When you brought that bad grain, it was stated, that in loading the barges, the workers would receive flour with their rations."

"Who said so?!" the director's angry voice.

"Your wife, Tatiana Ivanovna, but if you have changed your mind, then how are we guilty? We were

all waiting for that bonus. I instigated no one. The initiators were other people. I wrote the statement at the request of others. I did not offer it to anyone to sign. I never thought that in the Soviet Union, it is considered a crime to ask for that which has already been promised. After all. '*One has to wait for three years for that which has been promised,*' states a Russian proverb."

"And you will not get it!"

"Perhaps! As far as the sacks are concerned, I did not check them, I did not know that they contained good flour. I only said that they were familiar to me since they were made of Lithuanian tablecloths."

The workers who were my supporters and the director's favorites argued on for quite a while. Having said this, I left for the barracks.

Of course, we never received the promised bonus, we cooked a soup of pure nettles, while the director's wife and his two favorites baked *sanushkas*, * patties with a potato filling. The horse never even got a whiff of that flour because it was summer, and he was grazing in the tall grass.

The half-starved workers cursed the "superiors" and their favorites with such words as "slime," "snakes," "Herods," and even stronger words, but they were no less hungry from that and those addressed with these epithets did not hear the "compliments."

Once the tobacco barges had been loaded, we often went to help at the *zagotzerno* * station. There we would get an additional 300 grams of bread and 24 kopeks for a loaded ton. The payment was 90 *kopeks* a ton for the regular workers; we only helped out for extra money. In order to earn those 24 *kopeks*, it was necessary to carry twenty bags from the warehouse, usually on a slippery riverbank. When I asked one time why the payment was so meager, I was told that the norms had been set for mechanized loading. They were also valid here, although we had no mechanization.

Nevertheless, we were still content, because we received additional bread and the work, was paid for, though poorly, not like on the collective farm where we had to work almost 24 hours for nothing.

**Vot, Zukavskaja* - Here, Žukauskiene

**sanushka* - patty with a potato filling

**zagotzerno* - Grain processing station, a facility for storing and processing grain in certain rural locations in soviet Russia.

LITHUANIAN SCOUT CAMP RAMBYNAS

By Roland Giedraitis

High in the San Bernardino mountain range, near Big Bear Lake, California, the scout community of Southwestern US purchased land and established a scout camp.

It was a success from its beginnings in 1969. In the 50-plus years of its existence, it has hosted thousands of young Lithuanian American scouts. The camp usually lasts about two weeks in the mid-summer months. This year, 140 scouts are camping in tents. But the site also hosts an administrative building, full kitchen, bathrooms, and storage facilities. Due to the covid crisis, 400 covid test kits were obtained. Everyone, no exceptions, entering the camp is tested for covid. There are the camping scouts and then there are parents and guests who come to visit.



Lithuanian American scout formation by the camp's administrative building



Cousins Karina Konstantinavičiūtė and Aušra Venckutė -- young but experienced scouts

This year, Gintas Slapkauskas, a scoutmaster, is in charge. He is aided by several experienced scouts. The theme this year is *papročiai* or Lithuanian traditions such as *Joninės*, *Užgavėnės*, and others. The scouts have various activities during the day such as hiking, sports, and classes, but evenings are devoted to *laužas* or fireside events such as singing Lithuanian songs or performing silly skits. There is levity and seriousness as when Lithuanian partisans or deceased scouts are remembered. The mood is enthusiastic.



A Lithuanian American scout family: Teresa and John Rukšėnas and their daughters Aistė and Vida.



An example of scout activity -- a muay thai (self-defense) class conducted by Greta Giedraitytė (with pink cap) from Vilnius, Lithuania. Nobody got hurt!



Scouts march to a twice-daily assembly. In the morning, the American and Lithuanian flags are raised; in the evening, they are ceremoniously lowered.

our community



The chow line at camp. Excellent meals morning, noon, and evening.



