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3



3 Modernism and National Identity:
Lithuanian Diaspora Architecture
in the United States
By Karilė Vaitkutė

12



12 President of Lithuania Visits
Los Angeles, California
By Laura Kush

14



14 Lithuanian American Youth Fix Old
Lithuanian Cemeteries

18 Rock Opera Jūratė and Kastytis
in Chicago

18



9 SOBRIETY FOR LITHUANIA
By Martha H.

15 109th Convention of the Knights of Lithuania
By Laura Kush

current events

19 Security. Ukraine. Covid-19. Business. General.

21 UNEXPECTED JOURNEY
By Juzė Avižienytė Žukauskienė

Front Cover: Honorable guests and leaders of the Lithuanian American Community XXIII Council 3rd Session in Denver, Colorado

Back cover: Participants of the LAC Session in Denver, Colorado

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Modernism and National Identity: Lithuanian Diaspora Architecture in the United States

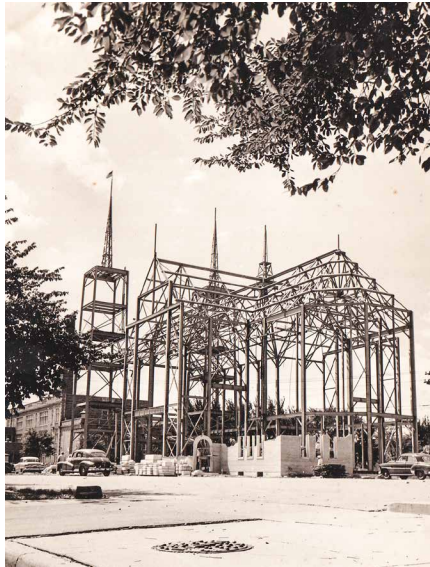
Interview with Architectural Historian Vaidas Petrulis
Karilė Vaitkutė

Vaidas Petrulis, an architectural historian and researcher at Kaunas University of Technology (KTU) Institute of Architecture and Construction, is currently a scholar-in-residence in Chicago. Vaidas Petrulis teaches architecture theory and criticism to students at KTU, and his historical research focuses on the history of 20th-century Lithuanian architecture. His articles and monographs cover the Lithuanian interwar period and the architecture of the Soviet era. By the way, it was announced just a few weeks ago that Kaunas modern architecture has been included on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Vaidas Petrulis was one of the preparers of the nomination. Petrulis came to Chicago as a researcher supported by the Baltic American Freedom Foundation. The topic of his thesis is "Modernism and National Identity: The Architecture of the Lithuanian Diaspora in the United States".

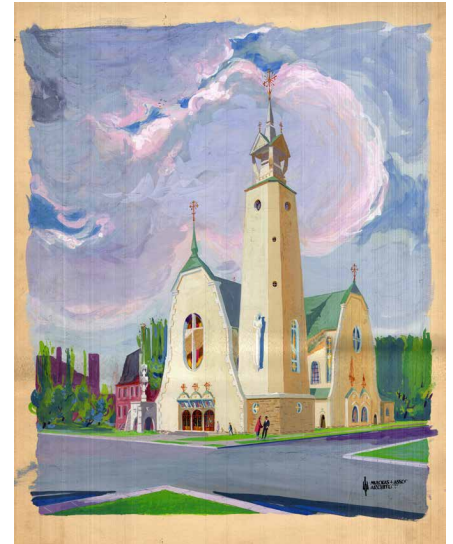
Please tell us about the goal of your project.

The goal of the project is to explore the creative legacy of Lithuanian emigre architects who came to the United States after World War II. After graduating from Lithuanian or European schools and having already started their professional careers in independent Lithuania, this generation of architects was forced to remain in the Soviet-occupied country or to become refugees and end up in Displaced Persons (DP) camps. Continuing to practice under conditions of emigration, Lithuanian architects not only sought opportunities to fulfil their professional ambitions but also, in many cases, attempted to express a political stance in architecture. This is how the concept of Lithuanian architectural style, which I am analyzing in my research, was formed.

The 1950s and 1960s are known in the history of world architecture as the period of mid-century modernism and late modernism. Architectural trends became universal, and ethnic features became less and less relevant in the globalizing trends and were seen as naive, not reflecting global trends. The loss of urban, natural, and cultural context, as well as the international logic of architectural development, made this task much more difficult for the Lithuanians and encouraged them to immerse them-



Construction of the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Chicago. From the Mulokas Family Archive



Sketch design of the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Chicago, architect Jonas Mulokas. From the Mulokas Family Archive

selves in symbolism. Nevertheless, this architecture is an important fragment of Lithuanian architectural history, a kind of testimony to the Cold War, which needs to be better known and presented to a wider audience.

Which centers do you visit and work at? What kind of material do they hold? Have you found any useful material?

In Chicago, I collect and research historical materials at three institutions - the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, the Lithuanian Studies Centre, and the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT). The Lithuanian centers in Chicago have historical data on architects, their works, buildings, correspondence, and letters from that period. The Balzekas Lithuanian Cultural Museum mainly contains iconography - images of the period. The archival material at the Lithuanian Studies Research Centre documents the activities of the American Lithuanian Engineers and Architects Association (ALIAS) and the World Lithuanian Engineers and Architects Association (PLIAS). These two organizations have long been

among the most important institutions in shaping and organizing the life of Lithuanian architects.

During the time of research, it became clear that the Lithuanian intellectuals had quite different opinions about what Lithuanian architecture should be in the diaspora. Some progressive-minded architects and cultural figures saw architecture as a Lithuanian manifestation of mid-century international modernism. Meanwhile, another part of the society sought to uphold traditional architecture, a romantic view of the past and looked for ways to create an architectural style that was characteristic of Lithuanians. Interestingly, the most important Lithuanian buildings built in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s, such as the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Mar-



Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Chicago, photo by V. Petrusis, 2023.



Marian Monastery in Chicago, architect Alfredas Kulpa-Kulpavičius, photo by V. Petrusis, 2023.

quette Park, the editorial offices of *Draugas* newspaper, the Marian Monastery, and the Youth Center, represent the Romantic approach. Here we can find Lithuanian symbolism and motifs transferred from roadside chapels to architectural space.

In the library and periodical archive of the IIT School of Architecture, I am studying the architectural trends of Chicago, the United States, and different other countries of the 1950s and 1960s, and in this way, I aim to present Lithuanian work in the broader context of American architectural history.

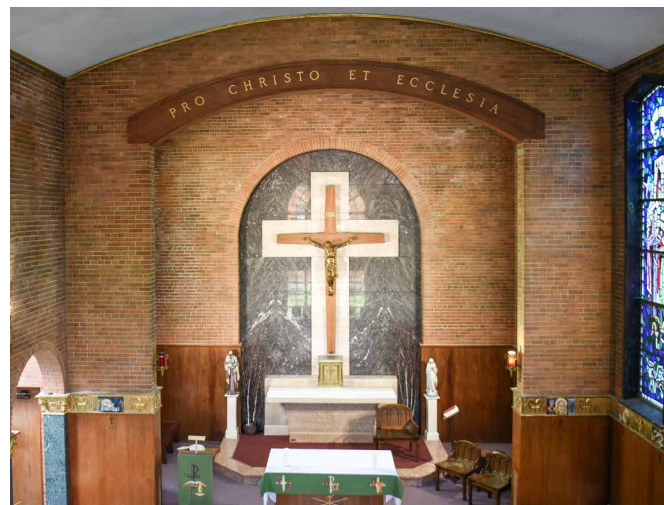
You have traveled around the United States. Which Lithuanian sites have you visited? What was interesting and useful for your research? Which buildings, in your opinion, are interesting architecturally, historically, or in other ways?

Of course, the first thing I had to get to know was the work of architect Jonas Mulokas. The Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in the Marquette Park neighborhood in Chicago is of particular importance. This symbolic building, dedicated to the 700th anniversary of the coronation of Mindaugas and completed in 1957, is a striking example of the quest for the Lithuanian style. In addition to the main authors of the church, architect



Fragment of the chapel of the Marian Monastery, photo by V. Petrusis, 2023.

Jonas Mulokas and artist Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas, a whole host of important Lithuanian artists contributed to the construction and furnishing of the church: Kazimieras Žoromskis, Vytautas Kašuba, Ramojus Mozoliauskas, Adomas Varnas and others. Interestingly, the construction of the church was extremely modern. The steel structures, designed by engineer Antanas Rudis, are essentially the same as those used in the construction of skyscrapers. However, the metal frame was clad in decorative brickwork. The neo-baroque and ethnic architectural elements clearly distinguish the church from the general architec-



Fragment of the chapel of the Marian Monastery, photo by V. Petrulis, 2023.



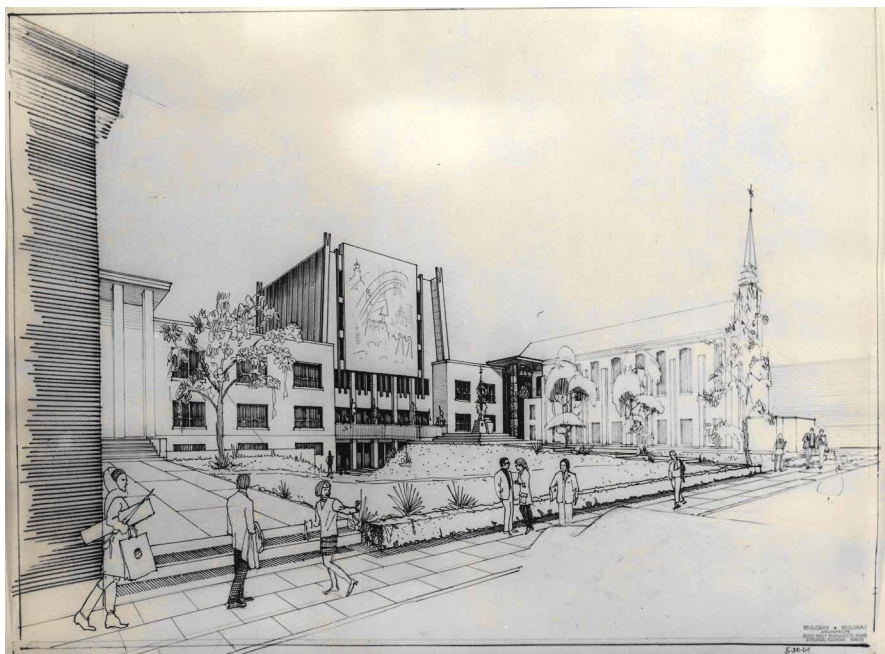
Draugas editorial building, architect Alfredas Kulpa-Kulpavičius. Photo from the funds of the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture

with the Neris company carrying out the construction and the engineer Juozas Augustinavičius supervising it. The chapel is a particular highlight of the complex, not only for its characterful exterior but also for its subtle interior lighting and décor. The interior space is probably one of the most impressive Lithuanian sites in Chicago created at that time.

