

bridges



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NEWS JOURNAL



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bridges

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Dear readers,

The month of June is so beautiful with its forests, parks, and meadows brimming with LIFE. And yet, for many years this month has been marked of remembrance of horrible events of 1940 and 1941 that drowned Lithuania in DEATH. The statistics below taken from the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania shows the extent of the losses Lithuania suffered. I encourage everyone who visits Lithuania go to the Genocide Museum in Vilnius. I also encourage everyone to collect the stories of your family members if they were touched by the mass deportation to Siberia. These stories should be recorded so that future generations would never forget.

Sincerely,

Karilė Vaitkutė
Editor

LOSSES OF LITHUANIA'S RESIDENTS IN THE YEARS OF OCCUPATION	
OCCUPATION BY THE SOVIET UNION	
15 June 1940–22 June 1941	
Imprisoned, killed, deported	23 000
Perished during the June Uprising in 1941	700
1944–1953	
Arrested, imprisoned	186 000
Deported	118 000
Partisans and their supporters killed	20 500
Died in camps and prisons	20 000–25 000
Died in the deportation	28 000
1954–1986	
Arrested and imprisoned due to political reasons	1 000
In 1991, when defending Lithuania's independence	
Perished (on 13 January at the Television Tower, Krakūnai, Medininkai border posts, at the Supreme Council)	23
Wounded or suffered in other way	900
OCCUPATION BY THE NAZI GERMANY	
22 June 1941–July 1944	
Imprisoned, transported to concentration camps	29 500
Killed (including 200,000 Jews)	240 000
Transported for forced labour to Germany	60 000
Forced to leave and to repatriate in 1940–1941, 1944–1947 and 1957–1960	
Lithuanians, Poles, Germans, "Memellanders"	496 000

An American Person Infused with Lithuania



Interview with Irena Brokas Chambers
By Karilė Vaitkutė

Irena Brokas Chambers

Born in Alvitas, Lithuania, Irena Brokas Chambers has directed museum programs and curated exhibitions for over three decades. She has directed many major exhibitions for national and international audiences exploring the nature of world civilizations as well as American history and culture. She planned and developed a new visitor experience, using emerging technologies, at the Library of Congress. Irena Chambers lives in Washington, D.C. where she writes, paints and works with cultural institutions on programs and exhibitions.

Before answering the specific questions, I thought I would start with what I have been thinking about—prompted by a question from a good friend and by the knowledge that I was to write about my past soon.

My friend, a remarkable and talented African American artist, who has known me for almost thirty years asked recently “What’s it like to be Lithuanian”. Rather than answering, I stopped and looked at him. What was going through my head was surprise and the realization that I could not easily give a solid, real answer, one that captured what I thought it was like to be Lithuanian. So instead of answering the question, I said to my friend, “I should try to answer that when I write about my career and experiences for the “Bridges” magazine article. And here are some of my thoughts.

First, I could not begin to define what it is like to be Lithuanian. I can only define what I am as a person born in Lithuania, displaced by World War II, raised in the U.S. as a Lithuanian. There is nothing in my life that is purely American. But there is nothing that is solely Lithuanian either. No one knows me even fairly well without knowing that my background is Lithuanian. I do not speak English with an accent. I am comfortable with American ways. I am an American person. But my outlook, my memories, my sense of restraint, my interests and my loyalties are infused with Lithuania and with being Lithuanian. When the screen credits roll at the end of the film, I always check to see if there are any recognizable Lithuanian names. I automatically look for the tri-color whenever flags are shown in an international sport, cultural, or political

setting. I quote my mother’s sayings, translated into English, when good and bad things happen. I sing to myself Lithuanian lullabies, drinking and love songs, and even, on occasion, the national anthem. I eat all kinds of food. I make and enjoy fancy omelets, but I am most happy when my breakfast includes good Lithuanian bread. I am an avid reader of Lithuanian history, and I am proud of the recent scholarship that documents the country’s past, relying on facts and records to portray and, sometimes, re-interpret its fascinating history. I read whatever I can find about Lithuania’s ancient past, twentieth century history, and, more recently, the personal experiences of Lithuanians

who lived through the terror and upheaval of World War II and its aftermath.

Maybe I should note that the answer to “What is it like to be Lithuanian?” also depends on when in my life the question was asked. If I had to answer this question sometime before the movement for Baltic independence and the end of the Soviet Union, the answer would have been quite different. Then, an overwhelming reality was that to be Lithuanian was to be something unrecognized and foreign to the larger American culture. There were television comedies that used Lithuania almost interchangeably with Transylvania—places unreal and exotic. For example, an actor might say to another, in trying to emphasize how undeservedly proud someone was, “Who do you think you are, a prince of Lithuania/Transylvania?” Many times, in social situations, I was asked where I was born. I would answer and then the questioner would look at me blankly or simply ask, “Where is that?”. One young man I had just met said enthusiastically, “I know where that is! Right next to Turkey!”. In those days, being Lithuanian meant that repeatedly I had to explain what Lithuania was, where it was, and why it was not part of the world most Americans knew. The important place of my birth was mythic to me too. I knew it from stories, fairy tales, and my parents’ longings and recollections. And growing up, I felt caught many times between the lure and the demands of two worlds: the Lithuanian community and American culture. To summarize, in good and bad ways, in trivial and serious moments, I am shaped by my background, my knowledge, my love, and my connections to Lithuania. What that means cannot be summarized easily and the previous paragraphs provide only a partial insight. Though I must admit, I will continue to think and write about this question: What is it like to be Lithuanian!

How did you come to work with the Balzekas Museum and curate an exhibition on Baltic displaced persons?

I did spend over thirty-five years working with cultural organizations. Though my last position was with the Library of Congress (a national and unique institution), I worked with many smaller museums and historical societies on development, planning, and exhibitions. And I knew of the Balzekas Museum for decades. In fact, as the head of the museum program at the National Endowment for the Humanities, I had recruited Stanley Balzekas to work on the panel evaluating grant awards. And for as long as I can remember, prompted particularly by my mother’s insistence that I needed to tell our family’s story, I wanted to do an exhibition about those who were displaced at the end of World War II. Good friends would learn about how I came to be in this country. They were very interested in the story and wondered why they knew nothing about this part of World War II’s history. At one of the last openings that I attended at the Library of Congress, I even spoke to Senator Durbin, Illinois Senator and a Lithuanian on his mother’s side,



Brokas family of five in winter of 1946. Irena is in the center.

telling him how necessary it was to do a project and get these stories since those who were refugees had grown old and were dying. Senator Durbin seemed very interested, and I intended to contact him and his office in the foreseeable future.

Before I did anything on my own, I read in the Balzekas Museum journal that the Museum was planning to do an exhibition on DPs. I thought this was great. I wanted to volunteer to help but also to give them artifacts from my family. My mother, knowing of my interest in my family’s past and in history, had passed on to me many documents, photographs, books, and even artifacts from Lithuania and from the DP camps. I called Stanley Balzekas, who expressed great interest in the materials. Working with the Museum staff, Rita Janz and Karile Vaitkute, I arranged to fly to Chicago via Detroit during the coldest winter in many a year. I arrived in Detroit, to pick up several more artifacts that my sisters (who live in the Detroit area) had, on a day so cold that even chemicals were not melting the ice on the roads. I must admit that knowing I was working on a DP exhibition was enough to keep me going—no matter the ice, the temperatures, or any other obstacles.



Brokas family of six before leaving Germany. Irena is in the center.

The meetings in the Balzekas Museum went very well. It was clear that this exhibition was operating under several favorable factors: the recognition that the story needed to be told; the Latvians and the Estonians were committed partners; collections within the three communities were identified and were being donated. I recommended two major things which eventually led to my taking on the role of curator. The Museum and its partners were expecting to open the exhibition in April—we were meeting in mid-January. The outline for the exhibition was detailed but complex. I recommended opening several



Three Brokas sisters singing in Lithuanian.

months later—the date was set for August. I went home and wrote up an outline for the exhibition that simplified the structure of the exhibition to three major sections: the flight, the camps, the journey to a new home. In later planning sessions, we made the presentation of individual and family experiences the center of the exhibition and titled it “No Home To Go To: The Story of Baltic Displaced Persons, 1944-1952”.

What are the advantages and disadvantages in working with a smaller institution such as the Balzekas Museum versus working with the Library of Congress? Bureaucracy is everywhere—from small institutions to large, national ones. I used to say that the Library was especially tricky because it was both an institution and a government agency. The challenge in working with a large organization is learning how it operates, what its strengths are, and devising the ways to work to achieve your goals within the established system—maybe, after gaining some real experience and knowledge, to adjust the system to work more easily. Let me give you one example of what I had to do at the Library which helped tremendously. I was the director of the Interpretive Programs Office, the office responsible for exhibitions and related programs. When I arrived at the Library the goals were to make the collections of the Library (totaling then over 130 million



Irena Brokas Chambers and Newt Gingrich at the “Creating French Culture” exhibit opening.

items) more accessible to the general public. I wanted to hire the best consultants and particularly designers. But contracting was done by a specific office whose goals were not the same as mine. It took me a year or more, but we finally worked out an evaluation system for contracts that allowed my office to choose the best designer. Until we asked and re-asked, the evaluation system appeared to be unchangeable. I was very proud to have gotten the change but these kinds of efforts take time and energy.

Working with the Balzekas Museum was a dream by comparison. There are procedures, but they are not as complicated or numerous. I had two very compatible colleagues, and we worked long and hard as a team, knowing we could rely on each other. We were able to consult with a couple of key scholars on the background, history, and historical resources without spending any time on paperwork. Meeting even the delayed deadline was a push—made significantly easier by the ability to do things without going through layers of authority.

Of course, there are advantages to being in a major institution. The Library of Congress has a national and even international reputation. Its location and connection to the U.S. Congress have appeal for funders, and the Library’s collections equip it to mount amazing programs and exhibitions on almost any subject. Smaller institutions have staff who, when it comes to mounting exhibitions with artifacts and a subject matter that is complex, have funding, conservation, registration, education, and curatorial responsibilities. Often, all those tasks must be carried out by the same people. Yet in institutions like the Library of Congress, fully staffed and trained professional offices handle the various duties.

What did working on the “No Home To Go To” exhibit give you, as an American and as a Lithuanian?

It has been a most rewarding experience for me. As my preface to these questions suggests, I am steeped in and devoted to both cultures, American and Lithuanian. The American and Lithuanian sides of me were deeply satisfied by this exhibition.