A scouting family: Danutė Giedraitis, Vesta, Andrea, Karina Konstantinavičius, and Roland Giedraitis at Rambynas Lithuanian Scout camp



Three very happy young ladies and scouts just after being promoted to the "blue" or senior girl scout rank: Airija Donovan, Gabija Paliulis, and Karina Konstantinavičius



Future scouts with their white neckties. The girls are *liepsnelės* (little flames) while the boys are *giliukai* (little acorns).



An overall view of the assembled scouts with the administrative staff in front



Three generations of scouts: Danutė Giedraitis, Karina Konstantinavičius, and Andrea Giedraitis. Grandmother, daughter, and granddaughter.

Photo credits: Roland Giedraitis

MY LISS SUMMER

Karolina Usavičiūtė

I decided to participate in the LISS program in 2022 to re-connect with my birthplace and to gain tangible skills through a tech internship as a communications manager at VITP (Visorių Informacijos Technologijos Parkas). Since my career goal is to work within public-private sector innovation as well as creative communications, the LISS Program gave me an opportunity and experience I will never forget.

It was so inspiring to have the opportunity to meet with such high-level Lithuanian dignitaries and to meet politicians as they are— fellow citizens of Lithuania that care deeply about their people. In contrast to the United States, where the political sphere falls much further outside of regular citizens’ reach. During the 4th of July celebrations, I was surprised to see so many politicians in person, in one place— this would be regarded as much too high of a security risk back in the States.

During our roundtable meetings with Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė, Speaker of Seimas Viktorija Čmilytė Nielsen, and First Lady Diana Nausėdienė, it was quite sur-



LISS students meeting with Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė



LISS program participants meeting with the Speaker of the Seimas Viktorija Čmilytė Nielsen at the Seimas



Participants of the LISS program in Trakai

real to discuss topics of national interest and speak eye-to-eye with such powerful women with absolute honesty and passion for our country. For the first time in a while, I felt hope for the political world so-to-speak, much contrasted by the nature of my political studies at the University of Illinois. I often think back to my courses about political elites and interest groups, and what I learned throughout the LISS Program definitely changed my perspective of what a government can be like when it is small enough to be close to the people. In my own opinion, state-sanctioned political academia has acquired a taste for nihilism and the defeat of the current system when it comes to the question of what direction are we going in, how, and why? Kurk Lietuvai is just one of the examples of how Lithuania is determined to innovate, expand, and improve nationally in light of everything else that the globe is dealing with at the moment.

Complemented with our trips to meet prominent

our community

members of the Lithuanian government and industry was our journey to the Curonian Spit, where we met with the mayor of Nida, Darius Jasaitis. Regardless of high political tension, on the border of Kaliningrad, we found ourselves in the sand dunes of the pristine UNESCO heritage site on the Baltic Sea, and we scavenged for precious Amber on the beach to bring back home. Traditionally, we finished the night with the classic delicacy of locally caught smoked fish (courtesy of the Mayor) and singing familiar Lithuanian songs with everyone in the LISS family. These are memories I will remember forever.

As someone who was heavily involved in the Chicago-Lithuanian community, it felt so good to sing those summer camp songs again.

The adventure was the mode of the fast-paced LISS Program, led by Romena Čiūtienė, who made sure to fill our time with so many special experiences. We had the opportunity to tour the famous Lukiškės Prison, flew in an air balloon over old Vilnius, canoed through idyllic Lithuanian countryside, trekked through treacherous swamplands, and you can't forget the tradition of the sauna!

Of course, the LISS program is a professional internship



LISS program participants at the meeting with the US Ambassador to Lithuania



Before the balloon flight



LISS program participants after a hike in the marshes

as well, so during the week, we would all go to our respective internships. My first experience doing an internship at the Visorij Information Technology Park has definitely set my standards high for future opportunities. Instead of being a coffee runner, I had very real responsibilities and opportunities to learn about the management of Communications in Lithuania's silicon valley inspired Tech Park. I also had the opportunity to see how the European Union manages & funds technological projects & initiatives through the European Space Agency, where cooperation across member states as well as tech companies is so key. I got such a deep professional experience in just

five weeks, and the memories I made during LISS will continue to inspire me as I move forward in my professional life, especially as a Lithuanian-American.

