

# bridges



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

\$6

June 2023

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NEWS JOURNAL

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**Front Cover:** LISS students in Nida, Lithuania, celebrate Lithuania's Statehood Day.

**Back cover:** LISS students in Vilnius, Lithuania, meet Speaker of the Parliament Viktorija Čmilytė Nielsen.

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## from the editor

Dear Reader,

Summer is the usual time for vacation and travel. Traditionally, Lithuanian Americans visit relatives in Lithuania. Many go and visit parents and grandparents. Others visit the country to enjoy its many museums, exhibit galleries, concerts, and nature. Several programs have been established to facilitate the travel of Lithuanian American students to Lithuania. LISS and Bring Together Lithuania are two such programs. We have been publishing the stories of the participants of these programs for several years. Summer is a wonderful time to strengthen the ties with Lithuania. It is the time to have fun but also to learn. And even though life in Lithuania seems to be bright, we always are aware that the shadow of Russia is constantly posing danger. Ukraine is fighting for its independence and many say that it is also the independence of the Baltic States that Ukraine is fighting for. We all are living under repeated Russia's nuclear threats. However, Lithuania is a strong nation. It is small but it has a very loud voice and Lithuanians are able to unite and persevere under grave circumstances. In July, Lithuanians celebrate Statehood Day. They draw strength from Mindaugas who was crowned Lithuania's King on July 6, 1253 and placed foundation for the state of Lithuania. The spirit of King Mindaugas is still within us.

I hope you will have a beautiful summer.

Karilė Vaitkutė  
Editor



## A DIFFERENT TYPE OF GRADUATION

Roland Giedraitis

June is graduation month. We witnessed a double graduation ceremony for our granddaughter. One for her regular American high school and the other for a Lithuanian school. All three of our children finished this school many years ago now four of our grandchildren are attending, with one, Karina, enjoying a double graduation.

The Los Angeles area Lithuanian community has since 1949 maintained a unique school for its members. It is called the Lithuanian Saturday School. Besides enrolling in the area's American schools, scores of young Lithuanians spend their Saturdays in the classrooms of the St.

Casimir's church school. Some up to 15 years! This year the school had 116 students and 25 teachers starting with pre-kindergarten *kiškiai* (bunny rabbits) and ending at the 12th grade level as a Lithuanian high school graduate or *abiturientas*. This year we had 11 graduates who toiled weekly for 12-plus years to achieve this goal. Their class mentor was teacher Vitalija Virbukienė. We thank all the teachers and congratulate the graduates!

At last count, there are 38 such special Lithuanian schools in the United States, ranging from Hawaii, California, and Illinois, to Florida and other states. All under the auspices of the Lithuanian American Com-



Here are nine of the eleven graduates of the Lithuanian Saturday school. Left to right: Julius Čelkis, Antanas Reivydas, Darius Hayden, Maximus Bruožis, Grantas Perevičius, and Gabija Paliulis,



The eleven *abiturientai* during the ball in their honor.

munity Education Council. Thanks to our pastor, Rev. Tomas Karanauskas, for allowing the school to use the parish classroom facilities.

The curriculum consists of Lithuanian vocabulary, grammar, literature; Lithuanian history and customs; Lithuanian songs and dances. Most students belong to the Spindulys dance troupe. This is especially popular. Besides the classroom work, special occasions such as Lithuanian Independence Day, Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, and Father's Day are noted. Sometimes distinguished visitors such as Archbishop Gintaras Grusšs or the Consul General of Lithuania Laima Jurevičienė may visit. There are frequent distinguished guests at the school.

The graduates this year were:

Amber Gintarė Bartulis is a serious classical ballet dancer who also enjoyed Lithuanian folk dancing. An honors student, she plans to continue her studies at the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo University.

Maximus Vytautas Bruožis, a sports and engineering enthusiast, saxophone and chess player, loves mathematics, plans studies in mechanical engineering.

Julius Eimantas Čelkis, a lover of music, plays the piano and African Djembe drums, will attend Cal Poly University at San Luis Obispo, where he will study business administration.



St. Casimir Lithuanian church and rectory in Los Angeles. The property also contains a school with many classrooms.

# our community

Emma Teisutė Garbischis is a music and art lover who enjoys playing piano and singing. She will enter the medical field to train as a nurse.

Darius Artiomas Hayden, a soccer player in high school, also loves to travel, having visited Alaska, Mexico, and many parts of the USA. His future plans are uncertain.

Karina Monika Konstantinavičiūtė is an award-winning scholar and co-captain of her volleyball team. She plans to continue her studies at UC Santa Barbara in environmental science.

Gabija Paliulytė is multitalented in sports and music. Gabija's forte is volleyball. UC Santa Cruz welcomes her as a talented volleyball player.

Grantas Martynas Perevičius got an early start as a *kiškis* at the Lithuanian school which he faithfully attended

for 15 years! A scout and member of *ateitininkai*, he is interested in a career in engineering.

Antanas Liudas Reivydas, from an early age a lover of world and Lithuanian history, he also enjoys scout camping and dancing. After CSUN he will pursue a career in history.

Kayus Remeika, another long-term veteran of the Lithuanian school, began attending at age 3. His interests are scouting, folk dancing, and sports. He has his eyes on the university ROTC program which would lead him to be a Marine Corps officer.

Andrius Vytas Variakojis is an enthusiast for music, scouting, and nature. He especially enjoyed the Lithuanian scout camps at Big Bear which he never missed. A scholar, he plans studies in engineering and pursues music as a trumpet player.

We wish them all success! A common thread among these graduates is that they are proud to be Lithuanians. Friendships are formed at school and summer camps. As the director of the school, Marytė Sandanavičiūtė Newson likes to say, we are not half Lithuanian and half American. We are full Lithuanians and full Americans depending on the locale and circumstances. Proud and responsible citizens of both nations!

*Note: Roland Giedraitis is a dentist and a teacher of Lithuanian history at this school for over 15 years. Now reluctantly retired.*



All the *abiturientai* were grandly greeted at the ball. This is Karina Konstantinavičiūtė.



All the *abiturientai* were grandly greeted at the ball. This is Karina Konstantinavičiūtė.

# Periodicals Collection at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture

Aušra Zarins  
Volunteer

After retirement, I decided to do some volunteer work at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture. My assignment was re-organizing and cataloging the Periodicals Room. Although I have no Library Science expertise, I accepted the challenge. I worked at a leisurely pace one time per week. That plus vacation time, Covid, and other factors made this a multi-year project. But now it's done, and I hope that people will be able to use the Periodicals Room to find the information they are looking for.

First, let me introduce you to the newly organized Periodicals Room:

## The statistics:

- Over 1300 titles have been cataloged into the Museum's Past Perfect program. They include magazines, newsletters, bulletins, journals, and almanacs. Newspapers are not yet cataloged. That is a separate project for another volunteer.
- The publications are organized into a general collection and three special collections – Church bulletins, Sajūdis, and Displaced Person (DP) publications.

## The General Collection:

- Language: More than 60% are in Lithuanian, followed by English with 21%, then sixteen other languages with much smaller numbers.
- Format: About 49% are in the newsletter and bulletin format, followed by magazines at 39%, then journals and almanacs.
- Country of publication: Lithuanian leads the way with 36%, then the USA with 28%. There are 25 other countries of publications, including Latvia, Australia, England, France, Scotland, and even India.
- Time frame: Late 1800s to present day. The majority are from the late 1940s to the present.
- Topics: Many and varied. Popular ones include politics, religion, literature, art, culture organizations, and student and alumni news. There are also a large group of special interests, but these usually have a very



Aušra Zarins at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture

small number of both titles and the number of issues.

It is very difficult to give you a picture of the scope of the general category. Some publications have a large number of issues (a few are even complete). Others have only a few issues.

Here are a few examples of our publications with a large number of issues:

“Pergalė” (Victory) was started in 1942 as a literary supplement to “Tėvynė šaukia” (Motherland is Calling). It was a Soviet publication. We have issues starting in 1948 through 1990, with many years complete. In 1991, after Lithuania’s liberation, the publication changed its name to “Metai” (Year) and is still being published by Lietuvos Rašytojų Sąjunga (Lithuania’s Writers Union). We have 1991 through current issues, with many years complete. Both magazines are in Lithuanian and published in Vilnius, Lithuania.