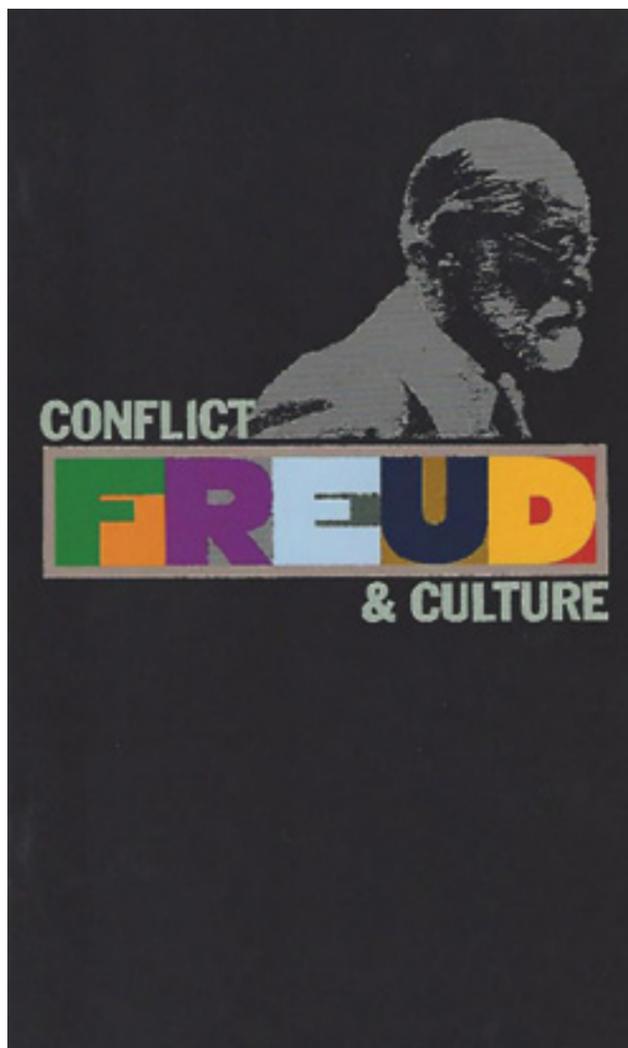
This exhibition has fulfilled a deep desire to work on my own family’s history. I loved being immersed in the historical events that shaped what happened to my family and the other hundreds of thousands who lost their homes and lives in World War II. I remain engrossed in trying to get more individual stories and in finding a way to make the exhibition’s materials and gathered eyewitness accounts a part of an ongoing and permanent record. Twenty-five members of my family attended the opening of “No

Home To Go To” in Chicago. Though I have worked on more than 200 exhibitions in my career, on a wide variety of subjects, this was the show that meant the most to those closest to me. I am also very pleased that the exhibition seems to have reached many other DP Lithuanians.

As an American, I am touched and astonished how meaningful and timely this exhibition is. During every installation, I have had individuals come up to thank us for doing the exhibition and to share how moved they are that the personal story of



Ambassador Zygmantas Povilionis, Irena Brokas Chambers and Stanley Balzekas, Jr. at “No Home To Go To” exhibit opening at the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, DC.



"Sigmund Freud: Conflict and Culture" exhibit brochure.

exhibition on Sigmund Freud. Entitled, "Sigmund Freud: Conflict and Culture", the exhibition was nearly cancelled when a letter writing campaign, opposing an exhibition on Freud, was started by both professional Freud haters and others mistakenly convinced of the "haters" cause. This was during the height of the "culture wars", and the media pounced on a rash decision by the Library's top office, over my objections, to "postpone" the exhibition. The word "postpone" was used but everyone at the meeting knew "cancel" was meant. Working with two of the most famous of the scholars on the planning panel as well as the head of the Sigmund Freud Museum in Austria, we managed to change the verdict, and the Freud exhibition opened two years later. The design incorporated ways to enable the visitor to "read" Freud's script, and monitors helped audiences trace how invasive Freud's influence was on popular culture. It was a tremendous success with the public, the media, and both the scholarly and psychoanalytic communities. The exhibition traveled to cities in the U.S. (New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles) as well as abroad (Vienna, Austria and Brazil). This example illustrates a very good aspect of my career: a successful and needed exhibition on Freud; and a bad aspect: weeks of battling bureaucratic forces within the Library as well as a media onslaught. The good outweighs the bad—especially from today's perspective!

Another example that combines good and bad aspects was "Revelations from the Russian Archives", an exhibition which we mounted during the first months after the dissolution of the Soviet empire. The Librarian of Congress at that time, James H. Billington, a Russian scholar, learned that once-secret archives were being opened. He secured an understanding with the Russians that allowed the Library to choose materials from these archives for an exhibition. The only caveat was we had to make the selections and mount the exhibition within a month or so. A young scholar of Russian followed up on a visit there by Dr. Billington and worked feverishly on the selections in Russia. In Washington, we started the preparations based on what he could tell us by internet and finished when he returned, bringing hundreds of documents, photographs, and film clips only a small portion of which could be used for display. We managed to mount a very intriguing exhibition, allowing the exceptional nature of the materials to remain and providing seating so visitors could read and examine these history-changing artifacts. It is noteworthy, that the Library made copies of the materials, and, after a few years had passed, some of the materials were re-classified as "secret" in Russia. A rewarding and important exhibition—but the preparation was harrowing!

One more example, taken from my life before the Library of Congress. I worked in the early 1980s with a small historical organization in Pennsylvania, the Valley Forge Historical Society. The VFHS had existed for nearly a century, had a wonderful collection related to the Revolutionary War and the Valley Forge encampment, including the flag that had flown over George Washington's tent during the famous 1777-78 winter. I

worked with the President of the VFHS to plan a reinstallation of the permanent collection. Over the several years I worked with the Society, I raised money for the installation, hired a designer, curated the exhibition, wrote every word of the script and accompanying publications. It was a great experience though not always an easy one. The Board and paid and volunteer staff were used to the operations as they had existed, and the new installation drew on current scholarship regarding the Revolutionary War and George Washington. In the end, the exhibition opened to the approval of most people and went on to win a best of the year award from the state.

In summary, I don't think there is an ideal, all good experience—at least not for planning and realizing meaningful exhibitions. My aim is to do the best possible exhibition, to draw on expertise as it is needed, to engage the best designers who understand the content and the role design plays. I still believe, as I have for decades, that good exhibitions have a director heading things up, one person who, like a film director, draws on all the elements that make up an exhibition to create the best presentation. I have been fortunate to be such a director on many, interesting exhibitions and to have trained several exhibition directors who are continuing, I hope and trust, to make great and meaningful exhibitions happen.

How can we showcase the things smaller museums do and enable them to reach larger, more national audiences?

There is no easy answer to this question. Large national institutions attract not only interest and visitors. They acquire collections by donation and purchase. Many, if not most, funders see the benefits of giving to well-known institutions. But there is an important and vital role for smaller, focused institutions—both on a local as well as national level. Museums exist to collect, preserve, and interpret the past—in all its glories, struggles, successes, and defeats. Larger museums, and probably particularly national ones, do best at telling a mega story—the past writ large, one might say. But often the past is best remembered and understood through individual and personal experiences. Smaller, local and regional institutions can do the latter better, I believe, than any large national entity. That is what we did with "No Home To Go To"—the historical framework presented the stories of individuals whose experiences are the heart of the exhibition. It was very much a neglected story, but the Balzekas Museum, focused on the history of Lithuania and Lithuanian Americans, was ideally positioned to coordinate an exhibition on Baltic displaced persons. The consequent reception of the exhibition in many cities and by individuals from all cultures shows that the personal stories reach a level of universal understanding that is compelling and valuable.

I have a few ideas that I would like to see implemented in order to give smaller institutions more attention and credit. I will describe just one. I wish we could make clear the advantages that come with donating both collections and funding to a



"The Floating World of Ukiyo-e" exhibit brochure.

smaller, local organization or institution. Places like the Library of Congress or the Smithsonian Institution have millions and millions of items. They simply cannot give the kind of attention to aspects of their collection that a smaller institution can give. I hope that in the future, acquisition of collections is done with realism and with honest assessment about how and why collections are acquired. More equitable and thoughtful distribution of collections should equip local institutions to do programming and exhibitions important to the full national picture.

Based on the international exhibitions you worked on, what are the differences between the U.S. and Europe? What could each learn from the other? Looking back on the dozen or so exhibitions, which I worked on at the Library of Congress, that were conceived in partner-



ship with European or other international partners (particularly “Sigmund Freud: Conflict and Culture”, “The Work of Charles and Ray Eames”, “Scrolls from the Dead Sea”, and “Churchill and the Great Republic”), I would say that there were differences but that what made the collaborations successful was the fact that we worked them out during the planning and development of the exhibitions. The differences sometimes centered on changing the emphasis of the exhibition or selecting different materials. For Freud, the animosity we encountered in the U. S. toward Freud and, to some extent, toward psychoanalysis simply did not exist in Europe or in South America. In the U.S. we held a six-part interpretive program that engaged scholars and other experts in discussing Freud’s legacy and influence. For the Eames exhibition, the title need to be changed from “The Work” to the “The World”—the “work” term just was not acceptable for the German and other European venues. Though the Churchill exhibition did not travel to England or Europe, the contribution of British scholars and experts augmented the presentation significantly.

I would say that we learned a great deal from all the overseas collaborations. We learned for example that language is critical and that even the best English speaking, foreign-born collaborator can misunderstand key points. And even a small misunderstanding can cause trouble. On a more practical level, we learned that European audiences seem prepared to read more than American ones. Perhaps this is an area in which each side could do some learning. There are advantages to learning and reading more, but there are also benefits to concise, short but well written labels and texts.

My biggest lesson: collaboration across national boundaries has a great, great deal to offer.



Paintings by Irena Brokas Chambers.

What inspires you in art?

I love to paint. I have water colored since I was little. At least two or three other family members painted, and I remember always having them available. I started oils in high school, but learned to handle the medium in classes at various art schools. For many years, I called myself a landscape artist. But I have done abstract works for decades. What inspires me? Many things: colors, shadows, trees, shapes, and simple landscapes and buildings. I believe that art should have some content, whether the work is abstract or representational. More recently, I am exploring a more conscious intellectual and narrative content to my paintings. I find that these works combine abstraction and reality and draw on the skills and interest I have in painting people, faces, and urban and rural landscapes.

Please describe the “Artbarn in Amaranth”.

The “Artbarn in Amaranth” is an art space located in the mountains of rural, western Pennsylvania. It is located on the 116-acre farm we have there. The Artbarn hosts artists-in-residence twice a year—one in the spring and one in the fall. The Artbarn replaced an old structure that was destroyed by lightning. The Artbarn brings together the beauty of the Appalachian countryside with artists, from more urban environments, who are inspired by such a location. The main purpose of the Artbarn is to provide a visually stimulating and comfortable location where the artists can create unencumbered by the pressures and the sights and sounds of their normal, more urban life.

The barn building includes a living quarters (a bedroom, bath, and a living/dining/kitchen area) as well as a studio, and display and storage space. The Artbarn was built to reflect the simple beauty of the old barns still peppering the landscapes in the area. Whenever possible, the Artbarn has included alternative energy sources and environmentally friendly products.

Each artist residency is from two to three weeks long. Though most of the artist’s time is for creating, each resident is encouraged to have one public program or display for local audiences during the residency. The residencies take place between April to June in the spring and from late September until mid-November in the fall. The resident artists receive and honorarium as well as a stipend to cover the costs of travel and shipping.