The main sponsor of the program LISS is the Lithuanian Foundation.



At the Alpaca Farm



Participants of the LISS program at the World Lithuanian Sports Games in Druskininkai



LISS program participants with the Gediminas Staff Battalion soldiers

LITHUANIAN AMERICAN YOUTH ASSOCIATION NEWS

The Lithuanian American Community together with the Lithuanian American Youth Association continues the "Roots" project thanks to the support of the Lithuanian Foundation. The project is now in its second summer. It took place on August 4-8, 2022 in Southern Illinois at St. Casimir's Cemetery in Ledford, IL and the Lithuanian Cemetery of the D.L.K. Kęstutis Society in Johnston City, IL. During the project, the youth searched for and cleaned up old Lithuanian American cemeteries, and together with the other team members, discussed the topics of preserving the Lithuanian heritage and Lithuanian identity. The "Roots" project gave young people the opportunity to learn more about the history of the Lithuanian-American community, their roots, and Lithuanian heritage, and to make new friends. You can watch a video about the project at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWiL0y_D5cl



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On July 17-21, the 16th World Lithuanian Youth Congress cultural program took place in Poland. Nine representatives from the USA participated. During the Congress, the participants got acquainted with the Punks Lithuanian Community members and its history, participated in various discussions, danced, sang, and swam on several lakes of the region. The cultural program ended in Warsaw, where participants visited the Lithuanian Embassy and went on a city tour. The 17th World Lithuanian Youth Congress will be held in North America on June 14-22, 2023, in Boston, Lithuanian Camp Neringa, and Montreal. Mark your calendars and follow @PLJKongresas World Lithuanian Youth Congress, @PLJS_org PLJS - World Lithuanian Youth Union, @javljjs USA Lithuanian Youth Union, and @kljs_official Canadian Lithuanian Youth Union - KLJS on Instagram and Facebook for further news.



**

The annual meeting of the Lithuanian American Youth Association will be held on October 14, 2022, in St. Petersburg, Florida. There will be a get-to-know-you evening, discussions, networking, presentations, dancing, and a formal party with the Lithuanian American Council Session participants. The convention fee is \$75 for those who are not members of the LAYA and \$50 for LAYA members (those who have paid this year's LAYA membership dues at any time after October 25, 2021). Registration is open until October 4, 2022.

https://www.paypal.com/donate?hosted_button_id=N6WZJG33KKB4Y

We encourage you to start looking for airfare - we suggest flying through Tampa International Airport.



The convention hotel is the COURTYARD ST PETERSBURG CLEARWATER (3131 Executive Drive Clearwater, FL 33762). \$164 per room per night if booked by September 16. Rooms can be booked using the following link: <https://www.marriott.com/event-reservations/reservation-link.mi?id=1651597705937&key=GRP&app=resvlink> or you can call to let us know you are part of the Lithuanian American Youth Association Annual General Meeting. We suggest that you stay in a room with 2-3 friends to make it cheaper for everyone. We ask that anyone booking a room through our room block please let the board know (via Instagram or Facebook DM) so that we can make sure everyone who wants to stay in the hotel has a room.



our community

CULTURE

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Lithuania and the United States, the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture hosted the premiere of Arvydas Reneckis's new documentary film "Lithuanian Liberty Bell". The film features unseen archival footage from the first Lithuanian-American meetings, early 20th-century Seimas, visits of the signatories to America, and commentary from contemporary scholars. It tells the story of Lithuanian-American efforts to achieve statehood for Lithuania and the efforts to raise financial support for war-torn Lithuania. The Lithuanian Liberty Bell, cast by Lithuanian-Americans, traveled around America for some time and was used to collect donations, and later was donated to Lithuania, found its way to Kaunas, and remains one of the most important symbols of Lithuania's freedom to this day. The film was supported by the Lithuanian American Community.