A particularly interesting place and important for Chicago's Lithuanian identity is the complex of the Jesuit monastery and the Youth Center. The monastery moved out not too long ago. The visual highlight of the complex is a colored brick wall with a silhouette of the Vytis.

tural context of Chicago. Particularly striking are the characteristic towers, the tops of which are based on an interpretation of Lithuanian way-side chapels.

The same chapel motifs can be seen in the complex of the Lithuanian Press House, the editorial office of Draugas and the Marian Fathers Monastery. This is another particularly significant Lithuanian building in Chicago, built after World War II, which has remained in Lithuanian hands to this day. The design of this impressive complex was prepared by Jonas Kovalskis-Kova, an architect trained in France who started his career in Lithuania in 1935. Costing around one million US dollars, the ultra-modern building was constructed by Lithuanian professionals,



Sketch design of the central part of the Youth Center in Chicago, architect Jonas Mulokas. From the Mulokas Family Archives.

The monument "To the Fallen for Lithuanian Freedom", designed by architect Jonas Mulokas, with the Vytis in the background, is perhaps one of the most symbolic Lithuanian architectural images in Chicago. The early part of the complex was designed by engineer Juozas Augustinavičius and architect Jonas Kovalskis-Kova. By the way, it is interesting to note that the architect Stasys Kudokas's drawing for the Youth Centre has also been discovered. The Vytis of the Youth Center, built in 1973, was one of the last attempts to create Lithuanian architecture.

It is also important to mention the Church of the Transfiguration of Christ in Maspeth, New York, designed by Jonas Mulokas. The project won recognition not only among Lithuanians but also among Americans. Although Mulokas was not yet on the official list of architects in New York at that time, he was awarded first prize in the sacred architecture category for the Church of the Transfiguration of Christ at the American Registered Architects Annual Con-

but there is no doubt that it is one of the most important examples of Lithuanian heritage in the United States.

Leaving the big cities behind, the Franciscan Monastery in Kennebunkport and the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception Monastery with the ALKA Museum in



Youth Center and the monument "To the Fallen for the freedom of Lithuania", photo by V. Petrusis, 2023.



The Chapel of the Cross for the Fallen for Lithuania's Freedom in Kennebunkport, by architect Jonas Mulokas, photo by V. Petrusis, 2023.

vention in 1962. Thanks to this event, a photograph of the church appeared on the cover of *The New York Times* on 2 December 1962, next to the world-renowned Terminal 5 at Kennedy Airport designed by Eero Saarinen. The building in the New York City skyline is rather modest in scale,

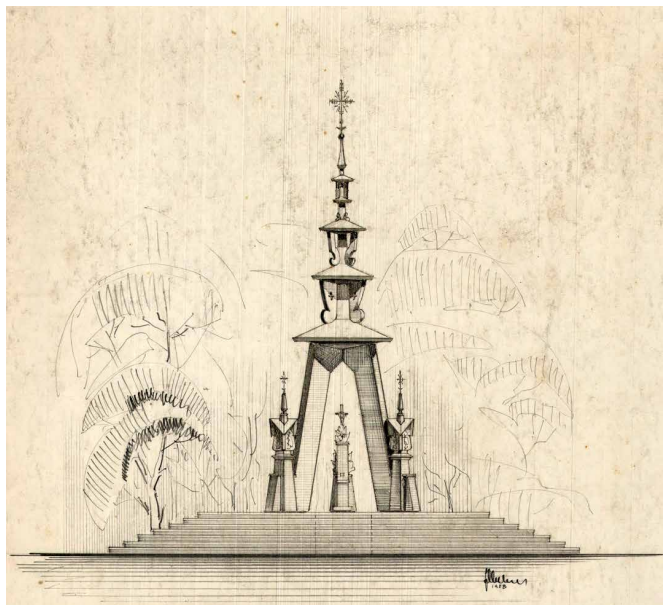
according to the plaque, were moved from the Vatican Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair. While the relief in the Kennebunkport Abbey is widely known as the work of Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas done for the Vatican Pavilion, Hamden's work is stylistically similar to

Putnam have a particularly friendly atmosphere, beautiful nature, and Lithuanian architecture. Both monasteries have survived as vibrant bastions of Lithuanian identity and at the same time as interesting architectural ensembles. A number of Lithuanian artists and architects who came to the United States after World War II contributed to the construction and decoration of both monasteries, including Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas, Alfredas Kulpa-Kulpavičius, Jonas Mulokas, Kazys Varnelis, Vytautas and Aleksandra Kašuba, and others.

During my time here I encountered some mysteries as well. Perhaps the most interesting one is the sculptural reliefs at the Church of the Assumption in Hamden (CT), which,

Jonynas's, but a more precise historical record of authorship has yet to be sought.

One of the most interesting discoveries was in Toronto, where I met architect Nijolė Liačas. Together with her husband, also an architect, Vaclovas Liačas, she has been working for a long time in major Canadian architectural firms. Interestingly, Vaclovas Liačas did his Master in Architecture at Yale University under the famous Paul Rudolph. The chapel in the Anapolis Cemetery complex, designed by Vaclovas and built in 1969, was recognized as one of the best Canadian architectural works of that year.



Sketch design of the Stations of the Cross Chapel in Kennebunkport, architect Jonas Mulokas, from the Mulokas family archive.



Sculpture of the Virgin Mary (by Vytautas Kašuba) and mosaic (by Aleksandra Kašubienė) at the Convent of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Putnam, photo by V. Petrulevičius, 2023.



Sculptural reliefs at the Church of the Ascension, Hamden (CT), art. Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas (?), photo by V. Petrulevičius, 2023.

These buildings are only a small fragment of the Lithuanian architectural heritage in North America, which should be known as an important part of Lithuanian architectural history.

Where will readers be able to see the results of your research?

The research will contribute to the monograph on the architect Jonas Mulokas, which I am currently working on with my colleagues Dr. Brigita Tranavičiūtė and Dr. Paulius Tautvydas Laurinaitis at KTU. This monograph is funded by the Lithuanian Science Council. The Mulokas family architectural archive has now come

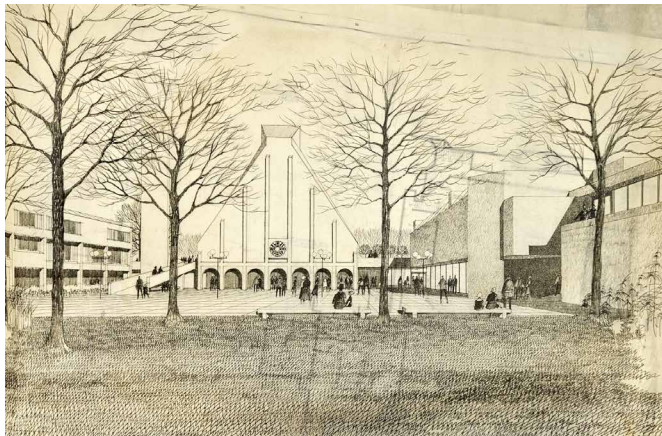
to Lithuania. It contains thousands of drawings, sketches, and other documents by Jonas and Rimas Mulokas. This archive is the basis for a future monograph. In the meantime, my goal in United States is to get an impression of the context in which Jonas Mulokas worked. Therefore, as a researcher, I am also interested in other designers who were designing for Lithuani-



Sculptural reliefs at the Church of the Ascension, Hamden (CT), art. Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas (?), photo by V. Petrusis, 2023.

of Architecture in Chicago on 30 October. In addition to this lecture, I will be sharing my observations on the architecture of the Lithuanian diaspora at the Balzekas Lithuanian Cultural Museum. I am also contributing to Chicago's academic community. In September, I gave a lecture on Soviet architecture to Professor Michelangelo Sabatino's architecture students at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Another result of the trip is a series of documentaries with the creative team of the Stop Juosta show, which is being produced for Lithuanian National Television. During my short but intense stay, I visited various places related to Lithuania - New York, Pittsburgh, Dayton, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, and Toronto. The documentary series is planned to be broadcast on LRT Culture in the spring season of 2024.



Sketch design of the Anapolis complex, architect Vaclovas Liačas. From the Liačas Family Archive



Chapel in the Anapolis Cemetery, architect Vaclovas Liačas. From the Liačas Family Archive.

ans at the time, as well as those who were involved in debates about the national style and the possibility of discovering Lithuanian character in architectural forms. The research in Chicago will significantly broaden our knowledge of the political, social, and cultural context, and will allow us to look at the architect's work on a broader horizon.

The material and research gathered during my time in the United States will also be presented in public lectures. One of them, entitled "Architecture as a Political Statement: The Heritage of Lithuanians in the Post-World War II United States", will take place at the American Institute



Vaidas Petrusis at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture. Photo by Karilė Vaitkutė

SOBRIETY FOR LITHUANIA

By Martha H.

The year was 1990. *Bridges* had recently published an article about the devastation alcoholism had created for the Lithuanian people. The article said that there was a centuries-long history of using alcohol to suppress the people of Lithuania. Part of that history of oppression includes that “In 1795, after the Third Partition of the Lithuanian-Polish state, the Lithuanian lands were divided between Russia and Prussia. The slogan ‘A drunken nation is easier to rule’ became a cornerstone of tsarist policy in Lithuania.” The article stated that in the recent past, the Soviets made Vodka inexpensive and very available as their way of oppressing the Lithuanian people.

In June 1990, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was having an international convention, which they hold every five years. That year it was held in Seattle, Washington. I was there. The opening day ceremony of these conventions (similar to the opening ceremony of the Olympics) includes a parade of flags representing people from each participating country. I saw the Lithuanian flag at the AA opening ceremony and recognized, from my childhood, the three bands of color -- yellow for the sunshine, green for the farmland, and red for the bloodshed. I knew that at least one person was in Seattle representing Lithuania. I investigated and, indeed, it WAS one person, Romas, an acclaimed artist, who did not speak English but was accompanied by two Lithuanian Americans, Linas, and Daiva, from Santa Monica, California. At one point in our meeting, Linas said, “We’re going to have an AA convention in Vilnius next year.” As it turned out, we not only had a convention but traveled throughout Lithuania, helping to support the beginning of AA in Lithuania. Right there, in Seattle, we began our adventure.