The Artbarn board of directors (drawn from experienced artists and teachers, gallery and museum directors and administrators) recommends and selects artists for the residencies.

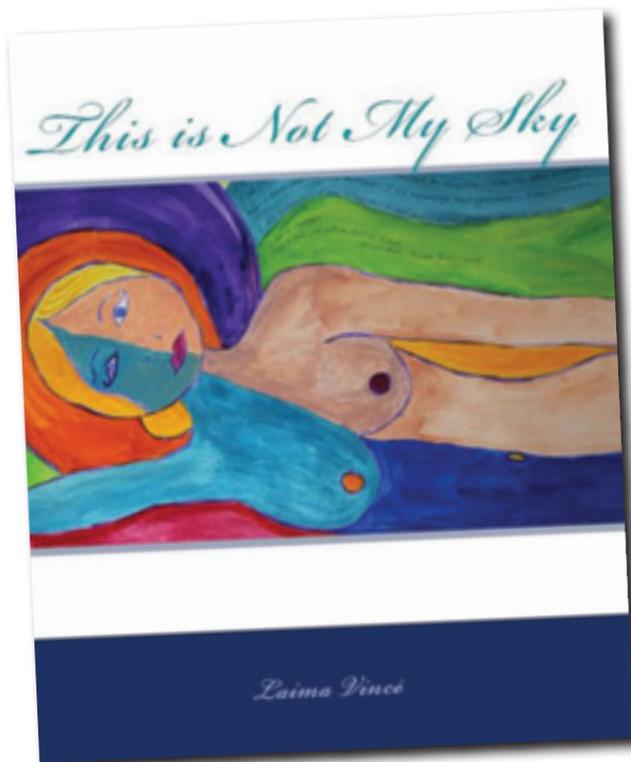


The Artbarn in Amaranth.

The inaugural first resident was Leroy Johnson, who completed his residency in May of 2017. He is a native Philadelphian artist who works in mixed media to explore the nature of urban life on a personal as well as a metaphorical level. During the residency, Mr. Johnson completed a dozen works in water color and acrylics. The work reflected the landscape, farm buildings, and concentrated on the birds and foliage that surround the area. His residency paintings during are markedly different from any of his previous work, and he intends to use completed work for further investigation and development in his studio in Philadelphia.



Artist Leroy Johnson standing next to his paintings at the Artbarn in Amaranth.



**Nora Comes Back from the Dead
Saint Petersburg, Florida | December 23, 1988**

Cathy

Her birth mother did not know she was coming. Cathy had not been able to drum up the courage to call or write to her. Dad had assured her that a face-to-face meeting was the best way to go.

But, it was a shame that the only time she could get away from her university work and take this flight to Florida was during Christmas break. She had to complete her dissertation, despite all of this. And, all of this was such a distraction. All Cathy could think about during her final exams was whether the woman whose address her birth father had scrawled on the scrap of notebook paper she was now clutching in her sweaty palm would slam the door in her face when she got there or take her in her arms and give her the biggest hug ever.

And now, as she sat in economy class, wedged between a nervous woman who was obviously afraid of flying, and her husband, who somehow ended up in the window seat and not beside his wife, the doubts Cathy had been trying so hard to keep out of her head drifted back: Why would she want to see her birth mother anyway? She had given her away.

Her therapist at the Columbia University health clinic had called it “circular thinking,” the first symptoms of obsession. Cathy reminded herself once again why she was making this trip: to break out of that obsession, to resolve what occupied her mind day and night. She needed to face her birth mother. And she needed an answer to her question: Why did she give me away?

But it was hard not to worry about leaving Dad alone for Christmas. Dad had assured her it was alright; that time alone over the holidays would give him a chance to catch up on his reading. Still, she would miss a New York Christmas with the angels in Rockefeller Center, the outdoor skating rink, and the giant Christmas tree, trucked right into the heart of Manhattan all the way from the Midwest. Cathy had to admit she was excited to see palm trees again. The long strings of twinkly red and green Christmas lights wrapped around their papery trunks reminded Cathy of her Christmas trips with Dad. They usually went to Miami or Orlando or sometimes to Key West. She had never been to Saint Petersburg before. Saint Petersburg was the town where the elderly Lithuanians went to live. Or, more accurately, where they went to die. And her birth parents, Cathy had recently learned, were war refugees from Lithuania. They came from a place that no longer appeared on any map of the world, a place that had been swallowed up by the Soviet Union, a place that was no place.

Cathy pulled her Florida guidebook from her handbag and thumbed to the tabbed section on transportation from the airport. It was pointless. Nothing made sense. She closed the guidebook. She'd grab a cab and hope for the best. She didn't have the patience to figure out bus routes just now. Cathy slid her wallet out of her bag. Careful to open the wallet just the slightest, so that the woman seated beside her couldn't see inside, Cathy checked how much money she had. Yes, there was enough for a taxi. Daddy had done it again. He'd slipped a few twenties into her wallet before she left for the airport. He must have done it when she went back to her room to grab her ticket. Cathy sighed. Daddy didn't seem to get it that she wanted to be independent. Despite herself, she smiled. He was still her Dad. He was there for her. And these people? They weren't. So why was she making this trip?

Still, Cathy wanted to meet them. When she was honest with herself, she understood that she wanted to be part of her birth family in some capacity. She had Dad, but it was just the two of them now. What about when Dad was gone? She'd be all alone. A feeling of shame washed over her. How could she even think such a thought?

She turned her thoughts to that country once called Lithuania. She was curious to learn about this country that had disappeared off the map of the world: The former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, now the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. Her birth family's country of origin. She'd read all the books her birth father had given her, but the books only left her wanting to know more.

The plane hit the tarmac and rolled to a stop. The airplane engine went still. The couple seated on either side of her started to clap. So stupid, Cathy thought, why clap? The woman had been pale and nervous the entire flight. Probably she was one of those neurotic types who imagined the plane was going to crash just because she got on it. Cathy unbuckled her seatbelt, stood, and squeezed past the woman and into the aisle. She grabbed

her backpack from the overhead luggage bin and headed for the cabin door. She was glad she had decided to just take a carry-on. Standing at the rotating baggage conveyor belt, watching other people's bags go round and round, would likely have put her over the edge.

Cathy strolled through the airport exit. She jumped into the first cab she saw. She read the address to the taxi driver from the slip of paper she'd clutched in her palm the entire two-hour flight. It was pointless. She had it memorized.

Half an hour later the cab pulled up in front of a modest one-story mint green bungalow in a neighborhood of similar pastel-colored one-story homes. Cathy paid the driver and headed towards the chain link fence that enclosed the yard. An enormous German Shepherd bounded towards the gate, barking, baring its teeth. Cathy pulled back. Great, she thought, my mission is ended before it even got started.

The front door flew open and a woman in her forties with ash blond hair pulled back in a pony-tail stepped out. She was dressed in white shorts, a blue cotton t-shirt, and canvas sneakers. There was nothing remarkable about her.

“Can I help you?” the woman asked in accented English. She looked at Cathy defiantly, as though she did not much care for visitors.

Cathy swallowed hard. For a moment she considered turning and leaving. But something about the strength in the woman's voice made her stay.

“I'm looking for a Maria Pil-ve-lis,” Cathy said, struggling to pronounce the surname.

“Wait, let me tie up the dog in the back,” the woman said.

She grabbed the giant dog by the collar and half dragged, half wrestled, half coaxed him to the backyard where she tethered him to the dog house. Clapping the grit off her hands, she walked briskly towards Cathy.

“I am Maria,” she said.

There was no other way to do it. Cathy decided that quick, short and decisive was the way to go.

“I believe you are my mother,” Cathy said.

The woman stiffened. She did not reach out and hug Cathy, as Cathy had hoped, but she did not send her away either. She looked her up and down steadily, then rested her gaze on Cathy's eyes. Cathy studied her face. Maria had what her girlfriends would call good bone structure: high cheekbones, almond-shaped eyes, full lips. Cathy could see the traces of her devastating beauty in her middle-aged face. She also saw that she looked like her, only a toned-down version. Cathy was not quite as drop-dead gorgeous as the young Maria had been in the black and white photograph her birth father had shown her, but pretty enough never to hurt for a date.

“I thought you were dead,” Maria said.

“Why did you think I was dead?” Cathy asked. The corner of her lip twitched.

“Because of the baby formula,” Maria said.

“The baby formula?”

“Yes, the Americans give babies cow milk and everyone back home knows that cow milk will kill a baby. There was an Irish woman in our building in the Bronx. She gave her babies cow milk, and they all died.”

Cathy shook her head slowly, stalling, absorbing her words. Her thick blond hair whipped across her chin. A single strand came loose and stuck to her turtleneck. Maria reached out and gently picked the strand off and closed her fingers around it.

“Well,” Cathy said, “I'm alive, and I drank baby formula. I must've. How else would my mother have fed me after she got me from the hospital?”

“Your mother...” Maria said. This time it was her lip that twitched.

Cathy took a step forward and before either of them knew what had happened, they held each other fast in a tight embrace. They both cried. In that moment time stood still.

Finally, Maria disentangled herself from Cathy and gently pushed her back onto the hot Florida sidewalk. “Come in for tea,” she said.

A cup of tea? In this heat? This must be my mother, Cathy thought. She must carry the freezing temperatures of Eastern Europe around inside of her.

“There's something I need to ask you,” Cathy said.

“It can wait,” Maria said.

Maria

After Cathy had come, Maria lay awake in bed many long hours considering what to do. Should she talk openly to her daughter? If she did, would it corrupt that lovely aura of innocence the girl carried about with her? Cathy had not been touched by cynicism. That was her strength. Maria would not take that way. Besides, life had taught Maria not to toss words about too freely. They had spent a week together side by side at the loom, weaving and talking color, and still Maria could not bring herself to answer her daughter's question. Perhaps she was ashamed. She had lost her too easily. Too quickly. Like one loses some completely insignificant item, a hair band or a dish rag or a bookmark. Cathy needed to hear some magnificent lie—that they were fleeing the Russians and Maria was forced to hand her over to strangers, or that there was disease in the house, and giving her to the Americans was the only way to save her. Maria had made many mistakes, but letting her baby go was the one that she paid for every day of her life. She paid every morning, every afternoon, and especially every night, when her past came back to haunt her in her dreams, tormenting her, making it impossible to rest.

Whenever Maria had no answers she went to her loom. She had woven steadily over the past few days, so now she was almost finished weaving a cloth the color of dried autumn leaves in November. When she was finished, her daughter would have to come back. They would measure the cloth, cut it, and sew it into a traditional Lithuanian costume. And so, Maria wove. She wove to pull her daughter back to her, back with the long thread

that connected them in this life as mother and daughter.

Maria got out of bed now and went to her loom. She placed a desk lamp on the table beside her. Maria usually began her weaving with the first light of dawn and finished with the last rays of the setting sun. She did not trust the electric light to reveal the truth of the colors hidden in the thread, combinations of color that only came to light when one was set against the other. Like with people, Maria thought, you only really knew a person when you saw that person beside another.