“Tarybinė moteris” (Soviet Woman) is a women’s magazine obviously promoting Soviet ideology. In the April 1956 issue, articles include “Prisiminimai apie Leniną” (Memories of Lenin) and “Ar jūsų vaikai tinkamai elgiasi prie stalo?” (Do your children have good table manners?). There are also household hints on mushrooms, a page on fashion, and some poetry and art. It is an interesting look at the Soviet era. We have issues from 1956 through 1989; it is in Lithuanian and

published in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The “Journal of Baltic Studies” by the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS) is a collection of educational and scholarly works covering the politics, social, economic, and cultural life of the Baltics States and the Baltic region. It is published quarterly in English. Our collection is from 1972 through 2008, with many years complete.

Just to list a few more by name and years in our collection: “Mokslas ir gyvenimas” (Science and Life) (1958-1991), “Moterų dirva” (Women’s Field) (1919 – 1981), “Skautų aidas” (Scout Echo) (1946 – 1991), “Švyturys” (Lighthouse) (1955 – 1997), “Varpas” (Bell) (1953 – 2013), “Kultūros barai” (Fields of Culture) (1965 - present), “Karys” (Soldier) (1938 – present), “Lithuanian Heritage” (1994 – present), “Lituanus” (1954 – present), and our own “The Lithuanian Museum Review” (1967 – present).

Then, there are the small collections, sometimes just one or two issues. The topics range from the serious (war, politics, religion) to the silly (satire and humor, some that only came out on April Fool’s Day). I will share only one here, picked just because it made me smile!

“Piršlys” (Matchmaker), a Chicago-based Lithuanian “dating service” magazine precedes online dating services by 100 years! It ran for just two years, 1923-24. The application questions include height, weight, if you are single or widowed, and how much wealth you have!

## Special Collections

**Church Bulletins.** 20-plus titles, some as early as 1922, though most are more current. Almost all are from the USA, although there is one from Toronto, Canada (Evangelical Lutheran Church/1953) and one from Hamburg, Germany (Aušra’s Gate/1973). The majority are from Catholic Churches, but Lutherans are also represented. Most are in Lithuanian, followed by English, and many are multi-linguaged. The two largest collections are from Chicago: Immaculate Conception Church (1937 - 2019) and Nativity BVM Church (1938 - 2017).

**Sajūdis.** 40-plus titles, most in the newsletter or bulletin format, almost all in Lithuanian. All are published in Lithuania, and the years of publication are primarily from 1988 through 1990, though some extend beyond that. The largest publication in this group is “Sajūdžio žinios” (Sajūdis News), published by Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sajūdžio Taryba, editors: Arvydas Juozaitis and Juozas Glinskis. We have issues #1 – 60



“Piršlys,” 1924

(1988) and Issues #61 – 87 (1989), a Special Jubilee edition, August 19, 1988, and Special Edition: The Congress Bulletin, issues #1 – 4 from October 21- 24, 1988. All are in Lithuanian. The Congress Bulletin is in both Lithuanian and English.

**Displaced Person (DP).** 140-plus titles, mostly in a newsletter or bulletin format. The vast majority were published at various DP camps in Germany, and most are between 1944 and 1949, though some extend beyond that date. A dozen or so were published outside of Germany, in other locations where Lithuanians had fled war-torn Lithuania, including Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Italy, France, and even Uruguay. There is a small group of newsletters published onboard transport ships traveling to the USA. These are of very short duration and usually include only one or two issues. Some are in Lithuanian, but the majority are in multiple languages. There is also an even smaller group of publications from UNRRA (United Nations Relief and

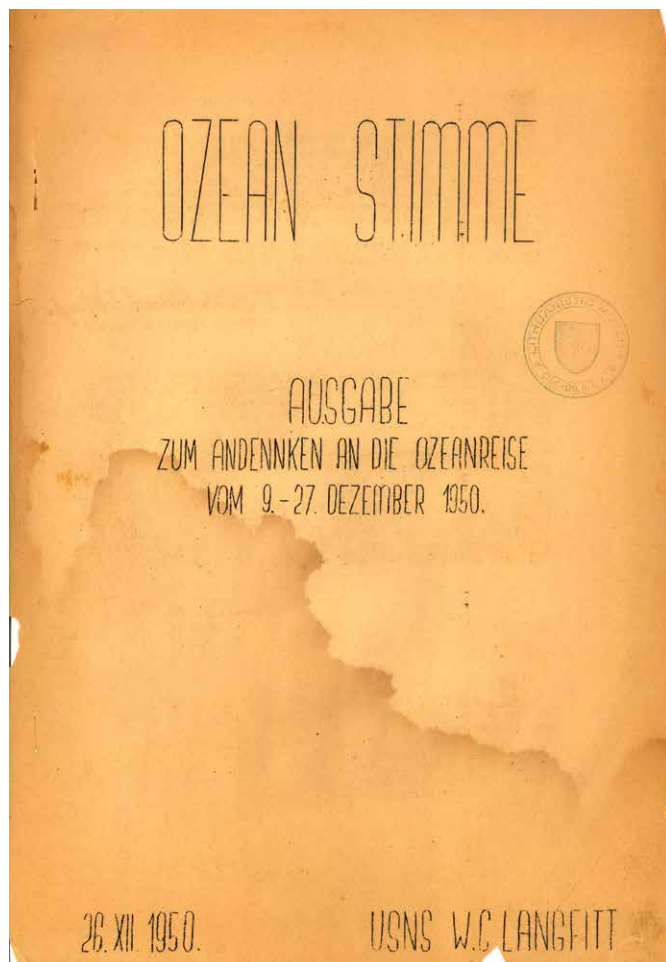


Rehabilitation Administration).

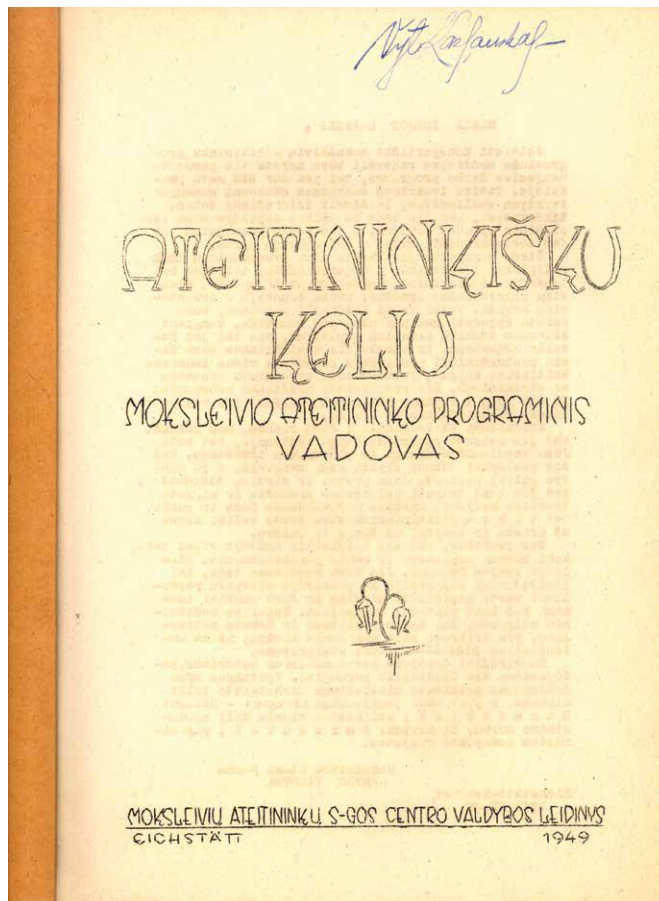
This was the group of publications I was most interested in. My parents had lived through the DP experience, and I heard many of their stories. Just to give you an idea of what can be found in this group, this is what I found related to my family:

My mother's family spent five years at Rebdorf/Einstatt DP camp. I found two publications from there. "Dienos žinios" (Day's News) (4 issues from 1946-47) is a typewritten, 2-sided sheet that posted news from around the world as well as camp news (one issue included a warning that youths were setting campfires in the surrounding woods, and that could be dangerous!). The second publication is "Ateitininkų keliu" (On the Ateitininkai Path), a program guide for the Ateitininkai group at camp. It is a hefty tome of over 100 pages. My mom had been involved with that group. I felt the connection!