One of the specific groups at the Seattle AA convention was an attorney’s group, and there was a man who looked “SO Lithuanian” to me. I asked him if he was, and he said he was Lithuanian American (his wife was Polish American). They liked the idea of going to Lithuania the next year “to carry the message of recovery to alcoholics.” Word spread and a group of people joined forces and prepared to go. There was Ed from Boston, George from Chicago, Marta from New York City, Gus, Kastas, Audra, and Ida from Los Angeles, Leo from North California, Linas and his two young sons (Vytautas and Aras, 11 and 9) also from Los Angeles, Ernie, and Cathy from Potomac, Maryland, and Loretta from Seattle. Four of the people in our group were members of Alanon, a 12-step program for family and friends of

alcoholics. (We all know that alcoholism affects the family, friends, employers, and very much society as a whole.) In all, we represented many regions of the United States.

Some background information on AA in Lithuania

This is how Romas learned that AA existed. It began with Romas’s wife, Jadvyga. She had been frustrated and in great despair. It’s not easy being the spouse of an active alcoholic. She was instrumental in helping her husband to stop drinking. She was responsible for getting the first translation (from English into Lithuanian) of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* (commonly known as the “Big Book”) into Romas’s hands. For one and one-half years, she welcomed early AA members into her home to hold AA meetings. At first, there were three or four people, and then it grew to eight to ten people until they found their permanent meeting place.

After the AA convention in Seattle, Romas spent the summer of 1990 in Los Angeles with Linas. At that time, there were two attempts at a translation of the “Big Book” from English to Lithuanian. They worked with those two translations to produce a third, more accurate, translation. The translation was then sent to AA General Services in New York City to print. Linas raised funds for a printer and paper. There were paper shortages, in addition to many other shortages in Lithuania at that time. They translated AA pamphlets from English to Lithuanian to distribute during our trip in 1991. Romas returned to Lithuania, and he and other people in AA in Vilnius, the capital, where the first group of Lithuanian AA had formed, prepared a road-map for our trip to cities. The cities have wonderful sounding names – Penevėžys, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Kaunas, Alytus, and Palanga.

We, in the USA, were on our way. As I was writing this article, Linas told me that at the time of our trip was June of 1991, the U.S. State Department had advised Americans not to travel to Lithuania. It was too dangerous! I’m happy I didn’t know this fact before or during our trip. We all just plowed ahead. We arrived at the airport in Riga, Latvia, and were met by AA members from Vilnius who greeted us with great excitement, smiles, and flowers! I remember hearing someone in our group saying, “People don’t bring flowers like this in LA.” The Vilnius group members arrived on an old bus that appeared to be on its last legs -- a wreck. This was the bus that would take us throughout Lithuania

for the next week or so. When traveling to Vilnius, the bus stopped at the Lithuanian border, where the Soviets had blown up the border patrol customs building. It was still smoking. We saw bullet holes in the side of a military truck.

This was our introduction to Lithuania. When we arrived in Vilnius in 1991, there were more remnants of the Soviet Union and hard times. People had suffered through communism and were recovering. There were some Soviet tanks and a few soldiers in the streets of Vilnius, and I remember one day, as I was walking through a park in Vilnius, a statue of Lenin was being removed. People were still mourning the killing of fifteen people by the Soviets at the Vilnius Radio Tower in January 1991. Store shelves were pretty much bare, and so were the people's wallets. But Lithuania was free again!

A day or two after we arrived, we all met at the Vilnius AA meeting, which was held in a room in the Vilnius Chemical Dependence Center. Lithuanian AA at that time was three years old (dating from Romas's first contact with AA and the introduction of AA in Lithuania.)

After the meeting, the director of the detox, psychiatrist Emilis Subatavičius, was introduced to us. Dr. Subatavičius had come to the United States in 1992, a year after our visit; he stayed in New York City in the home of one of our members. In New York City, he met with the director of alcohol rehab and was interviewed on a Lithuanian language radio program about alcoholism and recovery in Lithuania at that time.

Dr. Subatavičius then went to an alcohol rehabilitation center in Florida, where he met and studied with the director and his staff. At that time, there were no alcohol/chemical dependency rehabs in Lithuania. Dr. Subatavičius changed that. Dr. Subatavičius was instrumental in helping other Eastern European countries form medical facilities for alcohol/chemical dependency patients.

Members (about fourteen at that time) of the Vilnius group were very generous and opened their homes to us in the days immediately after our arrival while we stayed in Vilnius. Our new friends were all such welcoming hosts. We felt comfortable and "at home" in our new surroundings. The son of my hosts had a large poster of Sabonis on his bedroom wall. Sabonis was his hero.

The Vilnius group not only welcomed us into their homes while we were in Vilnius, but they also found places for all of us to stay overnight while we were touring the country. When we were ready to begin our journey, about twelve people of the Vilnius AA group -- Romas, (his son, Algirdas, then 12), Anzelmas, Vytas,

Rasa, Algis, Aušra, Ričardas, Birutė, and others joined us in our bus ride across Lithuania. People in the Vilnius group planned where we would go.

During the day, we met with patients in detoxes; they were, basically, in psychiatric hospitals. In the evenings, we held town hall meetings for citizens of the cities to talk to them about how alcoholism affected us and what we did to get sober. There were notices in the newspapers across the country to announce that we were coming and that all were welcome to these gatherings. At the detoxes, we were warmly greeted by the hospital staff, after which we held our AA meeting with the patients. This meeting consisted of an AA member speaking for about twenty minutes about his life while drinking, how he stopped drinking, and then about his life after getting sober.

Patients were asked to try to identify with the speaker's feelings. The patients, along with us, would then share some of their drinking stories. It was helpful that members from the Vilnius group were there. I remember, in telling his story, one of the American members mentioned that he had a swimming pool. A patient said that if he had a swimming pool, he too could get sober. A Vilnius member then spoke up and said that he was sober for two years, that he lived in Vilnius, did not have a swimming pool, and that sobriety was possible -- and one could then live a full and rewarding life.

On another occasion, a doctor at a detox told us that an elderly patient, who had been detoxed many times before, was about to be discharged and that he surely would start drinking again. Our group said to her that this was where we came in. We would meet with this man and support him and do our best to help him stay sober. At all the detoxes we went to, we left AA pamphlets with a contact phone number in Vilnius. This number was actually Romas's home number, and for the next year or so, people would call, sometimes in the middle of the night, and Romas and two or three other people would, a day or two later, drive sometimes for hours to help the active alcoholic.

One evening at our town hall meeting, we spoke with the family and friends of alcoholics. One woman asked, "How do you live with an alcoholic? How do you act?" We discussed AA for the patient and Alanon for the family. I remember another woman who begged us to take her son back to the U.S. with us. "Put him in your suitcase," she said. Her son, she said, "could not stop drinking." There was nothing she could do about it.

At this and other town hall meetings, we left AA Pamphlets and AA contact information.

We barnstormed Lithuania. For close to two weeks, we traveled to Penevėžys, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Kaunas,

Alytus, Palanga, and Neringa – and smaller towns along the way. Our hosts saw that we not only did our AA service but that we saw some of the beautiful wonders and historical sights of Lithuania. On our bus trip, we would drive past a forest of gleaming white-barked birch trees, and see a red fox running alongside the road. We would look up and see a big stork nest on top of a pole. We saw many hand-carved wooden wayside crosses on our trip. I brought a chip from the bottom part of my father's tombstone in New York City and buried it in the earth by a wayside cross in Alytus, near where my father was born.

I remember Loreta suggested that I pick some *rūta*, which I pressed in my little prayer book. We went to Trakai, a medieval castle. Not far from Šiauliai, we went to the Hill of Crosses. We traveled to Rambynas, a pagan site, on the way from Klaipėda to Kaunas alongside the Nemunas River. In Neringa, we walked along the shores of the Baltic Sea. Algis, from the Vilnius group, prior to our coming, spent many days combing the beach for small pieces of amber, which he gave to each of us. In the sand dunes of Neringa we held an informal AA meeting.

In 1995 (four years after our trip), AAers created an annual one-week summer camp near the beach at Šventoji on the Baltic Sea. Whole families participate. There is swimming, walks on the beach, barbecuing, socializing, lots of singing Lithuanian folk songs, and AA meetings. Romas's young granddaughter, Fausta, told me how much fun she had during these vacations. "I loved it," she said.

We all returned to Vilnius with two or three more people that we had met along the way. A block away from our final destination, our dilapidated bus's transmission literally fell out. We were very near home, and we felt blessed that the bus did its job and we did our job of carrying the message of recovery to people suffering from alcoholism.

A carton of books with the new translation of the "Big Book" -- the version that Romas and Linas had worked on had arrived. The books hadn't yet arrived before we left, so we all were holding our breath. Again, there were notices in newspapers across the country inviting everyone who was interested. Some people from neighboring countries joined us. We had AA meetings and lots of fellowship. People found the hope that was missing from their lives.

So ended our trip to Lithuania to "share our experience, strength and hope." We all left with many amber necklaces, bracelets, pins, and earrings, which we had purchased along the way. My relatives from Alytus -- I had visited them for the first time -- surprised me and came to Vilnius with a huge *raguolis* (tree cake) to take

back to New York City.

We all left with love for the Lithuanian people and country and hope that sobriety would flourish there. Both the group from the United States and the people from the Vilnius group formed a very close bond during our travels on the bus together and experienced the very emotional meeting of so many people across the country. I shall always remember the tears, including mine, as we waved goodbye to our friends in Vilnius.

Lithuania's 25th AA anniversary, 2013

Some months before Lithuanian AA celebrated its 25th anniversary, we learned that our beloved Romas suddenly died. It was a shock to all of us. Sober so many years, Romas left a wonderful legacy. Instead of one AA group in Vilnius in 1991, there were now 120 groups across the country and many thousands of sober people. (In June 2023, there were 150 groups across the country.)

Two members from the original American group in 1991, Linas and I, went to Lithuania to celebrate their 25th Anniversary. There was a memorial service at Romas's gravesite. He is buried in the Vilnius Antakalnis Cemetery in the section for artists and writers. (Lithuania appreciates and honors their artists and writers.) At Romas's memorial mass, a bird unexpectedly entered the church and was flying around. The priest said that Romas's spirit lives on. Indeed, it does.

Before leaving Lithuania, I called Dr. Subatavičius to say hello. We first met Dr. Subatavičius when we came to Lithuania in 1991. Dr. Subatavičius continues to work with and help alcoholics. He remarked what a "boost" our coming from the United States gave Lithuanian AA.

A day or so after the service for Romas, Linas and I were joined by four members from the Vilnius group -- Anzelmas, Pranas, Egidijus, and Rimas. Rimas was our driver and, at that time, had ten years of sobriety. Also joining them was Jadvyga, Romas's wife, who had become a good friend of the group. We went in a small van to some of the cities the original group had gone to on our trip in 1991. It was nostalgic and fulfilling. We saw many sober Lithuanians.