Maria wove blindly onwards, allowing the darkness to guide her hands. She stopped only occasionally to brush away tears from her tired eyes. She wove through the night and into the dim murkiness of the early dawn hours. She wove as though her life depended on it, and in some ways, it did. She wove to weave back together the life that could have been hers, if only everything had been different.

Cathy had come seeking answers, explanations, words, sentences, paragraphs, entire pages that Maria could not give her. When Cathy had hugged Maria goodbye, she had stood stiffly with her arms at her sides. Where she came from mothers were not asked to give explanations to daughters. And they did not say, “I love you” out loud, the way Cathy had said it every evening before going to bed. They did not say these words because they feared that saying them would make the feeling fall apart. Where Maria came from love was shown through actions, through a hot cooked meal, a loaf of rye bread pulled from the oven and placed on the table, a pair of patterned mittens knit especially for Christmas, or a woolen shawl wrapped gently around the shoulders on a cool evening.

It had all been too soon. And at the same time, not soon enough.

That morning two weeks ago, when the dog began to bark in the yard, and when Maria had opened the door to see standing on the sidewalk a slender young woman with thick ash blond hair that hung straight down to her chin and eyes so blue that they were almost violet, she knew immediately who she was.

Maria did not know what to do. Should she cook up a huge pot of borsch and feed her daughter? Should she start teaching the girl her own language? Should she tell her everything, absolutely everything, from start to finish? Or should she protect her from knowing?

Instead, they spent the rest of their first day together as mother and daughter making beetroot soup and cabbage rolls to celebrate Christmas Eve. Maria explained that in the Lithuanian tradition, you could not eat meat on Christmas Eve, and that you must prepare twelve dishes, one for each of the twelve apostles. They worked silently together in the kitchen with Maria guiding her daughter with her hands, speaking only when necessary. It was a good start, Maria thought. More than she could have hoped for.

Maria was glad to have her baby back. Indeed, it was a miracle, a Christmas miracle. Almost six years had passed since Maria had chosen to live this monastic life alone with her weaving.

Who would have thought that a woman who had birthed five children could ever be lonely? But she was.

The girl told her that her name was Cathy, a name Maria had difficulty pronouncing because of the tricky “th” sound in the middle. She refused to accept that foreign name as her own daughter's name. They sat on the couch with cups of steaming linden tea set in front of them, although, it could not possibly be that cold in Florida. It was as though they had brought the cold with them—Cathy from the windswept streets of New York, and Maria from the frozen wastelands of Lithuania. It was as though the cold lived inside of them, no matter where they went or where they lived.

“I named you Nora,” Maria said.

“Nora?”

Her daughter repeated the name a few times, testing it out on her tongue.

“I always felt that Cathy was not my real name. First of all, there are too many Cathys, just like there are too many Jennifers, and too many Christines.

All my life I felt that my name was wrong—that people were calling me by the wrong name.”

“But you were Nora only in my heart,” Maria said. “It was never written down on the papers. I named you for my mother. Her name was Nora, Eleanora really, but somehow the first part of Mama's name got swallowed up and lost. She was a brave woman. She was not afraid to fight the Russians when they came to our land. She hid men and women from the resistance in our house. She was ready to die for them, and in the end, she did.”

“I was named for a brave woman,” Cathy said, stunned, appreciative. “Can you tell me more about the resistance?”

Maria sighed. “I have not spoken of it for so long, and now I would not know how.”

That ended their conversation for that day.

The entire time her daughter was with her the old pain gnawed into Maria's side, as though someone had stabbed her heart with a knife. It was the pain of losing her baby twenty-four years ago. The pain of having her baby wrenched from her warm bosom before she'd had her fill of her mother's milk. Her baby had been taken away from her so brutally—like a dog. The child had been abandoned. Left to the Americans. But she had come back strong and beautiful.

Maria had to admit that the Americans had done a good job raising her Nora. Perhaps even better than she would have done herself. Nora had a purity in her spirit. She did not wear a single lie on her tongue. She did not cover her true face with a mask. There was nothing devious in her mind. Maria had searched for a hint, a clue, a scrap of meanness, and she had found none. Nora was present in her entire being. Maria's heart ached, no, it broke, when she thought of her Nora, with that eager look, eyes bright, like an intelligent and loyal dog, or a milking cow that she had come to rely upon for her rich milk, perched on the wooden folding chair at her kitchen table, eager for anything

Maria could say to her, eager to catch a crumb, with no bitterness in her heart, only forgiveness, and a deep need to understand.

They spoke of trivial things, made light conversation while Maria served linden tea, sweetening it with generous dollops of honey. She was ashamed now to think of how disappointed Nora must have been. When Nora left for New York after a week. It was as though everything worth loving had been sucked out of the universe.

The only good thing she had been able to think of doing was weaving Nora a Lithuanian national costume, like the ones she wove for the émigré dance groups and choirs, her means of earning a living. The project had consumed their time together and became the source and well-spring of all their talk, scant as it was. It was as though by talking about the weaving, they could avoid all the topics Maria did not want to talk about, the very topics Nora had come to her to hear about.

Instead, they discussed color and pattern for hours. Her daughter had earned a Bachelor's degree in Art History from Columbia University, and a Master's degree, and was now in a doctoral program with a concentration in indigenous arts and folk culture. Nora knew all about color and pattern. She even knew about weaving. They had leafed through pattern books together, sitting on the sofa for hours, with cups of steaming tea in front of them despite the Florida heat and humidity, as though the air outdoors was as cold and bitter and relentless as a Lithuanian winter.

These books were precious to Maria, gifts brought to her from women in the community who had visited Soviet Lithuania. The color plates were faded and the tones were off, just like the lives of the people left behind the Iron Curtain were faded, drained of color, devoid of tone. Printed on the cover pages in bold ink were the words “Published in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania,” words that mocked Maria and the Forest Brothers, all dead now. As though the resistance had meant nothing at all.

Like everyone in the émigré community, Maria had her way of knowing what was going on behind the Iron Curtain. The Soviet government published a few books to show the world how tolerant they were of diversity, of the ancient folk traditions. The first few pages were filled with inane propaganda written out in Lithuanian, and in Russian, and even in English. Those pages Maria had carefully sliced out with a razor.

Maria and Nora studied the book's illustrated plates together, discussing the nuances of color that could be teased out with natural dyes, and which were lost with chemical dyeing. Maria was amazed that she could have this conversation with her American daughter. They talked until they fashioned the perfect costume. During the daylight hours Maria sat Nora at the loom and taught her how to make her weft straight; how to combine colors to create new ones that sprung unexpectedly from the cloth. She taught her, without saying a word, that there was a certain comfort in the weaving, a comfort in the

work of the hands and the eye, an anesthesia that helped one forget all that lay outside the door of consciousness, all the clutter of the mind, that persistently rapped on that door, ceaselessly begging to be let in. She taught her everything about the weaving that her own mother had taught her all those years ago in Lithuania, in her village of Būda.

Life had given her enough. Life had given her strong hands to work with and an eye to see how the colors came together to make new colors that had not been there before. It was immodest to want more. Greedy. She had seen much worse after the war. She had been lucky. She had survived.

The Forest Brothers of the Resistance had stayed and died on their own land. So many others had fled, first to Germany and Sweden, then to America, to South America, to Australia. All of them fleeing, fleeing as far away from Lithuania as they could. In 1944, when Maria was six years old, when the deportations to Siberia were taking place, when the Russians were rounding up the young men in her village and sending them to fight on the front without rifles, one million Lithuanians, a third of the population, fled. Maria knew that they could not get far. The threads that fastened their hearts to the land always tugged them back.

Those threads were as taunt as the threads fastened tightly to the wooden frame of the loom. Only the shuttle could move, weaving its way seamlessly through the weft. The shuttle was the beating heart.

Maria's family did not flee.

“Only a rat jumps from a sinking ship,” her father had said. Her father and her mother had worked very hard to buy a small piece of land to begin their life together. They were not about to run away and leave their land behind. And after all, who would take care of the animals?

Maria wondered about the irony of her mother's story in those strange and brutal times. Maria's mother came from a family of wealthy farmers. They had made their money in the coal mines in America and had come back to an independent Lithuania in 1929 rich enough to buy a large expanse of land. They lived well. But when Nora was seventeen, she fell in love with Vincas, a poor farmer's son who lived at the edge of their meadow. In the middle of the night, in the light of the full moon, she ran away, across the meadow to him. They were married the next morning in the village church—the church that stood resolute in the center of town and was as grand as any cathedral. Her mother's parents did not speak to her for years. And then, because they were wealthy farmers, they were among the first to be arrested by the Russians and shoved into cattle cars headed for Siberia. They were declared “bourgeois” and “enemies of the State” because they owned too much land, good rich farm land. It was a bitter irony that allowed only one daughter from a family of eight to survive. The daughter who had chosen poverty for love lived, while her brothers and sisters and mother and father died in Siberia. Until the day they took her husband away. That was when Maria's mother, Nora, stopped believing Stalin's Sun had

come to Lithuania to raise up all the poor and downtrodden. That was when she began sheltering the men and women from the forest under the floorboards in her bedroom.

The first one to come to them used the code name, Perkūnas, Thunder. All the men and women from the forest had secret names. Few in their village knew their real names. It was too dangerous in those times to know anyone's name or where they were from or who they were related to. Knowing too much could harm others.

Perkūnas had named himself after the God of Thunder, one of a few male deities in a Lithuanian pantheon of goddesses. He was the leader of the Forest Brothers in southern Lithuania, near the Polish border, where they lived. He was a good man, older than the others, many of whom were barely men at all, school boys really. Perkūnas had been a high school history teacher before the war. When the resistance began he resolved to put all his lessons on patriotism and love of country to the test. In 1944, he joined the Forest Brothers together with his students. By 1948, when Maria was ten years old, and Perkūnas first came to their farm, all of his students were dead. He alone had survived.

This is what the weaving had given her—the ability to see how the long threads of life disappear for a while, but then they come back together some time later, completing the pattern. Her Nora was what Lithuania would have been if Lithuania had not lost her innocence through war and occupation. Nora was pure. Nora was hard-working. Nora was kind, generous. At the same time, her Nora was a real American, a self-assured and beautiful young woman, a doctoral student, a woman with a future ahead of her. She spoke English just like the Americans. Maria dropped the shuttle to the floor. Her hands went cold. She had to protect Nora. The KGB kept tabs on all the émigrés in the exile community, especially those whose families had been involved in the resistance. Even here in Saint Petersburg, Florida, they had made their presence known to her. Maria knew that they were watching. They were watching the little house where she lived, where she wove, divining the truth of her long, tangled life, teasing out the meaning of her fate.