My dad came to the USA on the USNS Langfitt, and there is one issue of the onboard newsletter, "Ozean Stimme," dated December 27, 1950 (no, that was not



"Ozean Stimme," 1950



"Ateitininkų keliu," 1949

dad's crossing). It is the last day of crossing and features well-wishes from many of the crew in English as well as thoughts from many of the nationalities onboard in their native tongue. Especially sweet was this from an Estonian passenger:

"It was not long ago that we met you in Bremerhaven. We saw your frame and thought: 'Hm, there she is, that Langfitt, will she be our friend for the coming two and a half weeks?' The first three days after being separated from the land, we hated you terribly as we felt so disgustingly sick, and you showed no mercy for us. On the fourth day, as the road was smoother and our heads clearer, we recognized our common aim. We became companions. For friendship was the time too short, we had not learned your whims as yet. But as good companions, we depart, and we extend our sincerest thanks to you, for you were a trustworthy companion indeed."

There is much to be found here. To access our Periodicals, write an email at [info@balzekasmuseum.org](mailto:info@balzekasmuseum.org) or call the Museum at 773-582-6500.



Summer 2023 in Lithuania began! Lithuanian students from USA and Canada met for the first dinner together. Welcome, have the best summer of your life!

## LISS Summer in Lithuania 2023

“Lithuanian International Student Services” (LISS) program is organized by the Lithuanian American Community for university students of Lithuanian descent in the United States of America and Canada.

LISS provides the opportunity for a 5-week summer internship in Lithuania according to your field of study and future career aspirations. LISS students intern 5 days a week, at least 6 hours a day at the place of their internship.

The LISS program is an intensive cultural program – students travel throughout Lithuania, meet with inspiring working Lithuanians, and in the process, gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of their Lithuanian heritage. Students also visit biomedical centers, laser companies, and other science centers and learn from business and science representatives in each of these fields.

Program participants who successfully complete their

Lithuanian internship add their valuable and diverse international work experience to their CV, as well as receive 5 university credits, as the Lithuanian American Community in the United States has partnered with Vytautas Magnus University, Vilnius University, and Vilnius Gediminas Technical University.

The LISS program is funded by Lietuvių Fondas. The program is led by Romena Čiūtienė.

The LISS program invites Lithuanian-Americans and Lithuanian-Canadians who are undergraduate and graduate students (ages 18-26), to become a part of this program. To become a participant, one of the following requirements must be met: (1) the student previously participated in a Lithuanian Saturday school; (2) the student is an active member in the Lithuanian American community, or (3) the student is a Lietuvių Fondas member.



D. Ingrida Girrienė, Vice Dean of the Vilnius University Communications Department welcomed the participants and invited them to spread smiles and optimism in Lithuania and to remember the Vilnius University motto - Hinc itur ad astra! We have no doubt that this will be the case!



The LISS program is officially launched! The Lithuanian American Community has partnered with Vilnius University to make all students participating in the LISS program official students of Vilnius University, the oldest university in the region. Detailed instructions and assignments for the internship period, signing of student practical training contracts, a tour of the old VU complex, 400 steps to climb, and an overview of the Old Town from the VU tower - this was the students' first day at the university.



June 14th is the Day of Mourning and Hope in Lithuania. On the night of June 14, 1941, armed Soviet soldiers invaded thousands of Lithuanian homes. Thus began the first mass deportations of Lithuanians. From June 14 to 18, approximately 18,000 people were exiled in cattle wagons. Some of the deportees died before reaching the place of exile, and many never returned home. To honor the memory of the victims of the occupation, the LISS students not only took part in the commemoration of the Day of Mourning and Hope and the Day of the Occupation and Genocide at the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania but also contributed to the remembrance event by reading aloud the names of the exiled people.



LISS participants visited the office of Nasdaq Vilnius, a global leader in financial services and technology. Lithuanian-American and Canadian youth had the opportunity to learn about the work of this leading company not only in Lithuania but also around the world, test the information they heard, and win great prizes!



After the first week of work, the students had a great opportunity to unwind by kayaking on the Neris River. The nature in Lithuania is amazing and being there is a good opportunity to recharge your energy, which will be needed a lot in this LISS program.



Every Sunday at noon, the Guard of Honor solemnly replaces the flags of Lithuania, the European Union, and NATO. The soldiers represent the Land, Air, and Naval Forces. LISS participants watched the ceremony with pride and had the extraordinary opportunity to have their photo taken with an Honor Guard! Who knows, maybe one day a LISS student will take their place!



After their work, the students rushed to the Centre for Civil Education, where they created and experienced a young and modern Lithuania in an innovative exhibition. The Centre for Civil Education is a modern educational space where students sought answers to the questions of how a democratic state and its institutions work, how citizens can contribute to the creation and management of the state, and how to solve problems that are important for the society as a whole or the local community. It was an opportunity to "try on" a state award on everyone's chest!



The strength of a team is in its unity! Although it's only been a week since the LISS program started, already the participants felt like a real family and reinforced the feeling in the team-building activities!





A warm summer evening is perfect for the exploration of the beautiful city of Vilnius! The rich history of the city, the most interesting stories, the connection between the past and the present - all this makes our capital unique and exceptional. As the guide said: 'Gediminas founded Vilnius by making his dream come true, so if you have unfulfilled dreams, it's best to make them a reality in Vilnius!' Thank you to our guide Ieva from the Vilnius with Locals Tours for showing us the most secret places and to the Lithuanian Foundation, Inc. for giving us the opportunity to see and experience it all!



We send our best wishes for a magical Midsummer weekend and wish you a wonderful new week ahead!



We met Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania! LISS students spent the afternoon at the Parliament, where they learned about the history of Lithuanian parliamentarism and current political processes. The delegation was warmly welcomed by Madam Speaker herself, who had an inspiring discussion with the students.



AB Žemaitijos pienas, a company celebrating its centenary, is engaged in milk processing and is happy to share what it does best. The LISS students had the opportunity not only to hear a presentation about the company but also to taste the Magija cottage cheese dessert.



We are happy to have this opportunity to thank the Mayor of Vilnius, Valdas Benkunskas, for talking to the LISS students, giving them leadership lessons, and wishing them to never forget their roots!



### Security

In preparation for the general NATO meeting in Vilnius in July, the Foreign Ministers of the NATO countries recently met. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said that all members should work to help Ukraine in its desire for NATO membership and that the July meeting would identify the steps that Ukraine can meet to attain membership.



On a visit to Berlin, President Gitanas Nausėda said that his priority is to have NATO forces permanently stationed in Lithuania rather than on the current rotating basis. He said that Lithuania is committed to creating favorable conditions for the deployment of a German brigade in 2026 and regional air and sea defenses around the Baltic Sea.

The Chinese Ambassador to France, Lu Shaye, caused an uproar when asked if he considered the Crimea peninsula part of Ukraine, “even these ex-Soviet countries do not have effective status, as we say, under international law because there’s no international accord to concretize their status as a sovereign country.” Following these remarks, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis commented, “We are not a post-Soviet state, that we are countries that were illegally occupied by the Soviet Union.” The European Union’s Foreign Policy Chief, Joseph Borrell called the Chinese Ambassador’s remarks “unacceptable”. France’s Foreign Ministry called on China to clarify its ambassador’s statement. The Chinese government said that its’ Ambassador expressed his personal views and not the government’s view. FM Landsbergis said, “I think there should be no further continuation. China has officially clarified the Ambassador’s words, saying that this is his personal opinion... In

this case, the issue is closed.” However, the FM added, “If anyone is still wondering why the Baltic states don’t trust China to ‘broker peace in Ukraine’, here’s a Chinese Ambassador arguing that Crimea is Russian and our countries’ borders have no legal basis.”