When we got back to Vilnius and the festivities were over, Rimas said his mother wanted to invite us to tea in the gazebo in their garden. I discovered that Lithuanian "tea" consists of lots of cheeses, meats, pastries, and, of course, the black (or dark) bread I grew up with. It was June, and the garden was in full bloom, very colorful and fragrant. When Linas and I left, Rimas's mother picked a big bouquet of peonies, gave them to us, and said, "Thank you for giving me back my son."

President of Lithuania Visits Los Angeles, California

Laura Kush

Following his address on September 20, 2023, to the UN General Assembly in New York City, the President of the Republic of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda, and his wife, the First Lady Diana Nausėdienė, visited St. Casimir Catholic Church in Los Angeles, CA, the center of the local Lithuanian community, on September 21, 2023 in the evening. The event was hosted jointly by the Council of the Lithuanian Community of Los Angeles and the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in Los Angeles.

Upon their arrival, the President and First Lady were welcomed by members of LB Spindulys, the Lithuanian folk dance group in Los Angeles, who performed the kepurinė dance (welcome dance with straw hats) and taken to

the Brazdžionis memorial garden for a greeting by a delegation of dignitaries and community leaders (susitikimo delegacija.) Before entering the church, President Nausėda and his wife were given a tour of the parish hall and grounds

where they were able to view the beautiful tile mural of Blessed Teofilus Matulionis commemorating 80 years of the St. Casimir parish community and a "Welcome" banner for past parishioner Gintaras Grušas, Archbishop of Vilnius, from when he returned to St. Casimir Church last year to administer the sacrament of Confirmation.

Upon entering the church where invited guests were already seated, the President and First Lady were seated in front of the church altar and formally introduced by Tomas Umbrasas from the Lithuanian-American Community in Los Angeles ((Lietuvių Bendruomenė) and Maryte Newsom from the Lithuanian Heritage School and invited to speak.

The President talked about supporting Ukraine and the refugees from Ukraine who are now living in Lithuania. He said the war in Ukraine is a global issue threatening both food security and nuclear safety and suggested a possible solution would be to open more export



lanes for Ukrainian grain, including via Baltic Sea ports, but added that the solution is not to lift sanctions on Russia. He said Russia's recent decision to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus and the announced suspension of its participation in New START, a nuclear arms reduction treaty between Washington D.C. and Moscow, means Russia is preparing for more war and not settling for peace. He declared that the war of unprovoked Russian aggression must stop, with an immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal

of troops and military equipment from the 1991 internationally recognized borders and territorial waters of the Ukrainian Republic and expressed full endorsement of the peace formula presented by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Lithuania's head of state also said post-war justice should also deal with Belarus, which he believes participates in the war by providing military assistance and facilitating the offensive from its territory.

Nausėda also talked about the importance of Lithuanians having more children.

He acknowledged that the Lithuanian diaspora is important to the Republic of Lithuania: that we are all part of Lithuania. He was pleased to see that L.A. Lithuanians are carrying on our traditions and customs.

The First Lady of Lithuania shared that she was happy to be in Los Angeles and spend time with the local Lithuanian community. She very much liked the young people dressed in national costume and was pleased to

see the Lithuanian School still functioning.

Representatives of several organizations as well as other Lithuanian community members were in attendance. Each organization had one representative in the susitikimo delegacija that welcomed the President and his wife upon their arrival. Organizations represented include the Knights of Lithuania, LB Spindulys, Lithuanian Heritage School, Baltic American Freedom League (BAFL), Lithuanian Children's Hope, the LA Chapter of the Daughters of Lithuania, Lithuanian Scouts, Lithuanian National Guard (Siauliai) and the Lithuanian-American Community in Los Angeles ((Lietuvių Bendruomenė.) A microphone was passed among the organization representatives to introduce themselves and give a short mission statement about their organization and present gifts to the President and First Lady.

Mykolas Andrulis, President of Knights of Lithuania Los Angeles Council #133, spoke in English. After saying a "Welcome" to the President, he asked that members of the organization in attendance stand up. He said the organization was founded 110 years ago and has been active in Los Angeles for over 70 years providing needed aid to children, single mothers, and the elderly in Lithuania. He said the organization also provides scholarships

to local high school students of Lithuanian descent.

The President then took questions.

The evening ended with the singing of "Lietuva, Tėvyne Mūsų," the Lithuanian National Anthem, led by members of LB Spindulys.

Organized in 1913, the Knights of Lithuania began as a youth organization. Its purpose was to unite the Lithuanian youth living in the United States, and through them, preserve Lithuanian culture and restore freedom to Lithuania, then divided between Russia and Germany. It has since become a family fraternal and charitable organization that aims to keep alive the Lithuanian language, customs, and traditions while also stressing the importance of Roman Catholic beliefs. Adhering to their motto "For God and Country," the Knights aid the Lithuanian Pontifical College in Rome through St. Casimir Guild, Inc., supply Roman Catholic reading materials and additional needed aid to Lithuania through the Knights of Lithuania Foundation, Inc., and promote a deeper understanding, reverence and knowledge of the Blessed Mother's appearance in Siluva, Lithuania in 1608. The organization is a member of the Lithuanian American Council and the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Federation.

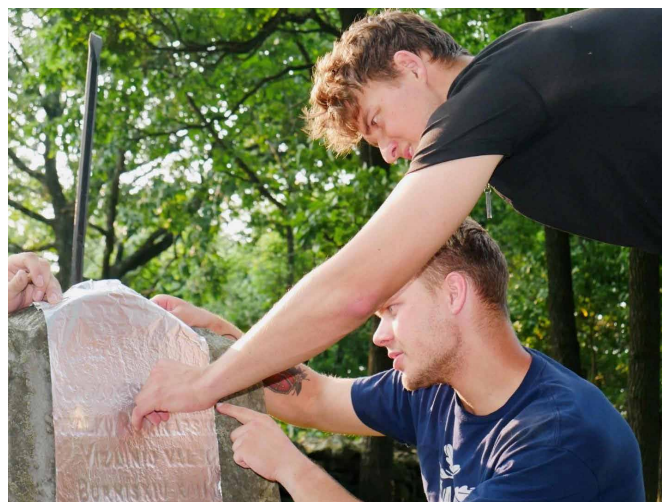


Lithuanian American Youth Fix Old Lithuanian Cemeteries

The third expedition of the Lithuanian American Community and the Lithuanian American Youth Association's project "Roots" took place on July 31-August 5 in the anthracite coal region of northeastern Pennsylvania. The participants were Lukas Urbonavičius (Omaha), Emilija Dzeržanuskaitė (Chicago), Kęstutis Žalpis (Portland) and Lukas Šmidtas (Florida). Project leader Vilius Žalpis noted that this time there were three "third-wavers" and one, his nephew Kęstutis, was a descendant of the first wave of immigrants. Lukas Šmidtas arrived after the expedition had started and would like to participate again next year.

The third "Roots" expedition, according to its leader Vilius Žalpis, was the most interesting of the three. The Girard Estate never gave permission to enter the abandoned St. Joseph's Cemetery, although the correspondence and paperwork, which began in April, continued until the last day. Despite all the difficulties, it was an intense and interesting five days, with a variety of useful activities. Most importantly, the young people learned a lot about the history of Lithuanian immigrants, especially the first wave. In those five days, they have learned more than during their entire time in Lithuanian language schools.

Next year, we plan to ask at least a few LAC chapters to cover the traveling expenses for at least one participant from their community. We are planning to make a short film about the three years of expeditions, which should



interest the young people to participate.

We are grateful to our main sponsors, the Lithuanian Foundation and the Knights of Lithuania. Their donation of \$1,000 will cover the cost of the airfare to Pennsylvania.

Please support the "Roots" project, organized by the Lithuanian American Community in cooperation with the Lithuanian American Youth Union, and vote in the "The Power of Lithuania" initiative competition initiated by the President of the Republic of Lithuania! Voting will be open until October 18th.

How to vote? Go to the project platform "Lietuvos galia" website [https://www.lietuvosgalia.lt/iniciatyvos/stipri-lietuva/...](https://www.lietuvosgalia.lt/iniciatyvos/stipri-lietuva/), click on "Cast your vote", enter your email address. A confirmation email will then be sent to your inbox. Click on the confirmation in the email you receive to have your vote counted.

THANK YOU!



109th Convention of the Knights of Lithuania Held September 15-17, 2023

Laura Kush

The 109th Convention of the Knights of Lithuania, hosted by Council 158, was held on the shores of Lake Michigan on September 15-17, 2023. Meetings were held at the Michiana Village Community Center in New Buffalo, MI.

Delegates from out-of-town enjoyed excellent accommodations and hospitality a short distance away at the 4411 Inn & Suites, recently renovated in the minimalist style, in Michigan City, IN.

A pre-convention boat cruise and bonfire on the beach with hot dogs and s'mores was available on September 14th to members who arrived early. Recorded entertainment was provided on the boat by Paul Strolia, C-157, Lemont, IL, and live music on the beach by Kurt and Denise Zakarka Benuomo (also from C-157) and Alex Deksnis, Lakeshore C-158, and friend Ari Augustinaitis. The party continued later that evening around a large fire pit and outdoor games area at the 4411 where revelers met up with other delegates who had just arrived.

Mass was celebrated Friday morning at the Michiana Community Center by Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis, the organization's National Spiritual Advisor and rector of the Pontifical Lithuanian St. Casimir College in Rome, Italy with Maryte Bizinkauskas and Vytenis Senuta, both from C-1, Brockton, MA, serving as cantor and lector, respectively. With the American flag at the front of the room and the Lithuanian flag draped on the mantle, the First Plenary Session of the Convention was called to order by President Alex Fletcher, C-96, Dayton, OH, and delegates were asked to stand for the singing of the National anthems of the United States and Lithuania and the Vyčių himnas of the organization. After a roll call of Supreme Council officers by Recording Secretary Liza Macke, C-157, Host Council President Maria Deksnis, and her daughter, Convention Chair Andreja, welcomed everyone to the area and introduced Dr. Rima Kašubaitė Binder, Vice President of the Board of Directors of the Friendship Botanical Gardens in Michigan City, IN for a cultural presentation. What started as an ambitious horticultural exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair of 1933-1934 became permanent in 1936 in Michigan City as the International Friendship Gardens. The original concept was a plea for world peace based on the universal love of flowers. The name was changed in 2014 to attract a wider and younger audience and to indicate a stronger emphasis on educational pursuits and the new direction in which the gardens are being taken. The Lithuanian Garden, one of the original

ethnic gardens made possible by a large monetary donation from Lakeshore Council #158 of the Knights of Lithuania, holds a special significance with stone monuments honoring Lithuanian presidents beneath spruce trees as memorials of the pre-Soviet period in the country's history. The first spruce tree was planted by Antanas Smetana, the first President of Lithuania, to mark the country's independence following World War I. The acquisition of a Lithuanian wayside cross which stands in another part of the garden was made possible through a donation from the Mid-America District of the Knights of Lithuania. Dr. Binder thanked the organization for their generous donations and encouraged Convention attendees to visit the Gardens while in town.