But Nora was under their radar. They could never get to her. Never make the connection. As long as Maria kept Nora on the sidelines, she would be safe. But there was a price to pay for that safety. Keeping Nora on the sidelines meant keeping her an American, a stranger, an outsider. Maria sensed that this was the last thing Nora wanted. Nora had come to her because she wanted to belong. But who was she to shatter Nora's strength with her paltry words and her weakness? Because in the end, that is all it had been, weakness. She had simply done as she was told. She did not fight for her daughter. Not then. Not now. Even now she had let her slip away into the deep, silky, Florida night with no concrete plan for a second visit. At the end of their week together, Maria made sure that she remained just as much of a mystery to Nora as she had been on that first day when she had shown up on her doorstep. Now there was noth-

ing left for Maria to do, except to collect all the strands of her shattered life, and to weave them back together.

Maria picked up the shuttle. As her hands worked, in her mind she returned to the day when it had all started, the day Dèdè Rimas came and changed everything forever. She had just turned twelve. That day Maria learned about the existence of the hidden trapdoor in the floorboards under Mama's bed. It was so cold that the sky had turned a shade of cobalt that becomes dark violet just before the stars blink to life. The sun was shining so intensely that whenever Maria looked out the window, the light reflecting off the snow almost blinded her. On days like that, it was as though God had given up on keeping them safe, and was shining a bright lamp directly above their little wooden cottage on the edge of the pine forest. On such days, anything could happen. On such days, nothing could make Maria forget the leaden feeling of fear that had settled deep in her stomach, a fear as cold and solid as the metal awl her father used to make shoes before the soldiers came and took him away forever.

The Bomb Underneath the Floorboards

Before Dèdè Rimas came Maria paid little attention to the men and women from the forest. Mama would serve them the rolls with bits of lard inside that she baked every morning, and they would sit and talk quietly with their heads bowed together. Often, they would sleep out in the barn or in the woodshed. Perkūnas first came to them dressed in the usual Forest Brothers's uniform—a combination of a Lithuanian military uniform with a homespun linen shirt and a hand-knit woolen sweater. Sometimes Perkūnas would bring a typewriter and they would stay up all night typing in the parlor with the windows covered over. Maria would fall asleep to the sound of his typewriter clacking.

Other days Perkūnas would set up wooden saw horses in front of the house. Maria would watch through the window, her hands pressed to the window frames. The backs of her hands were always red and slashed from the metal edge of Teacher's ruler. Even though she was twelve, Maria could not read yet, and she could barely write. Teacher often hit her for her laziness and stupidity.

Once the sawhorses were set up, he would call the girls outside. Perkūnas would pull out a large piece of charcoal that he kept always in his pocket. With the charcoal he would form the letter "A" on the sawhorse. "Now you try," he would say to Vanda, handing her the charcoal first. She always traced the letter perfectly. Then Vilma would try, doing well for her age. And then it would be Maria's turn, and she would shudder because she was practically a woman, and still she could not form her letters properly. Maria could never listen to the lesson because she had to keep watch over Vilma, making sure the little one wouldn't say anything stupid that would get them in trouble.

Perkūnas would gently place the charcoal in Maria's palm and guide her hand, so that she could form the letter too. She would do well with his help, but when asked to write on her own, she

could not. Perkūnas spent many hours patiently teaching her how to write letters and numbers, how to read, and how to add and subtract, divide and multiply. Mama said that it was important for girls to be good students, not just boys. Mama said that Lithuania needed women scholars, and dreamed Maria would be a teacher one day, but how could she be a teacher if she could barely read and write?

After Dèdè Rimas came, everything changed.

Maria and her little sisters came charging into the kitchen. They were giggling because they had been playing with Murmė's new litter of kittens, and the kittens had been silly, tumbling all over the place. A new man was sitting with Perkūnas at the kitchen table. He was dressed in clean new clothing. Maria had never seen such clothing before—fresh, pressed, quality clothing. His rich dark hair was thick and luxurious with curls. Maria thought he looked like a movie actor. She hadn't actually ever seen a movie herself, but some of the girls in the village had showed her posters of movie actors that their parents had saved from before the war.

"Girls, you may call him Dèdè Rimas," Mama said.

Maria wondered why they had to address this man as "Uncle" when he was not their relative.

Mama ladled soup for the two men into cracked ceramic bowls. The Russians had taken away all the good bowls and dishes, so now they had only cracked and broken things left, and that made them feel very poor. Mama took a loaf of rye bread and tucked it under her arm. With her big knife she sliced off hunks of bread and handed them to each of the men. Mama gave the new man the biggest piece of bread and she looked in his eyes when she handed it to him.

"And who is in charge of this little army?" Dèdè Rimas asked, glancing at Maria.

Mama nodded at Maria, indicating that she could speak.

"I am," Maria said shyly.

"Oh, but the Russians would tremble if they knew about these brave little fighters!"

Maria did not say anything. She wanted to laugh, but she knew it was rude to laugh around grown-ups, so she bit the corners of her lips from the inside.

"Their father would be proud," Mama said.

"And where is their father?" Dèdè Rimas asked.

"Siberia," Mama said and turned away. She gazed out the window that Tètè had made by cutting away the planks facing the front of the house.

"Have you received any letters?" Perkūnas asked.

"None," Mama said. "It's been years since the last letter."

Mama grew silent and the men ate their soup. Vilma and Vanda drifted back to their game in the corner of the kitchen. Maria went to the bucket where the dishes were soaking and began washing them.

Mama said, "You may stay here as long as necessary."

"Nora, I am giving you a code name," Perkūnas said. "Your name shall be Varna, the Crow."

Mama nodded.

Vilma made a "caw, caw, caw" sound. She stood up and flapped her arms and pretended she was a crow flying through the kitchen. "Mama, can you fly?" Vilma asked, twirling around in circles.

"Hush, child," Mama said. "Girls, go into the parlor to play." Then she said to Perkūnas, "With that name you've made my child believe I'm a real old crow."

Dèdè Rimas laughed, then he said, "Perhaps it's not a good idea to talk in front of the children."

"They're good girls," Mama said. "They know never to talk about anything they hear at home at school or anywhere else." "Then they really are little fighters," Dèdè Rimas said and winked at Maria.

Maria took Vilma by the hand and led her into the parlor. Vanda followed. Maria found their rag dolls in the corner and put them into her sisters' hands. Then she crept back to the doorway that divided the kitchen from the parlor. She crouched there and listened.

"I want to show you something, Varna," Perkūnas said.

He pulled a bundle from his backpack and unwrapped a linen tablecloth. Inside was something big and black about the size of a grown man's head.

"We cannot risk being taken alive," Perkūnas said. "Do you understand what this means?"

Mama nodded.

"You must agree to it or he cannot stay here," Perkūnas said.

"Rimas has been to West. He was trained by the Americans. If Rimas is taken, many will be compromised if he cracks under torture."

"I will not crack," Dèdè Rimas said.

"You do not know that," Perkūnas said grimly. "No one can know until it happens." Turning to Mama, he said, "If you are surrounded, Rimas will detonate the bomb. That means everything explodes. You, your little girls, the house..."

Mama nodded her head firmly. "I understand and I agree," Mama said. She looked at Dèdè Rimas and said, "If they come for you, you will know what to do."

"I will knock on the floorboards three times from the bunker," Dèdè Rimas said, "to warn you, so that you're ready."

"So that I may say my prayers in time," Mama said and laughed a short nervous laugh.

"Exactly," Dèdè Rimas said.

Then, they all laughed. Only, Maria did not see that there was anything to laugh about.

Laima Vince is a writer, poet, playwright, educator, and literary translator. She is the author of a novel, This is Not My Sky, and four works of literary nonfiction, Digging a Hole to China, The Snake in the Vodka Bottle, Journey into the Backwaters of the Heart, Lenin's Head on a Platter. Her plays have been performed in Europe, Hong Kong, and the United States. This Is Not My Sky can be ordered at <https://www.createspace.com/7124752>

A Generation Remembered

By Vytas Sirusas



A cross made by Vytas Sirusas in honor of his grandparents.

Those who enjoy the “taste of Lithuania” articles by my sister, Jana Sirusaitė Motivans, have read many anecdotes of times with our grandparents, especially močiutė, Sofija Klevas, who passed away in January 2016. She lived to nearly 100 and it was a blessing to have her with us for so much of our lives.

Sofija was our last surviving grandparent. Her husband, Vincentas, died in 1998. Our paternal grandfather, Jurgis Sirusas, died in 1984 and his wife, Elena, died in 1998.

A few months after Sofija died, our family began to discuss plans to follow the Lithuanian tradition of having a memorial on the one-year anniversary. We decided to postpone it a little longer, until spring arrived, and make it a remembrance of all four grandparents.



Deacon Dave Urcinas blesses the cross.
Photo by Dalia Hoffman.

As a symbol for the event, I constructed a traditional Lithuanian cross out of found metal items and installed it in my yard. Inspiration came from seeing beautiful crosses outside the Baltimore Lithuanian Hall during the dance festival, and from a book Jana found in her parish library that showed many classic designs. The cross served as a focal point, and a flat rock was used as the base for a candle and plaque, both put into place during the ceremony.

We felt that to truly honor our grandparents, the event should include a Catholic blessing of the cross by a local clergy. Despite many efforts, no one available could be found, until my father remembered a friend in the local Knights of Columbus, who was of Lithuanian descent, and just happened to be getting ordained as a deacon the day before our event. He was happy to come and did a wonderful job—truly, a case of meant-to-be!

Most of all, the event was about family, and it was a wonderful gathering. Everyone brought traditional foods, cherished photographs, and fond memories. We talked about days long gone, as well as hopes for the future that our grandparents helped to make possible, and for which we will always remember them with gratitude.



Sofija and Vincentas Klevas just prior to the war. They were married at this time. Vincentas was an officer in the Lithuanian army. Photographer unknown.



Jurgis and Elena Sirusas 25th wedding anniversary in 1960. Photo by Vytautas Maželis.



The Sirusas family came for the ceremony/memorial in honor of their grandparents on May 21, 2017. Photo by Dalia Hoffman.

June Anniversaries

645 years ago

On June 12, 1372 Grand Duke of Lithuania Algirdas marched towards Moscow and was stopped by Dmitry Donskoy near Lyubutsk where the Treaty of Lyubutsk was concluded. The Lithuanian–Muscovite War encompasses three raids by Algirdas, Grand Duke of Lithuania, to the Grand Duchy of Moscow in 1368, 1370, and 1372. Algirdas organized the raids against Dmitry Donskoy in support of the Principality of Tver, chief rival of Moscow. In 1368 and 1370, Lithuanians besieged Moscow and burned the posad, but did not succeed in taking the city's Kremlin. In 1372, the Lithuanian army was stopped near Lyubutsk where, after a standoff, the Treaty of Lyubutsk was concluded. Lithuanians agreed to cease their aid to Tver, which was defeated in 1375. Mikhail II of Tver had to acknowledge Dmitry as "elder brother".