Lithuania’s electricity transmission system operator (TSO), Litgrid, performed an isolated operation test where it disconnected from the system controlled by Russia for 10 hours. Electricity was supplied to customers from Lithuanian power plants and Direct Current connections with Sweden and Poland. During this period, Litgrid controlled the load balance and frequency as a prelude to synchronization with the Continental European (CE) grid in 2024 and being free of the Russian BRELL grid. There is hope that Estonia and Latvia will also join the CE grid but they are behind in their technical development.

The Seimas has passed legislation allowing Lithuanian border guards to turn back migrants who cross the border illegally.

In anticipation of Lithuania taking delivery of UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters, two Lithuanian Air Force Captains have graduated from the Aviator Qualification Course at Fort Novosel (formerly known as Fort Rucker) in southeastern Alabama. A year ago, a Pennsylvania Army National Guard team visited Lithuania to tour the aviation maintenance facilities and offer suggestions on fielding the Black Hawks and developing training strategies.

In preparation for the bi-annual NATO summit in Vilnius on July 11-12, Germany will deploy a Patriot long-range air defense system from Slovakia to Lithuania and support elements from Poland to Lithuania. General air travel will be restricted except for the expected 5,000 attendees.

The Ministry of National Defense plans to spend 3.1 billion euros (\$3.4 billion) on explosives and ammunition in the next 10 years. The last 23 Boxer armored personnel carriers of 88 ordered in 2016 are expected this summer. A new order for 120 Boxers will double its armored fleet of vehicles.

The Ministry of National Defense has contracted with Veho Lietuva to purchase 230 AROCS heavy-duty trucks with spare parts and 141 ZETROS off-road trucks equipped with cranes. The trucks which will cost 216 million euros are scheduled for delivery between 2023 and 2030. Currently, Lithuania has 25 AROCS trucks which are manufactured by Germany’s Daimler AG and purchased in 2021. Each AROCS can carry up to 17 tons of cargo. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs discourages Lithuanian citi-



zens from traveling to Belarus and encourages those in Belarus to return ASAP. The statement says: "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reminds once again about the valid recommendations for citizens of the Republic of Lithuania not to go to Belarus, and for those who are currently there, to leave Belarus immediately." The Ministry said that Lithuanians in Belarus are being detained unjustly under false charges. The Interior Ministry monitors the 679 km border with Belarus to keep track of all kinds of movements to guard against a hybrid attack coming from Belarus.

## Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky indicated that he will participate in the NATO meeting in July in Vilnius.

The Seimas overrode President Gitanas Nausėda's veto of the Seimas' sanctions on Russian and Belarusians which restricts the issuance of Lithuanian e-resident status and visas to them. It also bans them from bringing Ukrainian currency (hryvnias) into Lithuania and buying real estate in Lithuania.

Lithuania has transferred many of its M113 armored personnel carriers (APCs) to Ukraine. Lithuania is planning on back-filling the resulting void by purchasing 120 new Boxers from the German consortium, KMW, which has recently introduced a tracked version of its popular multi-purpose wheeled platform.

A group of 15 Lithuanian instructors will join German and Belgian instructors in Germany to train Ukrainian soldiers. Topics include basic weapons handling, marksmanship, engineering and medical training, and offensive and defensive actions in urban and wooded areas.

The Lithuanian crowdfunded effort to raise 5 million euros for defense radars for Ukraine actually raised 14 million euros. The first 3 of 16 radars manufactured by the Israeli company, DRS RADA Technologies, have been delivered. The Multi-Mission Hemispheric Radar (MHR) is a tactical radar that can detect targets from small drones to mortars, missiles, and planes.

The culture ministers of Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania met in Krakow, Poland, and signed a cooperation agreement enabling Ukrainian artists to work in Poland and Lithuania to protect Ukrainian culture in the face of Russia's invasion and intent on nullifying Ukrainian culture. The document reads: "The purpose of the agreement is to support the rescue and conservation of Ukraine's cultural heritage at

risk of destruction or damage, with particular emphasis on UNESCO World Heritage Sites and sites entered on the UNESCO Tentative List for World Heritage".

The Ukrainian national postal service, Nova Poshta, has added a branch in Kaunas to add to the one in Vilnius, which opened in March 2023. Customers can send and receive documents, parcels, and cargo weighing up to 1,000 kg. In addition to the branch, customers can order delivery to any city in Ukraine and Lithuania.

## Covid-19

The incidence of Covid-19 has diminished in Lithuania. On a daily basis, roughly 200 new cases are found and there is approximately 1 death. This time of year there are about 400 cases of Acute Respiratory Illness with Influenza A and B detected in 80 patients and 52 with Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV).

Covid-19 cases continue to decrease in Lithuania. Daily cases run under 100 per day and often there are no deaths. The 14-day primary infection rate has decreased to 35.6 cases per 100,000 people. The number of Covid-19 cases in hospitals now stands at 66, with only 2 in the ICU. The level of vaccine jabs stands at 69.8% of the population.

## Business

Two satellites manufactured by Lithuania's Konigsberg NanoAvionics were launched by SpaceX from the Space Force Base in Vandenberg, CA.

The state-owned Lithuanian Exhibition and Congress Center Litexpo will host the NATO summit on July 11-12. Because of the short time to opening, some contracts were negotiated rather than opened for bidding. Communication services were purchased from Telia Lietuva for the summit for 2.78 million euros. A competitor, Bitė Lietuva, complained that it could have provided the services for 1.84 million euros. As the largest exhibition space in the Baltic region, 32,200 sq. meters (351,980 sq.), it has 10 rooms of various sizes. An estimated 5,000 attendees will represent 40 delegations from NATO members and partners.

The Central Bank of Lithuania usually pays part of its profit into the state budget. In 2021 the bank had a profit of 37.99 million euros and paid 20.38 million euros to the state. For the first time since 1993, it will not pay anything

## current events

to the state so that it can cover losses from the sharp rise in interest rates in order to combat rising inflation.

In October 2022 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast that Lithuania's GDP would grow by 1.1% in 2023 and 2.7% in 2024. However, the IMF recently revised the GDP forecast to a negative 0.3% for 2023; that inflation will be 10.5% in 2023 (vs 18.9% in 2022) and that unemployment will be 7%.

The French cloud technology company, Devoteam, with 10,000 employees worldwide and 1 billion euros in sales, has opened an office in Kaunas along with its existing office in Vilnius. It currently has 74 employees in Lithuania. The expansion to Kaunas puts them in proximity to the Kaunas University of Technology for cloud technology. Devoteam works closely with Google, Microsoft, and Amazon Web Services (AWS).

The Denver, CO-based Palantir Technologies has entered into a strategic partnership with the Lithuanian Ministry of Defense to use its big data analysis and Artificial Intelligence (AI) capability to establish a regional hub for regional defense capabilities and will be hiring highly skilled software engineers. The company has already helped in the fight against COVID-19, military support for Ukraine, and the resettlement of Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania. Founded in 2003 by serial entrepreneur, Peter Theil who cofounded PayPal and invested in Facebook, SpaceX, and Stripe.

Lithuania's Seimas passed a windfall profits tax on the banking industry's net interest income for 2023 and 2024 following the sharp rise in the European Central Bank (ECB) interest rates to suppress high inflation. The vote was 103 to 12 with 13 abstentions. The ECB cautioned that imposing a financial contribution on banks "could have negative economic effects by making credit institutions less resilient to economic shocks." Banks in Lithuania are expected to pull in about a billion euros in combined profits. The "solidarity contribution" 60% tax on the part of the net interest income that exceeds the average of the previous four years by 50% is estimated to raise 410 million euros (\$451 million) for the government's budget which will be used to fund the increase in military spending. Lithuania's two largest banks are Sweden's Swedbank AB and SEB AB which have a combined market share of 55%.

Harmony Link is a 700 MW high-voltage direct current 330 km submarine cable that will connect the Zarnowiec electrical substation in Poland with a future Darbėnai substation in Lithuania and will link the two countries'

electrical systems. Litgrid, the Lithuanian transmission system operator (TSO), has canceled the procedure for selecting the cable contractor for its section of Harmony Link because the submitted offers greatly exceed the estimated budget. Likewise, the Polish TSO-PSE also canceled the contract proposals of 1600 million euros for the construction of the converter substations for the interconnector which greatly exceeded the budget of 680 million euros. A link already exists between the Lithuanian and Polish systems with the LitPol Link which has operated since 2016. Litgrid and PSE plan on rebidding for the construction of the Harmony Link project.