After breaking for lunch, the Convention Presidium was elected and Convention Rules of Order were adopted.

The President's State of the Organization and Treasurer's reports were read and the Honorary Membership Committee's recommendation that Honorary Membership be conferred on Teresa Balciunas DiCello, C-38, Kenosha, WI, Cathy Nakrosis, C-90, Kearny, NJ, Michael Petkus, C-96 and Ruta Lee, C-133, Los Angeles, at next year's Convention was approved.

Ritual Chair Georgianna Macke, HM, reported that 3 members will receive their 4th Degree at an upcoming District or Council Mass as none were in attendance. A moment of silence was held for former Spiritual Advisor Rev. Msgr. Albert Contons, HM, C-17, South Boston, MA who passed away on March 1, 2023, before the session was adjourned following a closing prayer by Rev. Arštikaitis.

That evening everyone enjoyed a "Friendsgiving" meal with turkey and "all the fixin's" and danced to the music of the band "2 Trailers Down" comprised of Denise Zakarka Benuomo, C-158, on vocals, her husband on guitar, and their friend on keyboards. Many people stayed until the end and then continued partying back at the 4411 Inn & Suites at the fire pit and various members' rooms. Once everyone retired for the night, outside doors were decorated and snack bags were placed on the doormat by "the Phantom," a time-honored Convention tradition that had been dormant for several years.

Saturday morning Mass, celebrated again by Spiritual Advisor Arštikaitis at the Michiana Community Hall, was said for all benefactors of the Knights of Lithuania as well as for members who had died in the past year with a special request for John Cizauskas, C-72, Binghamton, NY who had his 1st heavenly birthday that day.

Following an opening prayer by Rev. Arštikaitis, the Second Plenary Sessions began with the Trustee's Report and a discussion about the Convention site for 2024. Two sites were proposed with delegates voting for Portland, ME as next year's site hosted by the Junior Class of 2000 and for Las Vegas, NV in June of 2025 hosted by the Supreme Council. Charitable reports from the St. Casimir Guild and Knights of Lithuania Foundation were given by C-16 Chicago delegates Rob Martin, Jr. HM, and Aldona Zajauskas, respectively. Rev. Arštikaitis thanked members for the support the Pontifical Lithuanian College has received from the Guild and gave a short presentation on how funds have been used. Rob Martin, Jr., HM, C-16 reminded delegates that next year is the 75th Anniversary of the St. Casimir College in Rome and that the

organization is planning a trip to Rome in June for the occasion followed by a week in Lithuania for the Song & Dance Festival. Financial arrangements are still being arranged so those interested were asked to inform him of their desire to go. Presidium Chair Rita Johnson, C-19, Pittsburgh, PA, then invited Debbie Miller, C-72, and Marlene Warren, C-7, Waterbury, CT from the Membership Revitalization (formerly New Ideas) Committee to speak. Debbie talked about how change is difficult but necessary for an organization to thrive and grow. Marlene reported on the accomplishments of the Committee in the past year including the production of a four-color die-cut membership brochure, advertising materials for local Councils and Districts to use, and the creation of a new and dynamic website. She presented a national advertis-



Supreme Council photo by Debbie Miller.

Sitting, left to right: Amber District President, Barbara Miller, HM, C-72; Spiritual Advisor, Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis, Rector of the Pontifical Lithuanian College in Rome, Italy; President, Maryte Bizinkauskas, C- 1; Webmaster & Facebook Administrator, Pamela Gardner, C-72; Recording Secretary, Liza Macke, C-157.

Standing, left to right: Vice-President, Rita Johnson, C-19; Public Relations Chair, Laura Kush, C-133; Financial Secretary, Marlene Warren, C-7; Trustee, Michael Petkus, C-96; Treasurer, Deb Martin-Rudmin, C-16; Ritual Chair, Georgianne Macke, HM, C-157.

Not pictured: Trustee, Catherine Nakrosis, C-90; Legal Advisor, Alexander Domanskis, C-16; Honorary Member Chair, St. Casimir Guild, Inc. President & Vytis Editor, Robert Martin, Jr., HM, C-16; Vytis Business Editor, Mary Beth Slakis, C-16; Lithuanian Affairs, Language & Culture Chair, Birute Litvinas, C-72; Knights of Lithuania Charities, Inc. & Scholarship Fund Chair, Alex Fletcher, C-96; The Knights of Lithuania Foundation President, Aldona Zajauskas, C-16; Our Lady of Šiluva Fund President & Mid-Atlantic District President, Elena Nakrosis, HM, C-90; Mid-America District President, Susan Binkis, C-112; Archives Coordinator, Norma Petkus, C-96; and New England District President, David Boucher, C-78.

ing plan for the coming year and urged the adoption of an online membership application and payment process that could also be used to accept donations.

After a lunch of homemade chili and cornbread, the Third Plenary Session began with an opening prayer from Rev. Arštikaitis. Reports for the Our Lady of Šiluva Fund and the Knights of Lithuania Charities were given and the slate of Officers for the 2023-24 Supreme Council was presented by Elena Nakrosis, HM, C-90 from the Nominating Committee. Maryte Bizinkauskas, C-1, Brockton, MA, was elected President and Rita Johnson, C-19 was elected Vice-President. Liza Macke, C-157 remains Recording Secretary, and Debbie Martin-Rudmin, C-16 remains Treasurer. Marlene Warren, C-7 was elected Financial Secretary, and Michael Petkus, C-96 was elected to the first year of a three-year term as Trustee. (Cathy Nakrosis, C-90 was elected Trustee last year and, as such, is in her second year of a three-year term.) Birute Litvina, C-72 was elected Lithuanian Affairs, Language & Culture Chair, and Laura Kush, C-133 was elected Public Relations Chair. Several resolutions were passed and a final donations report was given. The session ended with a closing prayer and the 109th Convention was adjourned. All agreed that this year's Convention theme, "Embracing the Autumn Breeze: A Time for Reflection and Renewed Purpose" had been realized.

Saturday evening was "Una Bella Notte" at the Michiana Village Community Center. Alex Fletcher, C-96, Scholarship Fund Chair, announced four recipients for the 2023-24 academic year at the banquet, including Sophia Rickerl who is the daughter of Pamela Gardner & Paul Rickerl, and step-daughter to Kevin Gardner, all members of C-72. Sophie now attends Ithaca College in New York.

Robert Martin, Jr., HM, C-16 Honorary Membership Chair, bestowed an Honorary Membership on Barbara Miller, C-72. Barbara began her brief acceptance speech with a quote from Birute Litvinas, her Lithuanian school teacher, "Being Lithuanian is in our blood" but then added, "it's more than that." Her mother was 100% Lithuanian and her sister's earlier activities as a Lithuanian folk dancer inspired her to join the Knights of Lithuania when she moved to the Binghamton, NY area. She credits Casey & Irene Grikenis, Elizabeth Kuncze, as well as John Mankus, HM, for taking her under their wing. Barbara started their Junior council to pass on the Lithuanian heritage to her daughter, Deborah Joan Miller (who is also an active C-72 member.) She thanked the organization for the Honorary Membership and her family, Council, District, the Rochester (NY) Lithuanian community, and each person there for their part.

Liza Macke, C-157, introduced President-Elect, Maryte Bizinkauskas, C-1. Maryte gave a very emotional and moving speech stating that she feels the Holy Spirit moved her to accept the nomination in the belief that the mission

of her Presidency is to promote a deeper understanding, reverence, and knowledge of Our Lady of Šiluva in the United States whom she thinks of as "The Patroness of Fallen Away Catholics." Believing in the power of prayer, she asked that members – and all Lithuanians -- pray the simple prayer "Our Lady of Šiluva, Pray for Us" once a day in a concerted effort to bring family members and friends back to the faith.

Her words resulted in a standing ovation.

At the conclusion of the banquet, everyone was invited back to 4411 Inn & Suites where Tom and Barbara Miller hosted a celebration party.

On Sunday, members went back to the Michiana Community Hall for a wonderful Lithuanian farewell luncheon of sausage and sauerkraut, rye bread, kugelis, and cucumber salad and a cultural program of singing and dancing by Chicago's Laumė folk dance group directed by Vaida Indriliūnas. Theresa Balciunas DiCello, C-38, displayed her Lithuanian Christmas ornaments and weavings with instructions on how to make each. Everyone received a handmade Lithuanian straw ornament (as well as a woven bookmark if they chose) before heading over to St. Anne's of the Dunes Church adjacent to the campground entrance to Indiana Dunes National Park for the 1 pm Lithuanian Mass. (It has been said that the park's dunes and forests are reminiscent of Lithuania's Baltic coast.)

Just before the service, members of the newly elected Supreme Council in attendance were sworn in by Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis, National Spiritual Advisor, who also celebrated Mass. Maryte Bizinkauskas, C-1, and Denise Zakarka Bonomo, C-158, served as cantors.

Members who remained in town Sunday night were invited to the Deksnis' family home for cocktails and leftovers. Some of the younger members hiked to the beach for the sunset and fireworks.

The Knights of Lithuania is a national fraternal charitable organization founded in 1913 that aims to keep alive an appreciation of the Lithuanian language, customs, and traditions through cultural presentations, outings, and social events while also stressing the importance of Roman Catholic beliefs.

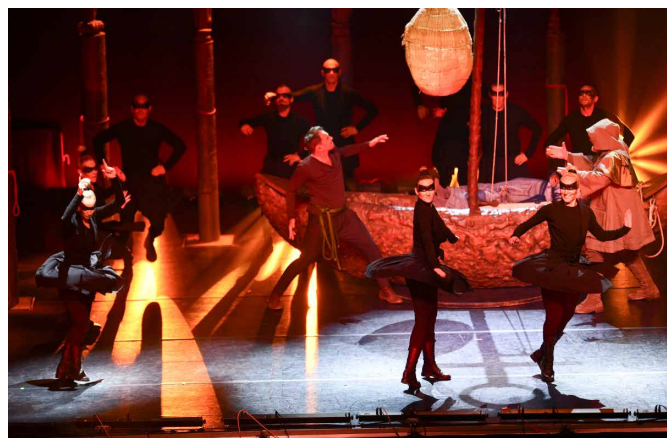
Adhering to their motto "For God and Country," the Knights aid the Pontifical Lithuanian St. Casimir College in Rome, Italy through the St. Casimir Guild, Inc., supply Roman Catholic reading materials and additional needed aid through the Knights of Lithuania Foundation, Inc., and promote a deeper understanding, reverence and knowledge of the Blessed Mother's appearance in Šiluva, Lithuania in 1608 through the Our Lady of Šiluva Fund, Inc.