Kazimieras Jogailaitis

Pomerania, and the Jagiellonian dynasty became one of the leading royal houses in Europe. He was a strong opponent of aristocracy, and helped to strengthen the importance of Parliament and the Senate. The great triumph of his reign was bringing Prussia under Polish rule. The long and brilliant rule of Casimir corresponded to the age of "new monarchies" in western Europe. By the 15th century Poland had narrowed the distance separating it from western Europe and become a significant factor in international relations. The demand for raw materials and semi-finished goods stimulated trade, producing a positive balance, and contributed to the growth of crafts and mining in the entire country. He was a recipient of the English Order of the Garter, the highest order of chivalry and the most prestigious honor in England and of the United Kingdom, awarded at the Sovereign's pleasure as his or her personal gift, on recipients from the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth realms.

225 years ago

On June 14, 1792, the Russians took Vilnius, after only a small skirmish with local garrison. On June 19th they took Nesvyžius, and on June 20th, they took Kaunas. The Polish–Russian War of 1792 was fought between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on one side, and the Targowica Confederation (conservative nobility of the Commonwealth opposed to the new Constitution of 3 May 1791) and the Russian Empire under Catherine the Great on the other. The war took place in two theaters: northern in Lithuania and southern in Ukraine. In both, the Polish forces retreated before the numerically superior Russian forces, though they offered significantly more resistance in the south, thanks to the effective leadership of Polish commanders Prince Józef Poniatowski and Tadeusz Kościuszko. During the three-month-long struggle several battles were fought, but no side scored a decisive victory. The largest success of the Polish forces was the defeat of one of the Russian formations at the Battle of Zieleńce on June 18th; in the aftermath of the battle the Polish highest military award, *Virtuti Militari*, was established. The war ended when the Polish King Stanisław August Poniatowski decided to seek a diplomatic solution, asked for a ceasefire with the Russians and joined the Targowica Confederation, as demanded by the Russian Empire. *kariuomenė užėmė Vilnių*.

205 years ago

On June 24, 1812, in the morning, Napoleon's Grande Armée crossed the Nemunas River by the City of Kaunas and the invasion of Russia began. Philippe-Paul de Segur, an eyewitness, describes the scene:

"Enthusiasm ran so high that two divisions of the vanguard, contending for the honor of crossing first, almost came to blows and were restrained with difficulty. Napoleon was impatient to set foot on Russian territory. Without faltering he took that first step toward his ruin. He stood for a time at the head of the bridge, encouraging the soldiers with his look. All saluted him with their usual *Vive l'Empereur!* At length, overcome by impatience, he suddenly galloped off across country and plunged into the forest which skirted the river. He urged his horse on at top speed. In his eagerness it seemed as though he wanted to overtake the enemy all by himself. He rode on in that direction for more than a league without encountering a living soul. Finally he had to turn back to the bridges whence, accompanied by his guard, he descended the river toward Kovno. The only enemy that encountered that day or on the follow days was the heavens. Indeed, the Emperor had hardly crossed the river when the air was shaken by a faint rumble. In a short time the sky had grown black, the wind had risen, bringing to our ears the sinister crash of thunder. The threatening

sky, this land without visible shelter, threw gloom over our spirits. Several of our men, recently enthusiastic, were terrified as though this were an ill omen. They fancied that fiery clouds had piled up over our heads and were bursting on this country to prevent our entering it. That same day a more personal misfortune was added to these general trials. Above Kovno, Napoleon was annoyed to find that the bridge over the Viliya had been destroyed by the Cossacks, preventing Oudinot from crossing. He shrugged this off scornfully, as he did everything that thwarted him, and ordered a squadron of Poles to ford the river. These picked troops obeyed without a moment's hesitation. At first they advanced in order, and when they were beyond their depth they still forged manfully ahead. They swam together to the middle of the stream, but there the swift current swept them apart. Then their horses took fright. Helplessly adrift, they were carried along by the violence of the current. They no longer tried to swim and lost headway completely. Their riders splashed and floundered in vain. Their strength failed, and finally they gave up the struggle. Their doom was certain; but it was for their country and her liberator that they were sacrificing themselves. As they were about to go down, they turned toward Napoleon and shouted: "*Vive l'Empereur!*" We noticed three in particular who, their mouths still above water, repeated the cheer and immediately sank. The army was gripped with horror and admiration."

Defeat: Napoleon's Russian Campaign (New York Review Books Classics) by Philippe-Paul de Segur (Author), J. David Townsend (Translator), Rk Danner (Introduction), pages 2-9.

110 years ago

On June 17, 1917, Reverend Mickevicius of the Lithuanian National Church of Lawrence, MA quarreled with bishop Hodur of the Pol-

ish National Church. Mickevicius called a popular synod which elected him Lithuanian bishop. He established a seminary for Lithuanian National Church clergymen.

On June 6, 1907, opera singer Petras Dargis was born. He died in 1962.

On June 10, 1907, Albinas Liaugminas, Lithuanian pedagogue, psychologist, Doctor of Philosophy was born. He died in 1992.

On June 20, 1907, Felix Waitkus, an American Lithuanian pilot was born. His parents came from Lithuania in 1904, settling in the old "Lithuanian Downtown" in Chicago's Bridgeport neighborhood where Vaitkus was born three years later. He enlisted in the army in 1928, and after graduating from advanced pilot's training school, was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Air Corps. In 1931, he was placed in the reserves with the rank of first lieutenant and returned to civilian life to work with his father-in-law who operated a flying school in Kohler, Wisconsin. A few months after the Lituanica tragedy, some prominent members of the Chicago Lithuanian community discussed the possibility of financing another transatlantic flight. This idea was greeted with much enthusiasm, and enough funds were raised during this difficult period, the Great Depression. A much faster and more modern aircraft (compared to the original Lituanica) was purchased from the Lockheed Aircraft Corp., called the Lockheed Vega, the same model used by Wiley Post in his round-the-world flight, and by Amelia Earhart, the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. The aircraft was christened Lituanica II on Sunday, April 22, 1934. When the pilot originally chosen for the flight unexpectedly resigned in the spring, the Lithuanian organizers turned to Feliksas Vaitkus, and he accepted the challenge to fly to Lithuania.



Felix Waitkus by his plane Lituanica II.

Beets for Summer

By Jana Sirusaitė-Motivans



For Lithuanians, one of the most beloved foods is šaltibarščiai (cold beet soup). This is one of the staples of summer in Lithuania, made with cucumbers, scallions, and dill fresh from the garden. It is often served as a simple lunch or as a first course for dinner.

My grandmothers, and most other Lithuanian-Americans, have traditionally used buttermilk to make šaltibarščiai. Terese Vekteris, my friend and previous Bridges editor, taught me to use kefir (kefyras in Lithuanian) instead. She published her recipe in the July/August 2012 issue of Bridges, and it has become my recipe of choice. Kefir has only recently become more widely available in American grocery stores, which is why previously buttermilk was commonly used. Kefir has a slightly tangier taste, and contains less fat than buttermilk.

I live in Canada, where fresh beets are inexpensive and readily available, so I prefer to use fresh beets for šaltibarščiai. Terese suggests using shredded beets from a jar for added convenience.

I am also sharing two recipes for beet salads. Roasted beets with dilled cucumbers is a beautiful looking summer salad, combining two vegetables traditionally loved by Lithuanians. I found this recipe in a Martha Stewart magazine. Martha's mother is Polish, so our food tastes are similar. The second salad combines raw shredded beets with apples for a refreshing taste. The recipe for this salad came from Danutė, a woman who was a caregiver for my Močiutė and had previously worked in the food industry in Lithuania.

I hope you enjoy your summer beets!

Šaltibarščiai

INGREDIENTS

- 2 quarts plain kefir
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 and 1/2 pounds fresh beets OR one jar of shredded beets
- 1/2 cup chopped scallion
- 2 pickling cucumbers (Kirby), diced
- 1/2 bunch chopped dill
- 2 hard-boiled eggs (one chopped, one sliced)

1. If using fresh beets, wrap them in foil and bake at 400° for approximately an hour and a half until they are soft. When they are cool enough to handle, peel them and then shred them using a hand-held grater.
2. Mix the kefir and sour cream together in a large bowl.
3. Mix in the shredded beets, diced cucumbers, chopped scallions and dill, and chopped egg.
4. Ladle into serving bowl with a garnish of sour cream, dill and sliced egg. Serve with warm boiled potatoes.

Beets with dilled cucumbers

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound roasted fresh beets (see Šaltibarščiai recipe above for roasting information)
- 1/2 English cucumber
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons white-wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sour cream
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill

1. Peel the roasted beets, and cut into wedges. In a medium-sized bowl, toss the beets with 1 tablespoon each of canola oil and white-wine vinegar. Season with salt and pepper.
2. Cut the cucumber in half, and thinly slice it. In another bowl, mix the sliced cucumber with the 2 tablespoons of sour cream, the tablespoon of chopped dill, and the remaining 2 teaspoons of white-wine vinegar. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Place the beets on a platter and top with the cucumbers.

Beet and apple salad

INGREDIENTS

- 2 large beets
- 2 Granny Smith apples
- (The total weight of the beets should be equal to the total weight of the apples)
- Peel the beets and slice into match-stick (julienne) sized pieces
- Peel the apples and cut similarly into match-stick sized pieces.

Prepare the salad dressing:

1. Put 2 tablespoons of honey, 2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar and 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a small glass jar. Close the lid tightly and shake the contents to mix thoroughly.
2. Place the beet and apple pieces into a medium-sized bowl, pour the dressing over them, and mix to combine.



Keeping our Folk Art Alive!

By Ramūnė Jonaitis



Lithuanian Folk Art Institute (LTFAI) Board, elected April 2017. Seated, from left: Birutė Batraks, Diana Bubulis-Wiese (President), Ramūnė Jonaitis (Secretary); standing, from left: Algimantas Nakrošius (Treasurer), Lith. Costume Archive Lead Aldona Rygelis, Danguolė Juozapavičius-Breen, Sebastian Grinham. Photo by J. Tarvydas

This year's annual general meeting of the Lithuanian Folk Art Institute (LTFAI) took place on April 30, 2017, at the Resurrection Parish in Toronto. The former president, Birutė Batraks, called the meeting to order and asked for a moment of silence in remembrance of recently deceased members – Laurynas Vismanas, Aldona Vaitonienė, Irene Meiklejohn, Dana Šablinskas and others. Their passing was deeply felt in the organization and it was important to honor their memories and accomplishments.

LTFAI Board elections also took place at the annual meeting, and the following were elected: Diana Bubulyte-Wiese (President), Algimantas Nakrošius (Treasurer), Ramūnė Jonaitis (Secretary), Danguolė Breen (LMAC Liaison), Sebastian Grinham (Technical Advisor), Aldona Rygelis (National Costume Project Lead), Birutė Batraks, Alytė Milliken, Algis Norvila, Kristina Pavilanis.

This past year, a number of things were initiated and completed with plans for many more for this year. We want to ensure that LTFAI is not just a legacy organization but a living breathing entity that celebrates the past and embraces the future.