EDUCATION

During her visit to the United States, First Lady Diana Nausėdienė met with the heads of Lithuanian schools in the United States at the Lithuanian House in Philadelphia. The First Lady was pleased to see that Lithuanian schools in the USA provide other important lessons along with language instruction - children are introduced to Lithuanian history, geography, Lithuanian literature, and ethnic culture. The meeting was attended by representatives of 37 Lithuanian non-formal education schools operating in the USA.



**

The 45th Lithuanian Education Week "Let's Leave a Trace" was organized by the Lithuanian American Community Education Council at the Dainava Camp. Approximately 40 teachers from 13 Lithuanian schools in the USA participated in this camp. No one regretted coming here. The lectures and evening programs were very interesting. The memories will last a lifetime. Our biggest thanks to the organizers of the camp: Auksė

Motto, Asta Čuplinskienė, Kristina Vyšniauskienė, Vilma Požėraitė-Alkhas, Kristina Petraitienė, Laima Apanavičienė, the caretaker Jonas Petraitis, the commandant Paulius Apanavičius, the lecturers Dr. Norbertas Černiauskas, Dr. Akvilė Naudžiūnienė, Dr. Rūta Stanaitienė, Dr. Dalia Cidzikaitė, Dr. Daiva Litvinskaitė, Dr. Robert Vitas, Dr. Audronė Elvikienė, Laima Apanavičienė, and all the campers.

SPORTS



On July 14-17, 2022, Druskininkai became the center of friendship and unity of all Lithuanian athletes who came here for the XI World Lithuanian Sports Games. The motto of the Games was "I am Lithuania!". 2314 Lithuanians from 26 countries participated. The largest number of participants came from the United Kingdom (329 athletes) and the United States (238 athletes). The most popular sport of the Games was basketball, with 482 players taking part in the competition. As many as 323 sets of medals were awarded. Lithuanian athletes won 59 medals, while the second and third-place winners were the United Kingdom with 51 medals and the United States with 23 medals.



Lietuviškų Dokumentinių Filmų Festivalis



Lithuanian Documentary Film Festival

October 5th, 7:30 PM
Atidaryms | Opening Night

A. Lekavičius "Kernagis"
Oak Park, Lake Theater (1022 Lake St, Oak Park, IL 60301)

October 6th, 7:30 PM

A. Mickevičius, N. Milerius "Pavyzdingas elgesys" ("Exemplary Behaviour")
LWC West End (14911 127th St, Lemont, IL 60439)

October 7th, 7:30 PM

M. Stonytė "Švelnūs kariai" ("Gentle Warriors")
Balzekas Museum Of Lithuanian Culture (6500 S Pulaski Rd, Chicago, IL 60629)

October 8th, 2 PM

V. Vareikyte "Būsiu su tavim" ("I'll Stand by You")
Balzekas Museum Of Lithuanian Culture (6500 S Pulaski Rd, Chicago, IL 60629)

October 8th, 5 PM

V. Puidokas "Pasienio paukščiai" ("Before They Meet")
Balzekas Museum Of Lithuanian Culture (6500 S Pulaski Rd, Chicago, IL 60629)

October 9th, 12:30 PM

L. Mikuta "Mončys. Žemaitis iš Paryžiaus" ("Moncys. Samogitian de Paris")
LWC West End (14911 127th St, Lemont, IL 60439)

October 9th, 3 PM

R. Rakauskaitė "Sugrįžę iš Niujorko" ("Back from New York")
LWC West End (14911 127th St, Lemont, IL 60439)

October 14th, 7:30 PM

R. Rakauskaitė "Sugrįžę iš Niujorko" ("Back from New York")
Lithuanian Art Gallery Ciurlionis (5620 S Claremont Ave, Chicago, IL 60636)

October 15th, 2 PM

L. Lužytė "Blue/ Red /Deport"
Balzekas Museum Of Lithuanian Culture (6500 S Pulaski Rd, Chicago, IL 60629)

October 15th, 5 PM

G. Žickytė "Šuolis" ("Jump")
Balzekas Museum Of Lithuanian Culture (6500 S Pulaski Rd, Chicago, IL 60629)



LDF • Lithuanian Documentary Film Festival
Info: 312.375.2728



bridges

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