The organization is a member of the Lithuanian American Council and the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Federation.

Rock Opera Jūratė and Kastytis in Chicago

On 16 September, the Lithuanian rock opera "Jurate and Kastytis" received a standing ovation at Chicago's Compass Arena for the first and so far, only American showing of this musical. It was watched by more than 1,000 spectators: members of the large Lithuanian American community, diplomats, and guests from other states. "Jurate and Kastytis is one of the most complex and massive stage works ever brought from Lithuania and performed on this side of the Atlantic. The performance was special because the company was joined by local dancers of Lithuanian folk dance group Suktinis. The group, which has been in existence for eighteen years, bravely took on an extraordinary and unprecedented challenge.

Giedrė Elekšytė Knieža, the director of the Suktinis



dance group and the chairperson of the LAC Cultural Council, said that she had discussed the idea of showing "Jūratė ir Kastytis" in Chicago with the composer Rokas Radzevičius twelve years ago, but at that time, it seemed to be more of a dream than a realistic possibility. It was a tough road and a number of obstacles had to be overcome before the dream came true on 16 September 2023. It was an extremely complex and high-budget project. Bringing a rock opera from Lithuania to the USA would not be possible without the dedication and support of many people.

The event would not have been possible without the support of the Lithuanian Foundation, the Lithuanian American Community and its Cultural Council, and the LAC Chicago Chapter. Their joint efforts and dedication made it possible for Lithuanians from the two countries to experience creative unity.

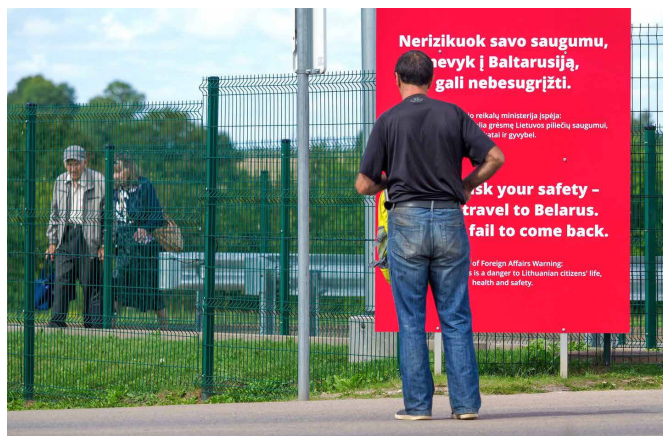


current events

Security

The presence of the Russian mercenary group Wagner in Belarus spurred a meeting between President Nausėda and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki at the strategic Suwalki Gap between Poland and Lithuania. This Gap separates Belarus from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad and would be a target of Russian aggression, much like its war in Ukraine.

In the first six months of 2023, over 200,000 Lithuanians traveled to Belarus, which is helping Russia in its war with Ukraine. Foreign Vice Minister Mantas Adomėnas urged Lithuanians not to travel to Belarus because of the dangers of being targeted by Belarusian intelligence services checking travelers' computers and social media accounts.

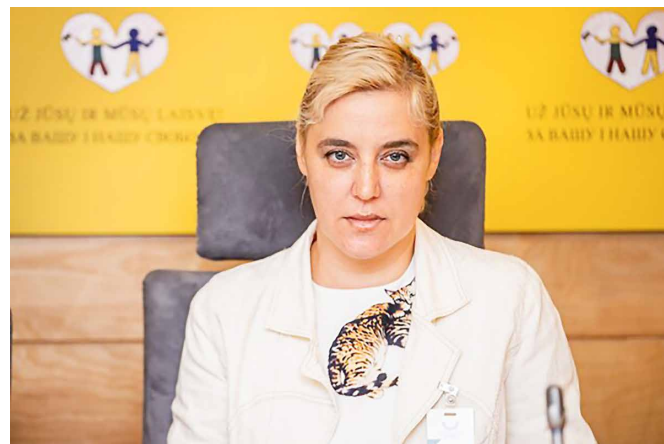


The presence of Wagner mercenaries in Belarus has spurred Lithuania to close two of the six border checkpoints with Belarus. The closed checkpoints will be fortified with concertina wire and barriers. Interior Minister Agnė Bilotaitė said that she will propose closing two more border crossings. The Polish Interior Minister said that if any "critical incident" occurs regarding the Wagner group, Poland and the Baltic nations will completely close the border with Belarus. Poland has already closed all but one border crossing with Belarus following the imprisonment of a Polish journalist and expulsion of Polish diplomats.

The U.S. Embassy in Minsk, Belarus advised U.S. citizens to leave Belarus "immediately," because of the increase in the number of closures with neighboring countries.

The Lithuanian State Security Department (VSD) claimed that Olga Karach, a well-known Belarusian opposition

activist (and 2024 Nobel Peace Prize nominee) living in Lithuania, has ties to Russian intelligence services and provided them with information on Belarusian opposition. She was determined to be a threat to national security and denied asylum in Lithuania.



Lithuanian border guards and the armed forces held joint exercises in Vilnius County to counter potential illegal migration and to respond to hybrid threats at the state border.

The Defense Ministry has proposed changes in the conscription law. It proposed that the current 9-month service time be reduced to 6 months for 35-50% of the draftees. The rest would remain at 9-months. It also proposes that higher education students will not be exempt. It noted that there is a shortage of 2,000 specialists.

President Gitanas Nausėda was unhappy that Defense Minister Arvydas Anušauskas disclosed that Lithuania plans to buy German Leopard tanks. He said that that information was restricted and not properly declassified.



Ukraine

The Defense Ministry has approved a new 41 million euro aid package for Ukraine, which includes Mi-8 helicopters, L-70 anti-aircraft guns, M113 armored personnel carriers, grenade launchers, ammunition, rifles, sea surveillance radars, and anti-drone equipment. Defense Minister Arvydas Anušauskas said that Lithuania has supplied Ukraine with more than half a billion euros in military aid since the beginning of Russia's invasion.

President Gitanas Nausėda met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv to discuss long-term military support of 200 million euros following the July NATO Vilnius summit. The support will include a Kongsberg (Norway)/Raytheon (USA) National Advanced Surface-to-Air Defense System (NASAMS) as an anti-aircraft system. President Nausėda spoke in Ukrainian to congratulate Ukraine on Ukraine's Independence Day at Sophia Square in Kyiv.

Covid-19

There are 15 Covid-19 patients in hospitals and few deaths. The 14-day primary infection rate increased to 10.4 cases per 100,000 people, with the 7-day percentage of positive tests at 8.9 percent. The public health authority indicates that 68.5% of the population has received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine.

Business

Swedbank P&C Insurance registered at least 400 claims throughout the Baltics related to a mid-summer storm that brought wind and hail damage to homes and autos. Claims amounted to 340,000 euros for home damage and 130,000 euros for car damage.



A Norwegian peer-to-peer (P2P) microlending company, Lendwill, has obtained a license from the Bank of Lithuania to establish an office in Vilnius. Users over 21 can lend/borrow small amounts of money with one another, whereas Lendwill keeps track of the loans and repayments for a credit history using blockchain technology. Founded in 2018, the Norwegian headquarters monitors the equivalent loans of \$25. to \$1,000. They will be hiring staff with experience in compliance and Anti-Money Laundering (AML) protocols.

General

The Vilnius District Court rejected a request to make the Vilnius City Registry Office register a same-sex marriage and enter the marriage contract in the Register of Marriage Contracts. The court indicated that the Seimas would have to recognize such a union.

Lithuania's Environmental Project Management Agency has received 38 million euros in EU funds for public sector groups to purchase electric or hydrogen-powered cars. Five thousand euros will be granted for each new car and 2,500 euros will be paid for used cars up to 4 years of age.

The Lithuanian Education Employees' Trade Union announced that they will stage a warning strike in mid-September prior to a possible walkout in late September to press for higher wages.



The Lithuanian Transport Minister anticipates passenger train service will begin between Vilnius and Riga in 2024 with a stop in Siauliai in northern Lithuania.

UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

Memoir of a Siberian Deportee

By Juzė Avižienytė Žukauskienė

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



Siberian Sky. Photograph by Rolandas Žygas

80. PARENTS' MEETING— ETERNAL DEFENSE

After the commandant announced to us deportees that we would stay where we were for our whole life and forcibly brought back the children (when they had been returned to Lithuania), they began to arrest the adults one by one. Our mood fell as did our desire to work. Juozukas began to do poorly in his studies. And not only Juozukas, but the others also studied without any enthusiasm. Such pupils as Jonas Vileišis, Jūratė Jasinskaitė, Liuda Ambrazevičiūtė Rachelė Marijampolskaitė, and Juozas Žukauskas were the stars of the class. According to one of the teachers, “The high performance scores of the school are due exclusively to the Lithuanians.” In the year 1953, these young people were already seniors. It was the last trimester. Their performance was plummeting.

A meeting of the parents is called. The first to speak is the “zavuch”—the director of instruction. He discusses the progress of the students, rather their falling behind, their behavior, their mood.

I sit there with an indifferent face. I think—it’s not my worry. But I am awakened from my apathy by the inspector’s words: “Even Žukauskas. He was an excellent student, one of the top, a good artist. But lately, he has become quite lax. He seems almost impassive. He doesn’t even react to remarks.” Then she turns directly to me, saying, “Here I see his mother seated. Perhaps she can explain what has happened to her son.”

I have been in a very peaceable mood. I have not been planning to react to the discussion and comments. But when the question is addressed directly to me, I have to respond, and I do: “This is very unpleasant for me, and I regret very much that my bright, energetic and not stupid son has fallen into hopelessness. I even find it difficult to look

at you and listen to your remarks when the whole reason for his lethargy is a careless remark of the physics teacher. Juozukas' dream upon finishing high school was to enter the navy school and become a sailor. He expressed his desire to the teacher Suchorukov. And the latter killed him with one sentence: 'Don't even dream of it! You'll never be accepted into any school. You are a deportee and your bones will rot here.' My son decided that he would not be able to apply himself to his studies or to anything here. For the work that we have to do here, we already have too much learning." There is a busting in the hall.

After my speech, a woman doctor, a communist, stands up. I have not seen her in the room before. She is seated four rows closer to the podium.