Our main accomplishment was the creation of an LTFAI website. Through the actions and support of the board members and other interested members, a website was developed that was envisioned to accomplish a number of things. First and foremost, to establish LTFAI as an entity on the internet. This will allow us to provide information on the Institute and our history and founders, showcase and promote Lithuanian folk art, reach out to members and more importantly new members, and provide a home for the archive of the National Costume Project. On May 1, 2017, our website was launched. <https://ltafi.org>. We encourage you to visit.

One of our key current projects is the National Costume Archive Project which is being led by weaver and photographer Aldona Rygelis from New York City. Its purpose is to document and photograph Lithuanian national costumes woven in North America, in the diaspora, in order to capture the beauty and artistry of these garments so that future generations can appreciate and understand the technical mastery that went into this weaving. To date, we have meticulously photographed approximately 275 costumes from all over North America. Our images include the full costume as well as closeups of individual garments and patterns to show the intricacy of design and color. This will serve as a guide, teaching tool and archive of information. The project is ongoing, and Phase 1 of the digital archive is planned to launch in September 2017. We are proud to be able to do that in the Year of the National Costume as designated by the Ministry of Culture of Lithuania.

We have an ambitious year ahead and welcome any and all artists and craftspeople interested in Lithuanian folk art and particularly weavers to become engaged with the organization and keep our heritage alive.



Crown. Exterior detail.



Bodice, front.



Costume woven by Anastasia Tamosaitis for Irene Meiklejohn. Worn for many multicultural events in Canada. Representative of the style of the Klaipėda region in Lithuania (with embellishments). Photographs on this page are by Aldona Rygelis.



Sash.

The 35th Annual Baltic American Freedom League's Banquet

By Alexandra Kudukis



Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania in Los Angeles Darius Gaidys, Honorary Consul of Estonia Jaak Treiman, a special guest, Honorary Consul of Latvia Dr. Juris Bunkis and Tina Bunkis, BAFL Vice President Ivars Michuls, Speaker of the Saeima (Parliament) of the Republic of Latvia Ināra Mūrniece, BAFL President Valdis Pavlovskis, BAFL Executive Vice President Angelē Nelsas, Ambassador of the Republic of Latvia to the United States Andris Teikmanis, Honorary Consul of Lithuania Daiva Čekanauskas Navarette, and BAFL Treasurer Tāivaldis Paegle.

The 35th annual Baltic American Freedom League's awards banquet took place on Saturday, April 29, 2017 at the Latvian Community Center, 1955 Riverside Dr., Los Angeles, California.

Co-Sponsors of the event were the Estonian Society of Southern California, the Latvian Association of Southern California, the Latvian Daugavas Vanagi Association of Southern California, and the Lithuanian American Community, Inc.

The sold-out event began as the Master of Ceremonies, Daiva Čekanauskas Navarette, the Honorary Consul of Lithuania in Santa Barbara and Central Coast California, warmly greeted the guests. Aivars Jerumanis, Director of the Baltic American Freedom League, followed her and delivered a thoughtful invocation reciting prayers for continued peace and security in the Baltic States. Nora Miculs followed by enthusiastically playing the national anthem on piano. The Baltic American Freedom League (BAFL) President Valdis Pavlovskis continued the momentum by enthusiastically speaking to the group. Valdis focused his message on the commitment, persistence, and dedication of the League's work, and on all that was necessary to see the group through many difficult moments in the past 35 years. Mr. Pavlovskis reiterated the group's necessity in these politically uncertain, even volatile times, stating that this ceremony marks the 35th anniversary of BAFL's existence and its continued commitment to ensuring and protecting the sovereignty of the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

After Valdis' impactful speech, the Honorable Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima (Parliament) of the Republic of Latvia addressed the audience. Ms. Mūrniece has been a member of Saeima since 2011, assuming the role of Speaker of the Saema

in 2014. She boldly stated her position that Russian aggression is a continuing and persistent threat to the entire Baltic region and that she works diligently with that thought ever present in her mind, to preserve and protect those hard-won freedoms. Ināra Mūrniece spoke in great detail on the important strides made in Latvia to strengthen the country from the inside out, making Latvia more economically, politically and societally strong and secure. She eloquently stated that Baltic soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder with our NATO allies in both Iraq and Afghanistan and paid our NATO dues not only in money but also in the blood of our fallen soldiers.

This year's recipient of the BAFL President's Award, long-time Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, delivered a direct yet poised speech by which he reminded the attendees that people of the Baltic States live in a bad neighborhood, noticing that "Ireland can afford not to join NATO. As long as Russia is aggressive and tries to influence elections, politics, economics, we need to remain members. Freedom is a torch passed from generation on to the next, to ensure the continued sovereignty of the Baltic States, NATO membership is a must."

President Ilves spoke passionately and very energetically, visibly raising the spirits of the audience.

The program concluded with a lively question and answer period with the attendees.

This was the 35th annual BAFL awards banquet. Much has changed and some issues remained constant over the last 35 years. Angelē Nelsas, BAFL Executive President and Valdis Pavlovskis, the current BAFL President witnessed those challenges and changes, Angelē from about BAFL's 6th year, and Valdis



President of the Lithuanian American Golf League Vince Bernota, Romas Predkelis, Rimas Mulokas, Vytautas Černius, Rūta Mulokas, BAFL Secretary Alexandra Kudukis, Alba Schuksta, former LAC President Danguolė Navickas, BAFL Executive Vice President Angelē Nelsas, Romas Nelsas, Janina Čekanauskas, Michael Andriulis, Dale Teti, Janina Mikalajūnas, Violeta Gedgaudas, BAFL Vice-President Aavo Reinfeldt, Laima Predkelis, and Mindaugas Gedgaudas. Left 2nd row: Danutė Mažeika and BAFL former president Tony Mažeika.

being a charter member. They shared a little about the biggest challenges they met over so many years of service, as well as their favorite memories.

BAFL President Valdis Pavlovskis stated: "The biggest challenge most of the time is also the biggest success, BAFL has two. The biggest challenge was to be accepted and recognized by other national Baltic organization as a forceful and effective promoter of political and national goals of the Baltic-American community. We got the Congress (Senate and House) to pass the Baltic Freedom day Resolution in 1982, which asked President Reagan to issue a proclamation regarding the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries. In his resolution, the President clearly and forcefully declared the Soviet occupation of the three countries is illegal and against the wishes of the population and that the United States does not recognize it and that the United States supports freedom and independence of the Baltic countries. Just last month (April) the House of Representative Foreign Affairs Subcommittee had a public hearing on the Baltic States, and the Ranking Member of the Committee, George Meeks (D-NY), stated that President Reagan's 1982 Proclamation is a cornerstone of the U.S. relations with the Baltic countries. I was the President at the time of BAFL at the time, but this landmark achievement of ours, would not have been possible without the fervent and diligent work of many others who assisted us. Above all else, our biggest success was working with other Baltic American organizations to get the Baltic countries into NATO.

When asked about this year's banquet. Mr. Pavlovskis shared: "My favorite moment was the singing of the national anthems. It made me feel like are truly sisters and brothers, and that no one can stop us from reaching our goals."

Ms. Angelē Nelsas stated: "I had three major challenges, first

one was in speaking with Congress and President Bush during the re-establishment of independence of the Baltic States. Secondly, creating the Baltic Caucus, and thirdly passing the HCR 51- the Konigsberg/Kaliningrad demilitarization protocol. It took unbelievable resolve to not give in, in the face of unbelievable obstacles, and to engage our Congress to pay attention to the Baltic States. We spent three months in the Washington DC pushing relentlessly to turn the Baltic States to face west, to make the Congress see that the sovereignty of the Baltic States was in all of our best interests.

When speaking on this year's program, Angelē Nelsas mostly appreciated the fact that so many people took time out of their busy schedules to attend. Despite many other concurrent events, our event was sold out. I loved the messages our speakers shared. They spoke on Baltic unity, shared ideas, and the importance of keeping all three countries safe from Russian intimidation and threats. It was fantastic to hear the speakers understand each other and what each state is trying to achieve. The message that all three countries are still growing, yet are already strong, productive, responsible, globally important states, is an important one to share. Ms. Nelsas added: "Thank you, everyone, for attending, and for the many generous donations, that empower us to continue with our efforts to preserve the freedom of the three Baltic States for another year. See you at the 2018 BAFL awards banquet."

2017 BAFL Board Members: President- Valdis Pavlovskis, Executive Vice President- Angelē Nelsas Vice President- Aavo Reinfeldt, Vice President- Ivars Miculs, Director- Janis Lacis, Director- Dr. Hendrik Leesment, Director- Imants Leitis, Director- Aivars Jerumanis, Director- Janis Lacis, Director- Guna Justsone, Treasurer: Tāivaldis Paegle, Secretary- Alexandra Kudukis

Atlanta Lithuanian Community Celebrates Its 40th Anniversary

By Emilia Kairys



From left: Pianist Rudolf Budginas, Lithuanian American Community National Committee President Sigita Šimkuvienė, Atlanta Lithuanian Community President Juras Palukaitis. Photo by Justinas Bartkevičius.

On May 6th, 2017, the Atlanta Lithuanian Community celebrated its 40th anniversary with many festivities and a couple special guests that culminated in a beautiful celebration of our Lithuanian heritage here in the United States.

The evening started off with a performance by "Jievaras", a very young Lithuanian dance group formed just two years ago. Dressed in traditional Lithuanian attire, the dancers performed three traditional dances. Their performance was followed by concert put on by the "Saulė" Lithuanian school students. The children performed a few songs accompanied by a special guest, Rudolf Budginas.

After the performances, The President of the Atlanta Lithuanian Community, Juras Palukaitis, talked about the the growth of the Lithuanian community in Atlanta. He introduced a very special guest who had come all the way from New Haven, Connecticut, Sigita Šimkuvienė, President of the American Lithuanian Community. She gave a moving speech on the importance of keeping the Lithuanian language and culture alive through events like the one put on that evening. Juras Palukaitis then introduced a very important project, the building of the 40-year tree. The tree came out onto the stage completely bare, and together as a community we placed a leaf for each year the community has been thriving. Everyone had the opportunity to add a leaf to the community tree. This collective building of the tree represented the growth that the community has experienced



"Jievaras" dance group performs at the celebration. Photo by Justinas Bartkevičius.



Young students of the "Saulė" Lithuanian school perform for the audience. Photo by Justinas Bartkevičius

and how the efforts of each individual within the community contributed to that growth.

After dinner that evening, Rudolf Budginas, a Lithuanian-born pianist, put on a wonderful performance incorporating classical music in a non-traditional way. He engaged the audience and entertained us with music from a variety of composers and artists. After the concert, guests were treated to cake and champagne. To conclude the night, DJ Jonas spun some tunes and we danced the night away.

The community board put a lot of time and effort into bringing this event to life, and it really paid off. The Atlanta Lithuanian Community has grown exponentially in the past 40 years and will continue to flourish for years to come.