Invest Lithuania, Lithuania's Investment Promotion Agency has published its Manufacturing Sector Report 2023. Lithuania has been named the number one destination for Foreign Direct Investment in Europe. Manufacturing generated 20% of Lithuania's GDP. With 23,086 manufacturing companies, 576 are foreign-owned and employ about 25% of Lithuania's manufacturing labor force. Within the manufacturing sector, automotive is leading in both job numbers and capital expenditure. In 2022 automotive created more than 2,000 new jobs.

Two investor events will be held in Vilnius in September. The INVESTOR CAMP will take place on September 6 for business and venture capitalists to learn, discuss, and network. Tickets are 250 euros for non-members of the Business Angel Networks or the Baltic Venture Capital Associations. The next day, the free Startup Fair 2023 takes place. For information, see <https://www.startupfair.lt/investor-camp-2023>.

## General

Lithuania's Chief Official Ethics Commission found Gediminas Norkūnas, the Deputy Finance Minister, violated conflict of ethics rules by owning shares of Ignitis Grupė, while making decisions regarding the state-owned energy group without disclosing his ownership. He resigned.

In 2019 then Presidential Candidate Gitanas Nausėda did not answer the question on the Central Electoral Commission questionnaire on whether he belonged or had belonged to a political party or political organization. It was recently revealed that in May 1988 he became a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which he described as "a youthful indiscretion". He added that he did not participate in any activities after the national Sąjūdis movement led by Vytautas Landsbergis was started in the late 1980s.

Lithuania's Tripartite Council representing employees, employers, and the government will consider raising the minimum wage which currently is 840 euros per month.

Jovita Neliupšienė, Deputy Foreign Minister of Lithuania has been selected as the new European Union Ambassador to the US. She has been Deputy FM for 6 months and previously served as Deputy Economic Minister, advisor to President Dalia Grybauskaitė, and Lithuanian Ambassador to the European Union. In her new role, she will head a 100-person diplomatic mission which covers a wide range of responsibilities from free trade negotiations to coordinating positions on China.

In anticipation of the 5000 visitors for the NATO meeting in Vilnius July 11-12, which should include President Joe Biden and President Volodymyr Zelensky, all flights to and from Vilnius Airport will be suspended. Lithuania will enact other air traffic restrictions prohibiting small planes, balloons, and drones between July 7 and 13. Airline passengers are cautioned that some airlines (Irish Ryanair and Hungarian Wizz) are still selling tickets and may not compensate passengers for cancellations because the cancellations are beyond the control of the airline.

Alma Adamkienė, 96, the wife of Lithuania's former President Valdas Adamkus, recently passed away in Vilnius. She was Lithuania's First Lady during her husband's Presidencies, 1998-2003 and 2004-2009. A viewing was held at the Presidential Palace followed by Mass at Vilnius Cathedral. About 1000 attended the funeral including her husband, President Nausėda, and First Lady Diana Neusėdienė. Burial was at her husband's hometown of Kaunas. The Adamkuses married in Chicago in 1951 and in 1962 acquired the Tabor Farm Resort in Michigan which provided summer employment for

many Lithuanian and American college students. After Labor Day the venue was the site of an annual conference of Santara-Šviesa, a progressive Lithuanian émigré organization.



A healthy 100-year-old oak tree was cut down on an undeveloped plot in Vilnius which prompted Vilnius Mayor Valdas Benkunskas to propose fining the Estonian developer 141,000 euros. The developer said that the development plan excluded the tree; the mayor said a permit was necessary and the case would be referred to prosecutors. President Nausėda said the "barbaric act" spat in the face of Vilnius' residents. In pre-Christian Lithuania, oaks were revered as sacred.

Switzerland will contribute CHF 45.2 million (Swiss francs) (\$50.2 million) in "cohesion payments" to Lithuania as an entry fee for non-European Union members to take part in the European Single Market. It is part of a CHF 1.3 billion payment up to 2029. Lithuania plans on earmarking CHF 30 million to improve maternal and infant health. About CHF 10 million is destined for newcomers-youth, migrants, and refugees. The remaining CHF 4.5 million will be channeled to vocational education programs.



Lithuania's ultra-runner Aleksandr Sorokin (41) broke the world record in the 100 km run at the Nord Security World's Fastest Run in Vilnius with a time of 6:05:35. He eclipsed the previous record by 3 minutes and 39 seconds set in 2018 by Japan's Nao Kazami. Sorokin competed in a field of 30 international ultra-runners on a 1.644 km circuit in his hometown of Vilnius.



# Children in Colorado Learn to Fence Like Lithuanian Pentathlon Champion

Kornelija Viečaitė  
Teacher at the Colorado Lithuanian School



"En garde, Ready, FENCE!" This phrase was probably heard more than a hundred times one Saturday in May at the Denver Fencing Centre. This was the beginning of a series of sporting events organized by the Colorado Lithuanian School and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania. This event was dedicated to getting to know the modern pentathlon athlete, Olympic champion Laura Asadauskaitė, the sport she represents, and her achievements for Lithuania. Since it would be impossible for the children to try five sports in one day, fencing was chosen as the least familiar and the most exotic-looking sport for the children. Lithuanian children from all over Colorado were invited to compete in the event, and nobody was disappointed. The children learned the correct fenc-





ing positions and offensive and defensive tactics, got to know the different types of fencing swords, and also dressed up in a full fencing uniform. At the end of the initial training, the children paired up and competed in duels against each other. With their parents refereeing, the children scored points against their opponents, aiming their swords at the undefended open areas of the body. Fencing is all about speed and quick coordination, but the chances of injury are very low, even though the origins of the sport can be traced back to ancient wars and jousting. And our children came out of the class all fine - just very tired and sweaty.



For most of the children, it was their first experience of fencing. From the conversations after the event, it was clear that the Denver Fencing Centre may soon see an influx of new students because the youngest children in Colorado were particularly excited about fencing and were already asking their parents when they could come to their first training session.



We are grateful to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports for its financial support.





**DĖMESIO!**  
**FECHTAVIMO UŽSIEMIMAS**  
**VISIEMS KOLORADO VAIKAMS!**  
**2023 m. balandžio 29 d. 14 val.**  
**RENGINYS NEMOKAMAS!**

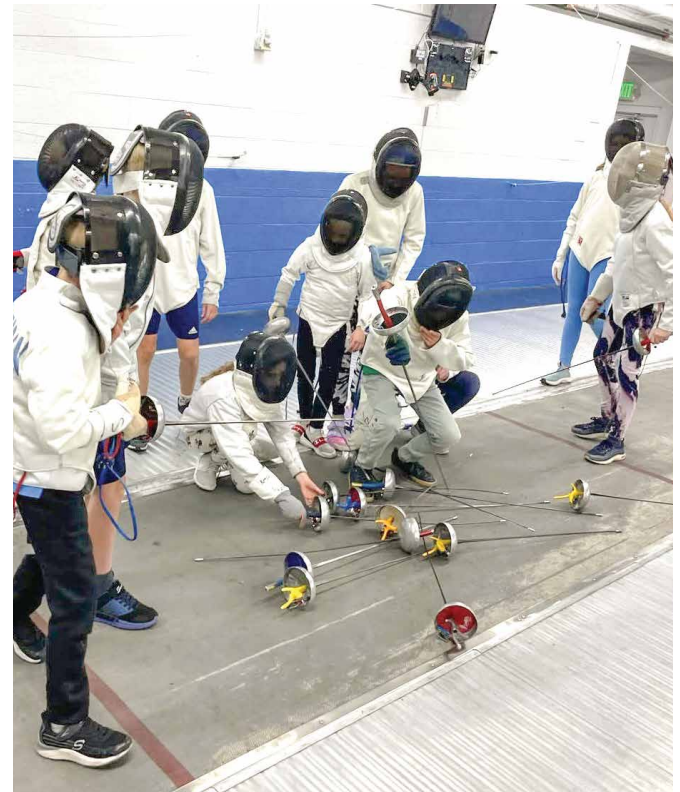


Kolorado lituanistinė mokykla kviečia visus Kolorado lietuvių bendruomenės vaikus į pirmąjį sporto renginių ciklo „Aš – kaip Lietuvos čempionas!“ užsiėmimą Denverio fechtavimo centre.