"That one there," she says, pointing at me over her shoulder with her thumb, "is talking nonsense. From that talk, it is obvious what kind of atmosphere there is at home. What an upbringing! In the Soviet Union ALL have the right to an education! But what can a school do with such lazy ones? Your children are in school for 5 or 6 hours, and they are home by 6 or 7 o'clock." The whispering in the hall subsides. I become angry, but I try to maintain my self-control since I did not know who my opponent is. I see only that she is neither a collective farmer nor a laborer.

I ask to speak again. Because I am so angry, I try to keep calm and keep my voice from trembling as I say, "Please excuse me and allow me to answer the citizen who spoke before me. I regret that I do not know her name or last name. I have lived in Europe too long, where it is not customary to point over your shoulder with your thumb at a person and say 'That one, that one.' There are whispers in the hall and smiles. 'My opponent has stated quite angrily that in the Soviet Union ALL have the right to study. Yes, here, locally, they have the right, and they study, but NOT ALL HAVE THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THIS REGION. I see that among those present there are security officials. Perhaps they will explain to my respected opponent, who, it seems, is not fully informed about the situation, while the teacher Suchorukov perhaps really knows who will and who will not be able to leave to study elsewhere.

"A second reproach made by the speaker was that the atmosphere and desire to study are created in the home, that world perspective is formed at home. It seems to me that, here too, my opponent is mistaken. Our children stay in school 5-6 hours. They spend another 1-2 hours on the way to and from school. They come home. Usually they do not find their parents because they have not yet returned from work. As soon as the mother comes home, she must send a child out: 'Go, give the cow some water; run, fetch some firewood; run, get some water; sit down, and do your homework.' The chores around the house and homework take about 4 or 5 hours. And so it's

11 or 12 o'clock. They need time to sleep. So there is your 24-hours. For those children who live in the dormitory or who rent a room, the parents, usually just the mother (the father is at war), see them only late in the evening on Saturdays, when they come home. The only other day when parents can spend with their children is Sunday, and not every one at that. But on

Sunday the mother is rushing about laundering and mending clothing, preparing food for the week, washing and heating the banya. So there is no time left for upbringing and instilling attitudes.

"In the meantime, the teachers have 5-6 hours every day for the teaching and upbringing of our children. I would say that it is a lot of time. As you know, the priest, in Pre-Revolutionary times, had only a half-hour a week to convey his ideas, and he EDUCATED people, and INSTILLED his ideas in such a way that it is decades already and you cannot pull out those roots."

There is laughter in the hall, a busting, talking. My opponent is silent. Besides, at this meeting, students who will graduate this year are also present.

As the meeting is nearing its end, the director invites some parents to come to the teachers' room. My son and I are among the names mentioned.

We assemble. The director, with an angry face, shuffles through some leaflets. He calls upon one student. "You are expelled!" The mother and son are confused and ask that the son be allowed to stay in school. They explain why he is falling behind: the mother has been sick; the son has had to help around the house.

"No excuses! He's lazy! Four twos*—failures! He's dismissed from school!" This is again the angry voice of the director.

He reads off a second, a third name, still angry. "Expelled! Thrown out!"

Finally: "Žukauskas! Three twos. Expelled!"

Juozukas turns pale. I become confused. Has he really received three failures? He has never boasted to me of an accomplishment like this.

"Really?" I ask Juozukas.

"I don't know where those twos came from. I've never gotten such grades."

I turn to the teachers who are sitting right there and say, "Perhaps the teachers could explain what subjects these failures are in and whether the situation is hopeless. There are more than two months left until the end of the school year. Maybe it's still possible to correct the situation."

The teachers glance at each other. No one admits having given Žukauskas such a grade. The class leader suggests they check the class register. I offer to help.

"In what subjects are the twos," I ask the teachers. "It's easier to check that way." They all shrug their shoulders.

The director speaks up: “In algebra, physics, and history—the most important subjects. There can be no adjustments.”

The mathematics teacher reacts in a lively fashion: “In my subjects, algebra and geometry, Žukauskas only has ‘Good’ and ‘Excellent.’ There can be no two.”

We check. It appears, that in all the subjects the grades are good. There are threes in history and physics. But they are threes, not twos.

“Ah, here’s the explanation! The lines of the register, when you turn the page, do not line up and Zaicev’s grades have been entered for Žukauskas.”

Juozukas is himself again, but I became very angry, asking, “So who made such a mistake?”

It appears that the director himself was looking for the under achievers and had apparently been trying to punish those for whom he has antipathy—those that he dislikes.

I continue: “Here, students make mistakes, they get twos, but those are not fatal mistakes, they can be corrected. But what grade should one give to a director of teachers who makes an error so fatal that it can ruin a young person’s whole life? It’s good that I am here, but what would have happened if my son had simply informed me of the fact that he has been dismissed from school. ‘Kicked out of school?’ That would mean that all his life’s roads were blocked. Does the director understand the importance of his mistake? And perhaps there is something similar with the other three students?”

The director appears uncomfortable.

“Anyone can make a mistake,” someone’s voice is heard saying.

“Yes, mistakes can happen, but to make a fateful mistake which could destroy a person’s life is not permissible to anyone, especially a pedagogue. Before announcing such a decision, one must verify the facts thoroughly,” the mathematician puts forth quietly and peacefully.

Everything ends well. We separate to go our ways. The mathematician, the Jew Saliom Abramovich, and the inspector Izaida Fyodorovna accompany me. From them I hear many bitter words against the director and many warm ones for me.

Juozukas finishes school without any mere threes. And the following year the director is changed. I do not know the real reason for the change. There is talk that, while working somewhere else before he came to Parbig, he had committed some criminal act and for that he is at last going to be tried.

All the other Lithuanians also finish school. Two of Juozukas’ Russian classmates are drafted into the army. One of them, Shalin, sends Juozukas a letter in a couple of months. He says he had been assigned to maritime school and that it is very difficult. “It’s good that you didn’t make it,” his fellow students joke: “The sea is beautiful from the

shore, a ship in pictures, but not swaying, the way people do after drinking in a restaurant”—“chorosho more a brega, korabl na kartinke, a kachka v restorane

After the death of Stalin, it was announced, that students, who had finished high school, could ALL go study wherever they liked.

A few of those, who had graduated that year, left for Tomsk. Among their number was also the best mathematician in the class, Jonas Vileišis. Once the mathematics teacher had asked him, “Vileiši,* was your father a professor?”

“No, he was an ordinary laborer.”

The teacher, apparently disbelieving, said, “Well, if your father was not a professor, then you will definitely be a professor.”

But unfortunately! Vileišis, despite having received fives* on the entrance exams and having presented the same grades on his final report card, was not accepted into the Institute—“he did not pass the competitive entrance exam.” Meanwhile, the weakest three students in the class, having barely passed the entrance exams with threes, were admitted because the director was a Russian and a communist’s daughter. Almost all the Lithuanians had to be satisfied with technical schools, among them Juozukas, Birutė and Jonukas, Stasys, Ambrazevičiūtė. But some time having passed, they all finally graduated from the institutes and received diplomas of higher learning, some in medicine, some in engineering, some in geology and other fields.

*The grading system in Russia was based on 1-5, five being the highest, equivalent to an A, and two being a failing grade, F.

* Vileiši – This is the form (Vocative Case) of Vileišis used in direct address

81. THE GREAT CHANGE

The war had ended nine years before. Life was becoming easier. We were already corresponding with those who had remained in Lithuania. Once in a while, I would get a letter from my husband in prison. My sister Slavėnienė, who had stayed in Lithuania, was taking care of him, sending him provisions. My two other sisters also aided us. The economic conditions were becoming tolerable but we were depressed by longing for our own country.

All the Lithuanians had settled in and had prospered: they were better dressed and better fed. Most had even built their own little houses, but the Russians, as they had been impoverished, so they stayed impoverished. They lacked determination, initiative, and diligence. The Armenians also did not make an effort to improve their state. The most aggressive and most resourceful were the

Jews. The majority had bidden farewell long ago to the inhospitable Siberian land. Only the more unfortunate ones were left.

My youngest sister had sent a letter asking whether we were not planning to return to Lithuania. Since others were already returning I had written, telling her of Gendler's answer to me about having 1000 rubles and a gold watch. My dear, good little sister interpreted this to mean that, if she sent us 1000 rubles, we would be able to go back. And she herself lived in great hardship, but she managed to send us that sum.

God! What hopes and dreams did we not we have! But even with 1000 rubles, it was too soon to dream of returning.

We women of Melstroy decided to organize some sort of "Women's Day." We would bring whatever we had to the Red Corner for a feast. We would sing and at least relax a little from our daily cares.

82. STALIN IS DEAD

Immediately the order was received, that selling alcohol was forbidden and that there were no days off - all days were workdays!

In the zagotzerno office a meeting was called. An announcer arrived from the region, the high school students from Parbig arrived, among their number also Juozukas from Melstroy.

There were suitable speeches, sympathies, regrets at such an event. Some feigned, or, perhaps did not feign, the deepest grief, sadness. The children recounted that, in their school, a teacher, upon learning that Stalin had died, fainted, while some old-believer worker could not refrain from laughing. Everyone was shocked and frightened. If Stalin had been alive still, that laughter would have ended sadly, but now it passed almost unnoticed - what could you expect from a fool...

The women regretted that now their "Women's Day" was ruined forever. Since the get-together would always fall on March 8th. And whom, does fate not mock! March 8th is declared a National Holiday and "The greatest leader of all time and all nations" will not be mentioned at all.

The top Party officials and political leaders, of course, felt what kind of "love" was burning for the deceased "Father and Teacher" in the hearts of the workers and, fearing, lest mass unity acquire an undesirable character, declared that Sunday, the day of rest, would be a work day and forbade the selling of alcohol.

We all waited for Stalin's funeral to be filmed and shown on movie theater screens, there were no television yet, at least not in the Siberian taiga known to us. But, unfortunately, we did not see it; it wasn't shown even

in the movie news chronicles. Stalin's place in the Administration was taken over by his personal and ideological friend Beria. But he did not rule for long. Other members of the Administration perhaps felt that this one also would continue the same type of politics as his predecessor. They say that even their characters were similar. Stalin's terror, cruelty, despotism and self-will had exhausted everyone to the depths of their being.

Beria's rule immediately displayed itself in a Stalinist direction. A group of physicians was arrested, having been charged with deliberate injurious medical practice and the abuse of the medical profession for personal gain. Among them, two Jewish physicians were also arrested. During the interrogation, of course, they all "confessed" that they were guilty and were sentenced.