Security

...President Dalia Grybauskaitė attended the NATO summit in Brussels, Belgium with representatives of all 28 members including President Donald Trump, newly elected President Macron of France and the newest member, Montenegro. Topics included cost and responsibility sharing with respect to Russia, terrorism and deployment of Forward Presence Battalions in the Baltics and Poland. During the summit the new headquarters was dedicated and two memorials were unveiled: one to the demise of the Berlin Wall and the second to the victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in NYC when NATO invoked the Alliance's Article 5 where an attack on one is considered an attack on all NATO members justifying a united response.

...In anticipation of Zapad-2017, the quadrennial war games of Russia and Belarus, there is still uncertainty if U.S. Patriot surface to air missile systems will be located in the Baltics. The Washington Post reports that US officials said that the system "could be moved into the region during the July air defense exercise, but it would be gone by the time a large Russian military exercise begins in August and September".

...The RAND Corporation, a well-respected consulting firm, estimates that with concerted effort by Russian forces they would reach the Baltic capitals within 60 hours. They estimate that NATO would need 10 times the 4 brigades now spread between Poland and the Baltics.

...After reviewing 27 construction proposals, Lithuania's State Border Guard Service chose a Lithuanian construction company, Gintreja, to build the 2-meter high wire fence with electronic controls for \$1.45 million. The 45 km section borders the Kaliningrad region and is scheduled for completion before the end of the year. A Russian construction magazine reported that there were several offers from Russian suppliers at a reasonable price but "local companies have been preferred."

...Norway's NATO battalion delivered about 60 pieces of military and administrative equipment by sea to the port of Klaipeda. The shipment included Leopard tanks, CV90 fighting vehicles, M113 armored personnel and light vehicles.

...Kaunas was host to a two-week NATO exercise, "Steadfast Cobalt", to test the communication capability of 25 member nations between headquarters and combat units of the NATO Response Force. About 1000 NATO communications officers attended.

...Four Polish F-16 jets are serving as NATO air cover over the Baltic Sea. During a Russian Kaliningrad air defense exercise they were scrambled six times to intercept Su-27 fighters, a Russian Il-20 reconnaissance aircraft and an unidentified transport plane flying over the Baltic Sea. Generally they had their automatic transpon-

ders turned "OFF". The NATO planes are stationed at Siauliai in northern Lithuania.

...Russia was annoyed at the presence of various speakers at the fourth annual Vilnius Russia Forum attended by 100 for the two-day event. Speakers included Mikhail Khodorkovsky, once the richest man in Russia who later spent 10 years in a Russian prison and Zhanna Nemtsova, daughter of Boris Nemtsov, former deputy speaker of the Duma, who was murdered in 2015 on a bridge near the Kremlin.

...A group of 12 men dressed in camouflage with Russian look alike weapons were detained in the woods in Nemenčinė, 20 km north east of Vilnius and near the Turniškės homes of the President and the Prime Minister. The Lithuanian anti-terrorist operations team, ARAS, detained the men and later searched their homes and found firearms, ammunition and explosives. The men turned out to be a group of airsoft players who use air or CO2 powered guns that fire plastic BBs in combat games similar to paintball. They have been under surveillance since their travel to the Russian territory, Kaliningrad, and participation in a "Path to Victory" tournament where Russian military tactics were taught. In this internet and social network era, it appears that members have been linked to pro-Kremlin organizations and Russian secret services. It is reported that similar airsoft activity was noted in the region of eastern Ukraine just before the separatist movement began.

...About 100 Lithuanian domains were infected with the "Wanna-Cry" ransom attack which encrypted files and demanded ransom in bitcoin for help in recovery. No state or critical domains were reported to be infected.

Business

...The Libertyville, Illinois, medical device manufacturer, Hollister, Inc., plans to open a site in Kaunas which will result in 300 new jobs over the next several years. The employee owned company will supply products for ostomy and continence care. It also supplies products for the critical care and wound care markets. Founded in 1921 it has facilities in 25 countries and sales in more than 80 countries. It specifically chose Kaunas because of the proximity to the Kaunas University of Technology and the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences. In addition to products it supplies educational material and programs for patients and their healthcare providers. Hollister's motto is "We are committed to making a difference in the journey of life for the people we serve".

...A much smaller medical device company is also working in Kaunas. Ortho Baltic uses Computerized Tomography (CT) equipment from Nikon Metrology with CAD software and 3D printing to produce patient specific temporomandibular joint (TMJ) endoprosthesis. The 3D printing is also used to produce surgical guides which are used in to plan the surgery.

...Lithuania is making progress in working toward full membership in OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). It has submitted paperwork attesting to Combating Bribery of Foreign Officials in International Transactions. It hopes to join the current 35 members which include the U.S. (1961), Poland (1996), Estonia (2010) and Latvia (2016).

...The Board of Directors of Rail Baltica Construction has replaced the chief executive, Dainius Budrys, a former member of Seimas and member of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party. Budrys lead the construction company since its founding in 2014 and it is building the railway in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. His replacement is Karolis Sankovskis, Director of Strategic Infrastructure for the Lithuanian electricity transmission operator, Litgrid.

...Telialietuva, a TV, internet and mobile services provider, has installed 4.5G capability in Kaunas, Klaipėda, Panevėžys, Šiauliai and Vilnius. The new system combines four frequency bands of four channel transmission (4X4 MIMO) and uses a new signal encoding technology (256QAM) to provide data download of 500Mb/s.

...As part of Swedish company, Ikea's plan to run on renewable energy sources, it has contracted with OX2, another Swedish company, to manage a 45 MW wind park in northwestern Lithuania. The Mažeikiai facility consists of 19 Nordex wind turbines and adds to the three wind parks that OX2 manages for Ikea in Sweden.

...The Vilnius Regional Court has requested detailed information regarding the cybertheft case of Evaldas Rimašauskas who is accused of attempting to defraud Facebook and Google of \$100 Million, most of which has been recovered. The court has extended

his detention for three months while they await the response of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

...Wheat continues to be Lithuania's major agriculture export. Over 75% is sold to non-EU destinations, e.g. Saudi Arabia, 28%, 747 Metric Tons; Turkey, 12%, 395 Metric Tons. Much of the soft wheat is used for livestock feed.

General

...Lithuania's Ministry of Education and Science is recommending a consolidation of educational facilities to concentrate resources and combine research groups. Vilnius University will absorb Mykolas Romeris University, the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences and Siauliai University. A new entity will be started in Kaunas which will absorb the Kaunas University of Technology, Vytautas Magnus University, Aleksandras Stulginskis University and the Lithuanian Sports University. The reform also calls for two technological universities in Klaipeda and Vilnius.

...The Lithuanian Council General for Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty, Regimantas Jablonskas, has been recalled because of concern over irregularities in the issuance of visas.

...The Seimas Speaker, Viktoras Pranckietis is proposing that beginning January 1, 2018 a monthly grant at least 100 euros in "child money" for each child under 18 to encourage family formation and increase the birth rate. The Prime Minister, Saulius Skvernelis, believes that the country cannot afford more than 30 to 50 euros per month. Lithuania hopes to follow Poland's success of their program which resulted in an 18% increase in the birth rate, earlier family formation and a drop in alcohol consumption.

ONGOING

Most Fridays, 4:30-7:30 p.m.
Friday Fish Fry at the Rockford Lithuanian Club
 716 Indiana Avenue, Rockford, Ill.
 Open to the public. Weekly specials vary. First Friday of the month—Lithuanian dumplings.
 Info: lithuanianclub.org, 815-962-9256

Every Sunday, 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
All-You-Can-Eat Lithuanian Brunch Buffet
 Lithuanian Club and Gintaras Dining Room
 877 E. 185 St., Cleveland, Ohio
 \$15 per person; \$6 kids 6-12
 Info: lithclub@gmail.com, 216-531-8318

First Sunday of the Month, 12-4 p.m.
Lithuanian Brunch
 The Avenue Restaurant, 71-22 Myrtle Ave., Glendale, N.Y.
 Reservations strongly recommended.
 Info: 347-725-3853

First Sunday of the Month
Rockford Lithuanian Club General Membership Meeting
 716 Indiana Avenue, Rockford, Ill.
 Open to all members.
 Info: lithuanianclub.org, 815-962-9256

Every Third Saturday, Mar-Jun & Sep-Nov, 1-3 p.m.
Amber Roots Lithuanian Heritage Club
 Lithuanian Music Hall, 2517 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.
 Use Tilton Street entrance. Bring a dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

JULY 2017

July 2-8
Family Camp for Lithuanian Speakers
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

Please verify all events, as places and times are subject to change.

July 9-23
Children's Camp for Lithuanian Speakers 7-16
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

July 23
Lithuanian Friendship Day/ Putnam Picnic
 600 Liberty Hwy., Putnam, Conn.
 Info: neringa.org

July 23-29
"Third Week" Youth Camp for Lithuanian Speakers, 12-16 Years Old
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

July 27-30
Knights of Lithuania 104th National Convention
 Holiday Inn Hotel, Dayton, Ohio
 Info: knightsolithuania.com

July 30-August 12
Heritage Camp in English, 7-16 Years Old
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

AUGUST 2017

August 12-13
Lithuanian Days Festival
 The Knights of Lithuania Council 144
 The Annunciation Hall in Frackville, PA
 7 South Broad Mountain Avenue.
 570-874-1109

August 12-19
"Third Week" Youth Camp in English, 12-16 Years Old
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.

August 5-11, 2017
Ateitis Annual Lithuanian Cultural Week
 Franciscan Guest House, 26 Beach Ave., Kennebunk, Maine
 Concert and lecture series with accommodations available.
 Info: 207-967-4865

August 20-27
Meno8Dienos Adult Art Camp in Lithuanian
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

SEPTEMBER 2017

September 16, 1-3 p.m.
Amber Roots Heritage Club
 Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
 Everyone welcome. Use side entrance on Tilton Street.
 Bring a dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

OCTOBER 2017

October 6-8
Iskyla/Walk-a-Thon
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: neringa.org

October 21, 1-3 p.m.
Amber Roots Heritage Club
 Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
 Everyone welcome. Use side entrance on Tilton Street.
 Bring a dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

NOVEMBER 2017

November 5, 1 p.m.
Chicago Lithuanian Women's Club
 will present a fashion show of Lithuanian designers and others at Palos Country Club, 13100 Southwest Hwy, Orland Park, IL.
 More information: ericabrooks1@yahoo.com

November 18, 1-3 p.m.
Amber Roots Heritage Club
 Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
 Everyone welcome. Use side entrance on Tilton Street.
 Bring a dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

DECEMBER 2017

December 9, 1-3 p.m.
Amber Roots Heritage Club Kučios
 Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
 Everyone welcome. Use side entrance on Tilton Street.
 Bring a dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

JUNE/JULY 2018

June 30 – July 6
Dainu Svente: Lithuania's Centenary Song Celebration
 Vilnius and Kaunas, Lithuania
 Info: dainusvente.lt/en/programme/

GOT EVENTS?

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