**VIETŲ SKAIČIUS RIBOTAS. REGISTRUOTIS EL.PSTU.**

VISA REIKALINGA ĮRANGA BUS DUODAMA VIETOJE,  
JUMS BELIEKA ATSIVEŽTI DAUG ENERGIJOS IR GEROS NUOTAIKOS!

**PROJEKTA REMIA:**  
**LR ŠVIETIMO, MOKSLO IR SPORTO MINISTERIJA**



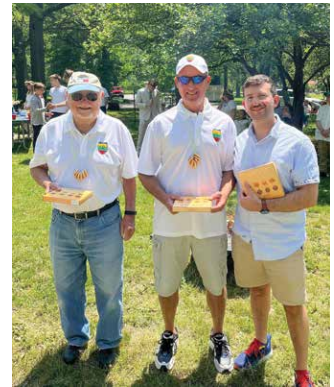
# Joninės

*Aušra Lelis Clifford*

The Edward Gervickas Lithuanian Heritage School along with the Lithuanian Heritage Society of Rochester sponsored Joninės (St. John's Day Festival) on June 17 at Seneca Park in Rochester, New York.

115 people attended this annual event.

As people arrived, they were greeted by Regina Juodeikienė, Irene Musteikis, and Sue Liutkus at the welcome gate decorated with oak leaves and Lithuanian sashes. Guests washed their hands and faces with the "morning dew" and were offered a piece of rye bread and a sample of krupnikas. Rūta Gečas, Žara, and Ramunė Philippone taught people how to make flower wreaths, vainikai. A traditional program, led by Skirmantė Juodeikytė Philippone and Aušra Lelis Clifford, had attendees gather around the campfire. Everyone took a handful of sugar to throw into the fire to pay respect to the Goddess of Fire, Gabija. Pieces of rye bread and small cups of milk were consumed to pay homage to our ancestors.



# our community



The festivities continued by honoring those with the names Jonas and Janina (John/Jane). This year there were three: Jonas Lelis, Jonas Vosylius, and Giancarlo Denaroso. They each received a necklace made of small bagels and a box of Lithuanian chocolates. This day was also Eva Yeatahie's 8th birthday! Everyone sang *Ilgiausią Metų* to Eva, a student at the Gervickas School.

*Paparčio žiedas*, the magical fern blossom, only appears during the summer solstice. People young and old went into the woods to find this magical plant. It is believed that the person who discovers this flower will gain incredible power, wealth, and lasting happiness!

Following the program, a delicious buffet lunch was served. There was a large variety of meats, salads, fruit, and desserts. *Ačiū* to Susan Zlotkus Jenkins, Nida Lelis, Laimutė Vosylius, and Rūta Monoenko for organizing all the food! While people were enjoying their lunch, musicians Valdas Ramanauskas and Vaclovas Povilonis from Toronto, Canada played lively music. After lunch, there were numerous games, led by Aistė Peel, Reda Juodeikis, and Irmunda Bergoltz, for the children including tug-of-war, sack races, and relays. Everyone enjoyed the beautiful day filled with music, dancing, and laughter.

The afternoon concluded with a raffle for many prizes including Lithuanian bread, *krupnikas*, *vyšninis*, chocolates, and t-shirts. Algimantas Musteikis, the LHSR board member, thanked everyone for coming and expressed our communities' support of Ukraine in its war against Russia. A total of \$270 was collected in donations for RocMaidan, the charitable arm of the Ukrainian Cultural Center of Rochester, New York.

*Ačiū* to everyone who helped make this *Joninės* a huge success!





our community



# 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

71. 1947

From the liberated European countries began to arrive by boat not only tractors, machines, electrical instruments and installations, but also shoes and some fabrics. To our store, they regularly brought baked bread, no longer just flour, oil, and sometimes even candy. I immediately hurried to acquire a pair of boots and a scarf. By the way, the boots happened to be Czechoslovakian.

We started raising rabbits, chickens, a pig. Our garden was fully planted. In the spring, Stasiukas planted a hedge around our little house: he planted black and red currants densely and, in the second row, mountain ash, and grain. Everything sprouted beautifully and was green. In the middle of that garden, he made a table.

We planted asters and rue, which we had gotten from Lithuania. Our hearts were glad to look at those flowers and that greenery. It was heartwarming to breathe in their scent, but also sad: those flowers reminded us of our homeland, so dear and so close to us, yet so far away and unreachable. The new teacher brought a trophy camera. He constantly went to our garden to have his picture taken. Of course, we also did not miss the chance to immortalize ourselves in this land of Siberia by taking some pictures.

One evening, I was busy in the potato patch. Glancing at the road, I noticed three men turn off the road onto the path leading to our house and hurry their steps.

A militiaman and two civilians. I became a little nervous: that uniform never meant anything good. I looked a little more attentively. Lord! One of the civilians was my husband! I ran to meet him; maybe he was only being brought past our house. But no, he was turning into the gate. I ran closer. The militiaman raised his hand a little in warning, but not angrily. He said with a smile, “You weren’t expecting him? Only please, go quickly into your house.”

They all came into the little house. I was completely overcome. Was it real or a dream? I started to greet my husband. I kissed his lips and his eyes. They were wet like mine. He held and kissed my hands, and only after



Siberian Sky. Photograph by Rolandas Žygas

an hour did we begin to talk:

“Are you back for good, Liudeli? Why do you have an escort?”

“This man has been released under the supervision of the militia. He’s from Veronika, and I am being brought to court.”

“You’d better speak Russian so that we would understand also,” said the militiaman with a smile but not sternly. “This man and I have to will leave tomorrow, but you’ll be able to talk all you want. We’ll sleep over. Only see that you don’t show yourselves to anyone. Don’t invite anybody. I’ll go look around to see who’s in your store.”

He took off his pack with documents, put it on the shelf, and hung the belt with his revolver above the door on a nail. “Watch these things,” he said, leaving with the other man. My husband remained. What a militiaman! What a fighter! Such trust!

If the superiors found out, he himself would wind up in jail. How different people are from one another, even officials!

“Ziutiūne, prepare something better, we have to welcome my escort properly.”

I ran to the store, bought some vodka—without that, it wouldn’t be a reception.

I whispered a word to Stasiukas.

When I came home, I found a chicken with its head cut off. I quickly prepared it and cooked it. I made a good sauce, and mashed potatoes. The militiaman, having gone out, stretched out on the grass in the garden and only came in when I invited him to supper.

And we had a celebration.

Even though I was very fearful, I pulled my husband’s dossier out from the packet, and I managed to read quite a lot of it. During the interrogation, the testimony of witnesses included two Lithuanians: Šičkus and Lazauskienė. I was surprised to read that Dr. Šakenienė had given assurance that Žukauskas Liudas was healthy and able to march to the holding place for interrogation. I knew that he was at that time very weak and had not yet recovered from his beating. I only found out later, after having talked it out with Šakenienė, that the security had called her and, without any ceremony, had told her to sign a prepared writ. I also learned that, after that last beating into unconsciousness, Doctor Liuda Vesilova had been summoned. Later, in preparing for the march, she was summoned again to sign the documents about the condition of his health. She absolutely refused to sign the *spravka*\* for Žukauskas for the march: “Too weak for the journey.”

It was different for her. She was a *komsomolka*. Her father was a high official in Tomsk, and as I mentioned, she had strong backing. Besides, a physician’s ethics does not allow her to sign that a person is well when he can barely move. No one could force her. It was another situation for Šakenienė. She was a deportee and did not have the courage to disobey. She did not know what the consequences would be. Besides, she had two under-age children. So for these reasons, she signed.

My husband and his escort slept in our house. In the morning, having had a rather late breakfast, they went off to Parbig.

Shortly thereafter, the trial took place. After that, I did not see my husband for almost 10 years. He returned only after Stalin’s death in 1956.