Koganovich's heart could not stand this - two fellow Jews! The other Politburo members, Malenkov, Bulganin, Chrushchev, seeing that Beria would be the same type of despot and sole ruler who disregarded the others, decided to get rid of him. They began to check his orders, reopened the case of the sentenced physicians. It became clear, that those cases and the means by which they forced a person to "confess" that which he had not done, were incriminating. In addition, a whole list of other illegal acts was uncovered. As a result of this, not only was Beria removed from the post of First Secretary of the Communist Party, but he was also arrested together with the Chief of Security Ignatyev and the Chief Prosecutor Riumin. All were hurriedly sentenced and shot - they were less dangerous if dead...

Many unjustly imprisoned officials, among them also the physician who had treated Stalin, regained their freedom.

The people rejoiced that the terror was ending, that false accusations would not be fabricated and that innocent people would no longer be put in prisons and forced, under torture, to "confess" that which was demanded of them. Especially the Armenians rejoiced that Beria had gotten what he deserved. Beria was a Georgian, and there was a smoldering history of discord between the Armenians and the Georgians. They said that Beria had determined to clean Armenians out of Tbilisi (the Georgian capital). That is why they were being driven en masse to Siberia, while the more active ones were liquidated on the spot. They stated:

"That Beria is no better than Hitler. He should not have been shot for his deeds, - that was too soft. He should have been tied to a donkey's tail, his head down to be dragged until his head was smashed..."

I listened to those words of hatred, and I thought:

"Lord! How vengeful and cruel people are! For their injustices, if they only had the right, they would pay back with various kinds of cruelty!"

83. NEW HOPE – 1955, 1956, 1957

After some time, the assistant to the commandant came to Melstroy. He called a meeting of the deportees together with the chiefs of the offices. First of all, they questioned the chiefs about the characteristics of each worker.

The zagotzero director evaluated almost everyone positively: “honest, dutiful, diligent.”

Then the question was put to the workers of how the administration was treating them, whether fair regarding the pay, the work hours, the living conditions. Sensation! In the life of the deportees, nothing like this had ever been heard before! But there were no complaints against the administration from us.

Finally, the commandant’s assistant said that we were citizens with equal rights and, if someone earns it, he would be able to join the Communist Party!

We immediately crowded around to ask if we were now free, if we could leave.

“That question has not yet been resolved. In the course of two weeks, each one of you must write an autobiography in two languages: in Russian and in Lithuanian and hand it in to me. This will probably be weighed in Moscow or in Vilnius. But I cannot say anything definite. There are no instructions so far,” the official explained.

Our joy was somewhat dimmed. When would we be free to return? What would happen in Vilnius? What in Moscow? When would we get an answer? But the hope of returning to Lithuania did not fade. We all immediately started to write those autobiographies. We all hoped for good news. But we only received an answer in 1956—apparently they studied our autobiographies for a long time.

At the end of July, I received a letter from my husband saying that political prisoners had received amnesty and that he hoped to return to me in the fall in Melstroy, where I had remained alone, my sons having left. At the end of October, he really did return. A decree was also received that all deportees should get a passport. Yes, we were truly free citizens, with no limitations, no restrictions. On October 1, 1956, we were issued passports. In giving them out, the chief of the passport section shook each person’s hand, congratulated him with regaining the rights of citizenship and of total freedom, and said, “I congratulate you cordially. With these passports, you will be able to accept any USSR post.”

But that was only in theory. In reality, the administration of the Lithuanian SSR, regardless of the fact that Lithuania was also a “Part of the Soviet Union,” did not receive many of us. There, a major struggle was still going on between Lithuanian patriots and the supporters of the new order of people, now dutiful Communist Party

members, placed in the government by the soviets. It is a fact known throughout the ages that there are more who want to rule than those who wish to hear the orders of the rulers and obey them. This was especially the situation in Lithuania then since the new leaders were only the tools of the stronger and more brutal powers in whose hands were weapons, the army, and the militia.

My husband, having returned from the concentration camp, told me a great deal about the camp’s order of life: punishments, work, hunger, funerals. To report all of these, a separate book would be necessary. Here, I only wish to describe in the most general strokes funerals in the concentration camp. I shall describe them as my husband described them upon his return from the Gulag, described them:

Quite a few prisoners died every day. There was a special funeral brigade made up of the same prisoners. Today they were burying someone, and tomorrow others would bury one or more of them. The dead were first of all stripped of their clothing (after all, one couldn’t stick government property into the ground). They would dissect the body, and just to make sure that no one would recover, they would smash the bones of the head with a hammer. In the summer, there were funerals every day while in the winter they would pile them up one on top of the other like logs in a shed, called a morgue, naked of course. There, they would freeze like sticks. There they lay until there was a good number. Then, they piled them up on sleds and brought them to a swamp where they buried them in trenches.

As a rule, funerals took place only at night.

Whenever I imagined such funerals—and there were hundreds of thousands of them—I shed bitter tears anyway although I was not one to weep easily.

Upon his return, my husband presented me with his poem “Final Farewell,” a poem which he had written in 1952. My dearest Liudas was alive and already back beside me, so for me to read this farewell statement of his was both terrible and sad. He was mortally ill when he wrote it and had not expected to recover or see me again. But the censors at the concentration camp did not allow this farewell through, so I received it from his hands only five years later. Perhaps it is just as well that the censors had not allowed it through. If I had received it at that time, I would have cried myself to death from heartache.

And why was it not allowed through?

First, because it was written in Lithuanian. It was only permitted to write in Russian.

Second, because the limit had already been exceeded, since in December, he had sent a greeting for Christmas and the New Year.

Third, because in the poem there was a reference to the funeral ceremony.

FINAL FAREWELL!

Farewell my Dream—my Princess!
I shall weave no more songs for you:
Into the timeless Ages, like an orphan,
I go from where no one returns.
I leave without a final banquet,
Without an ornate funeral board,
Without a cross upon my breast,
Without glimmering candlelight,
Without black, formal attire,
Without attendants, without a prayer.
On the way, at night, an owl shall hoot,
A homeless dog shall bark “farewell.”
When my sun has set,
When I shall sleep without a dream,
My face so cold, shall not be stroked
By thy silken tresses.
Crystal necklaces shall not fall
On a heart that has stopped beating,
And by my resting place so cold and hard
No one shall whisper “Go with God!”
And by my grave no one shall weep,
Its cross no stone shall mark,
Yellowing leaves alone shall rustle,
And tears shall flood the autumn.
Above the empty wasteland winds shall howl,
Perhaps alone a daisy on my heart
Shall whisper to a butterfly in summer,
“He suffered and he loved so much.”

Ziutei, (to Ziute)
Liudas Sakalinis,

ITANKA, 1952

ADDENDUM

A poetic translation by the late Dr. Edmund Miller,
Professor Emeritus at Long Island University – C.W.
Post:

Maybe I shall never again see thee,
But thy face still does appear before me,
And thy eyes ever look me in the eye.
Yet the man I see I greet with a sigh,
Fearing that this is but a painful dream
And letting tears flow from me in a stream.
But please accept whatever doubts I might
Express as hopeful signs we'll reunite.

EPILOGUE

We, at home, did not receive the above-mentioned letter and he did not receive Juozukas' photograph with our greeting, which Juozukas and I wrote together,

"DADDY"

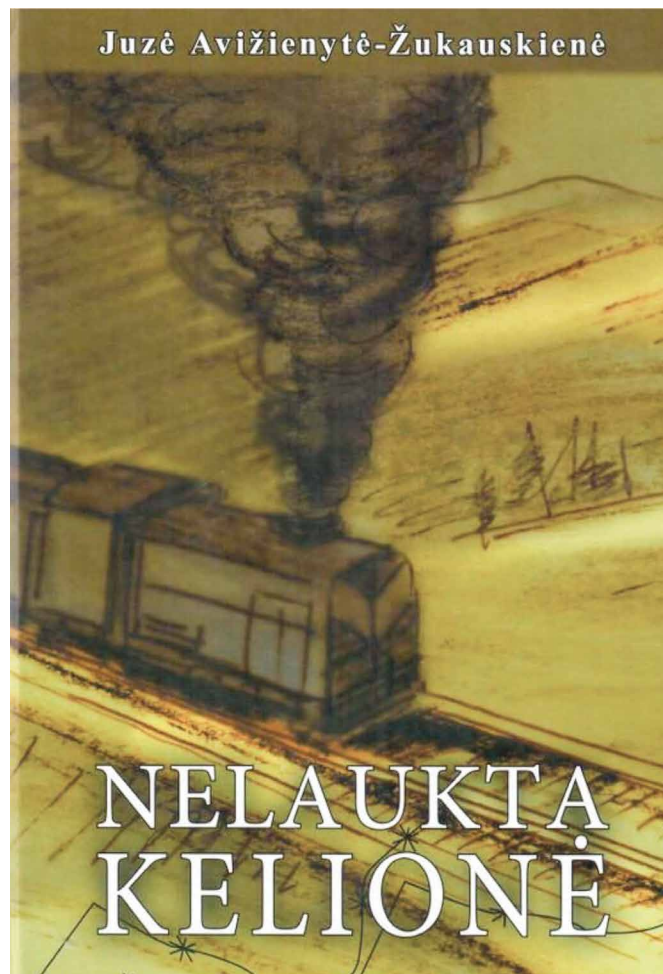
Perhaps I shall not ever see you,
Neither your face, nor your eyes,
But yet, you stand before my eyes,
I hope to see you still.
Perhaps that is only a dream,
As painful as a bleeding wound.
Accept these doubts of mine,
As a hope that we will meet again.

JUOZUKAS, who misses you

"TĖVELI"

Gal aš Tavęs nepamatysiu,
Nė Tavo veido nė akių,
Bet vis tik stovi man akyse,
Aš vis sutikt Tave tikiu.
Gal būt, kad tas tiktai svajonė,
Skaudi kaip sruvanti žaizda.
Priimk tas mano abėjones,
Kaip viltį susitikt kada.

Tavęs pasiilgęs JUOZUKAS



The book is available in Lithuanian at the Balzekas Museum Gift Shop.



On May 12, 2024, a referendum on the legalization of multiple citizenship will be held in Lithuania. The draft Constitutional Law on Citizenship, which elaborates on the principles of citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania and the grounds for acquiring and losing it, is available here: <https://e-Seimas.lrs.lt/.../3a2ea860d44d11ed9b3c9397e1236c2a>. The World Lithuanian Community is preparing a plan for engaging the diaspora and disseminating the referendum to it. Meetings are also planned with the Chief Elections Committee (CEC) and other institutions to improve the automation and dissemination of voting registration processes. If you have ideas and/or would like to contribute, please contact plb@plb.lt.



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