And only then did I learn many details of the interrogation and the trial process. I also learned about life in the prison camp and how he survived while men who had been as strong as oak trees did not return.

After a while, I went to Parbig. I was walking past the commandant’s office when I was stopped and asked to come into the militia bureau. The militia, the security, and the commandant’s office were in the same building. I went into the office. There sat the militia chief, the

commandant, and one of the more loathsome militiamen—Karabeinikov.

“Did your husband stop by at your house at Melstroy?” asked the militia chief.

“Yes, he did!”

“How long did he stay at your place?”

“He came towards evening and left the morning of the following day. I cannot tell how many hours since I do not have a watch. When he came to you, you know more precisely,” I answered quite calmly.

“He lived at your place for three days!” shouted the loathsome militiaman.

I glanced at him mockingly and quite cold-bloodedly said, “Your information agency is worthless. My husband lived at my place a whole week while you only have information about three days.” The commandant Romashov smiled a little and the militiaman became confused. The militia chief cut in: “After all, really?”

“I already said so. Besides, I believe you have received the cover letter of the convoy. Look in it for exact information,” I answered rather gruffly.

“You should have informed us.”

“Nonsense! To leave my husband, whom I had not seen for a whole year, and his escort, run 8 km on a muddy road to let you know or ask for a permit. What do you think? Or maybe you would have sent a carriage.” I retorted very angrily.

“That’s enough, we know everything.”

“I already see from Karabeinikov’s report how you know everything. Get out!”

“With the greatest pleasure!” I turned around and left.

“What a *baba*! What a *baba*!” \* I heard Karabeinikov’s voice saying.

That no one in Melstroy knew of the visit, as I had ascertained the day after I saw my guests off. To reach the little path overgrown with bushes, they only had to pass two *chatas*. They left at a time when everyone from those two was already at work. And about a half-hour after they had left, Juozukas’ school friend, Seriozha, came running up out of breath and said, “Auntie, run quickly to Parbig. I met your old man on the road under arrest. Maybe you’ll see each other.”

“Thank you, Seriozha, I’m going right away.”

*Spravka* – information about something, a certification.

*Baba* – see note Ch. 33.

## 72. LIFE BECOMES MORE NORMAL

Time was slipping past. One year turned into another. New officials replaced old ones, and we were still the

same, only not hungry and not ragged.

Stasiukas was still the bookkeeper at the Zagotzerno store, Liudukas was still the “god of lights” at the MTS, Juozukas was almost finished with high school.

All Poles had left long ago, some families of wealthier Jews had also left, and we were to remain for “our lifetime.” However, nothing is forever in this world.

We were strongly supported by my sisters and my former co-workers.

Lithuania, although it had been impoverished by all sorts of invaders, was still richer than Siberia. Having met a young Jew in Parbig, I asked him, “Aren’t you leaving for Lithuania soon?”

He answered, “Well, if I had three gold watches and 1000 rubles, then I would also leave.” That was a hint as to how much it had cost the wealthier ones to leave.

Writing to my youngest sister, who always asked in her letters if we could return soon, I reported that young man’s comment. She at once reacted very emotionally, sending me 1000 rubles by postal money transfer.

The three of us pooled our capital and, having sold a very good English Boston wool fabric my sister had sent, intending for a man’s suit, I bought a cow.

We had already eaten one of the pigs and were growing two others. We would be able to give the required quota to the government but still have some meat left for ourselves.

Each time I received a *spravka* that it was permissible for my husband to receive packages, I would prepare one. It was permitted to send up to 8 kg at one time. In truth, it was real torture to send those packages. You had to pack it and then bring it to the post office.

There they unpacked everything, dumping it all out. You then had to pack everything up again and nail it down on the spot. Then the receiver took it, put it on one end, banged on it, hit it, turned it over on the other side, and pounded on it again, shaking it. He then said, “*Shabarshit*, it’s rattling. Repack it!”

You pack it again. You nail it down again, but it rattles again. And so you become so weary, you sweat. It is not a package; it is a strain on the nerves. If it were paper, it would be a different story—you’d stuff it in, and it wouldn’t rattle. I wrote about this to my oldest sister, Slavėnienė, and received the answer: “Dear sister, at least don’t take this worry upon yourself. Let Liudas send me the *spravkas* rather than to you. As many permits as he sends me, so many packages he’ll get from me.”

How thankful I was to my dear beloved sisters! How I missed them! How I wanted to see them, to kiss them, to cry with them, to tell them all my woes, my injustices, all my hardships!

Will my dream ever come true? Will my longing ever be satisfied?

### 73. LITTLE BIRDS THROWN OUT OF THEIR NEST

A commission came from Lithuania to gather together fatherless orphans and bring them back to Lithuania but without their mothers, who remained in Siberia. From Parbig they took a group of children in similar circumstances, among them all three of Aleksienė’s girls. They gathered up the children from Burka, Kenga, and from the neighboring villages.

But even that muted joy did not last long for the children. Between the years 1947 and 1952, a storm of new deportations arose and many of the children that had been returned to Lithuania were grabbed again, as they stood, and were brought back to Siberia via the prisons.

In this way, the Aleksaitės came back, and Skukauskienė’s children, Birutė and Jonukas. The fate of these two families is well known to me, since two of their girls: Janė Aleksaitė and Birutė Skukauskaitė later became my daughters-in-law.

I already mentioned that our family lived well. That means we did not suffer from hunger or cold, but we were stifling from moral violence and the longing for our country. To cheer us up, I made parties. During holidays, our own (Easter and Christmas) and Soviet ones (the October Revolution, May Day, Constitution Day), the young Lithuanian people would come over. They would all flock together from Parbig. It was warm and cozy in our house, and we had an oil lamp by this time.

In exchange for rabbit skins given for tanning, we were allowed to shop; that is, we were allowed to buy a certain amount of white flour, sugar, and oil.

In this way, I was able to bake some cookies, to make some *braga* (a drink similar to Lithuanian *gira*,\* only fermented longer and with hops). I also baked some potato *kugel*,\* prepared mushrooms, steamed beets, and most importantly, I baked a large quantity of rabbit meat in the bread oven. All the guests ate their fill and danced. Juozukas and Stasys played the guitar while I was most enchanted by Lithuanian songs.

Even though they were moving and clutched at the heart, they gave us moral strength and determination, though we had to brush away a tear or two. We sang the following song among others:

*Leiskit į Tėvynę  
Leiskit pas savus  
Lietuva brangi, mano.  
Kad tu gude nesulauktum  
Nebus kaip tu nori  
Bus kaip Dievas duos  
O, ne tavo įsakai nedori*

Let us go to our Fatherland,  
Let us go to our own,  
Dear Lithuania, my Fatherland.  
May you Russians not rejoice.  
It won’t be as you want.  
It will be as God gives  
And not your immoral decrees.

We celebrated Christmas Eve more modestly, only within our family, but Juratėlė, who had lived with us some time before, and another one of Juozukas' classmates, Jonas Vileišis, always came over. Liudas would also come home. Of course, we all gathered late since work and school ended when it was already dark, and everyone also had to get up very early when it was still dark to make it on time to work and school the next day. But in spite of everything, neither the cold, nor storms, nor the dark, nothing could deter them as they briskly plodded along the taiga road, knowing that they would find a warm house, a bright light, a cozy atmosphere at the Christmas table covered with tasty foods, but also with "Plotkelės,"\* which my dear old mother sent.

On Christmas Eve in 1952, Liudukas came home. Having shaken off the snow together with the cloud of cold, he stepped into the *chata*, and behind him, there were two more little forms. "Mamyte," he said, "I've found two little birds thrown out of their nest. Warm them up."

"Give them to me quickly. Don't let them into the air that's too warm right away."

I had not finished with my warning that they might not be able to recover when Liudukas, throwing down his scarf and snow-covered cap, smiled and continued, "Don't fret, they won't perish in your care. Here are my little birds." He pointed to the children and said to them, "Take off your coats, children!"

They looked around bashfully and didn't dare obey Liudukas' urging: I quickly walked up to the girl:

"Get undressed, get undressed. The warmth will certainly not be dangerous to you. What are your names?"

Liudukas introduced them: "This is Birutėlė, and this is Jonukas." Having pulled me into a corner of the kitchen, he whispered in my ear: "The poor little things are orphans. They have neither a father nor a mother. Just don't question them too much. You'll find out everything later."

"Warm yourselves up, little guests," I said. "Make yourselves comfortable, as if you were at home," I urged the children, having poured them each a cup of hot tea and put out some bread. "Juozukas and his friends will be home shortly and then we'll have Christmas Eve supper."

Stasiukas brought a small armful of fragrant hay. We covered the table with a tablecloth. In its center, I placed the *plotkeles*, but Juozukas and his friends were still not there. So we continued to wait. I knew for certain that he would be back. He did, but only at about 10:30, bringing friends.

We shared the *plotkeles* and started to set out the food—herring, baked fish, steamed peas, *kisielius*, and enough bread for everyone to eat his fill.

In what way was this not like Lithuania?

There we used to have 12 foods; here there were only half that. But even so, it was a rare family that had such *Kūčios*.\* Juozukas told us why they were late. He and Vileišis

were living at the dormitory while Juratė with her mother was at Dr. Šakenienė's. The boys had decided that, as soon as the hour for doing homework was over, they would dash out of the dormitory, stop by at Juratė's, and then all of them would set out for our home in Melstroy. They did not even prepare supper for themselves. (The dormitory only gave them a living space and bedding, but their clothes were their own. Each one prepared his own food, whoever knew how, whoever had something. The dishes were also their own.)

They were already dressed and were about to go out when they met the teacher on duty. "Where are you off to? Get undressed immediately and go to bed!" he ordered them and waited a good hour until everyone was asleep. Some fell asleep, some just pretended, but the light was put out. It was quiet. Juozukas and his friend quietly slipped out and quickly stopped by at Juratė's.

Nobody stopped them this time, and ignoring the -40 C cold, they come puffing to our house in Melstroy.

And so the whole large family of us sat at the *Kūčios*\* table. Three of our sons, two boys and two girls of other mothers. My children at least knew that their father was alive and where he was while the other four didn't have any idea what the fate of their parents was. Jonukas Vileišis and Juratėlė at least had a mother, but Birutėlė and Jonukas Skukauskai, having been brought a second time to the unfriendly Siberian land, did not even find their mother—truly, they were naked, wingless little birds that had been thrown out of their nest.

Sad stories from Siberia, and not only from Siberia, were not lacking in our lifetime, but the tragedy of these two children, I wish to relate separately.

They lived with their mother in Burka. It was a settlement in the region of Parbig, deeply shoved into the *taiga*, about 60 km distant from the center. In 1947, when the commission that had come from Lithuania was gathering orphan children together and transporting them to Lithuania, Jonukas and Birutėlė had somehow not been included in their number. A mother is always a mother. Skukauskienė had a sister in Lithuania, a very good and caring woman. She was constantly sending packages and money to Siberia. The property of the Skukauskas family was in her charge; whatever she could manage to save she did. Now, she was supporting her sister's family. And so, Skukauskienė, having come to the regional center, made an arrangement with some pilots (in those days, twice a week, small mail planes would fly in from Tomsk). She gave them 1000 rubles, and they promised to deliver the children secretly to Tomsk.

The mother prepared some food for the journey; she sewed some money into the pocket of their clothing and sent her children off to Lithuania. Jonukas and Birutėlė reached Tomsk without any hindrance. But to get a train

ticket from there was not so simple. Documents were checked carefully and strictly: who was traveling, from where, to where, and why.

There were many traveling.

The train to Moscow only went every two days.

The children did not get tickets that day. They were tired already. By the time they reached Tomsk, they were falling asleep. But they couldn't sleep on a bench in the station or on the floor.

It was not allowed, and they might be robbed even though their wealth was not great. But they remained sitting there, hugging their little bundles.

They lasted one day and one night.

When they went for tickets the second day, there still weren't any. The little sister began to cry, and the little brother—a man is still a man—was more resolute. Having restuffed the bundles for Birutė and having ordered her sternly not to doze off and to be alert, he set out to the city to look for a hotel, so that they could sleep and rest. But the city was unfamiliar, and there was no hotel nearby.

The child walked and looked about. There were many passers-by, but no one could say exactly where there was some little hotel. Finally, Jonukas met a woman who, having seen the boy looking and standing around, asked him what he was looking for.

"A hotel," he answered.

The woman is surprised, "What do you need a hotel for?" she asked.

"We are going to Riga, but it's already two days and we haven't been able to get tickets. We need to rest."

"Why didn't the older ones go to look for a hotel and not send you?"

"Because there are no older ones. I'm the older one; my sister is even younger,"

The woman raised her arms in surprise and asked why they, minors, were setting out on such a journey. She asked from where and how they had come to Tomsk. Jonukas told her everything. The woman turned out to be a railroad worker. She brought Jonukas back to the station and told him to wait. The children waited worriedly. What would happen next? But the woman came back soon, took the children to the children's room in the station, showed them a bed, and having taken their things locked them up in a closet and told them to sleep peacefully.

"When it's possible, I'll get you tickets. Sleep."

The next day, she brought the tickets, gave them back their things, and having taken them to the railway car, entrusted them to the care of the conductor.

In such a way, they arrived in Moscow, and there, the conductor put them on a trolley bus, which went to the railroad station for Riga. Here the way was not difficult for the children. They did not have to change trains until Riga, and they already knew Riga somewhat. It was their luck that they happened upon a woman who was also going to Biržai. And from there, Nemunėlio Radviliškis was not far. Here was their parents' home; here their aunt awaited them.

\**gira* - bread-cider.

\**kugel* - grated, baked potatoes, see Ch. 19.

\**Plotkelės* - Christmas wafers.

\**Kūčios* - traditional Christmas Eve Supper at which twelve dishes are served, but no meat.

\**kisielius* - a thin cranberry pudding,

bridges

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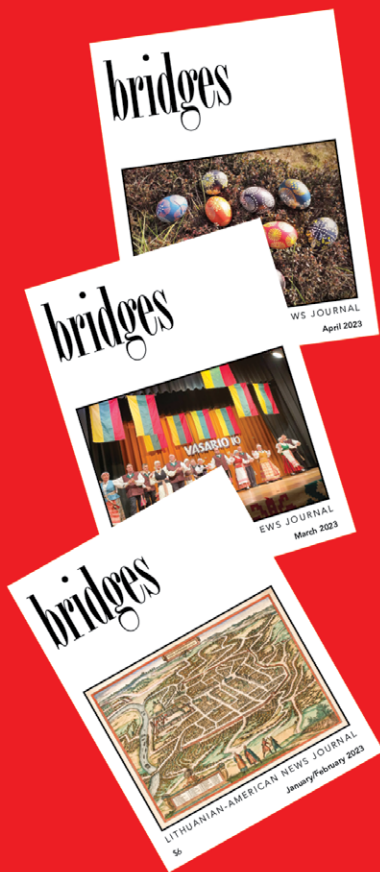
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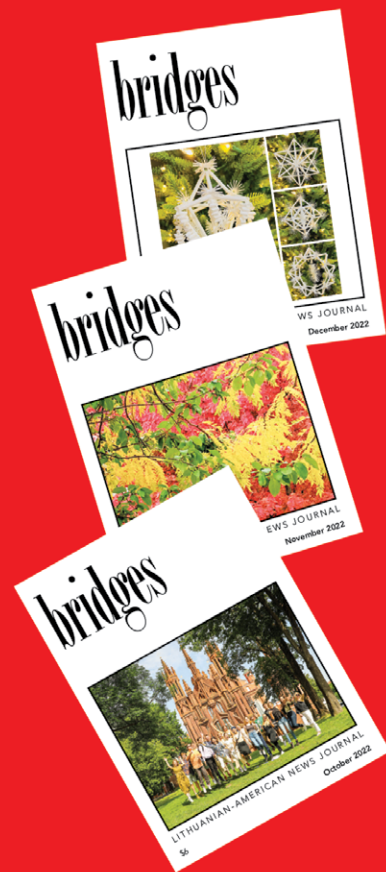
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