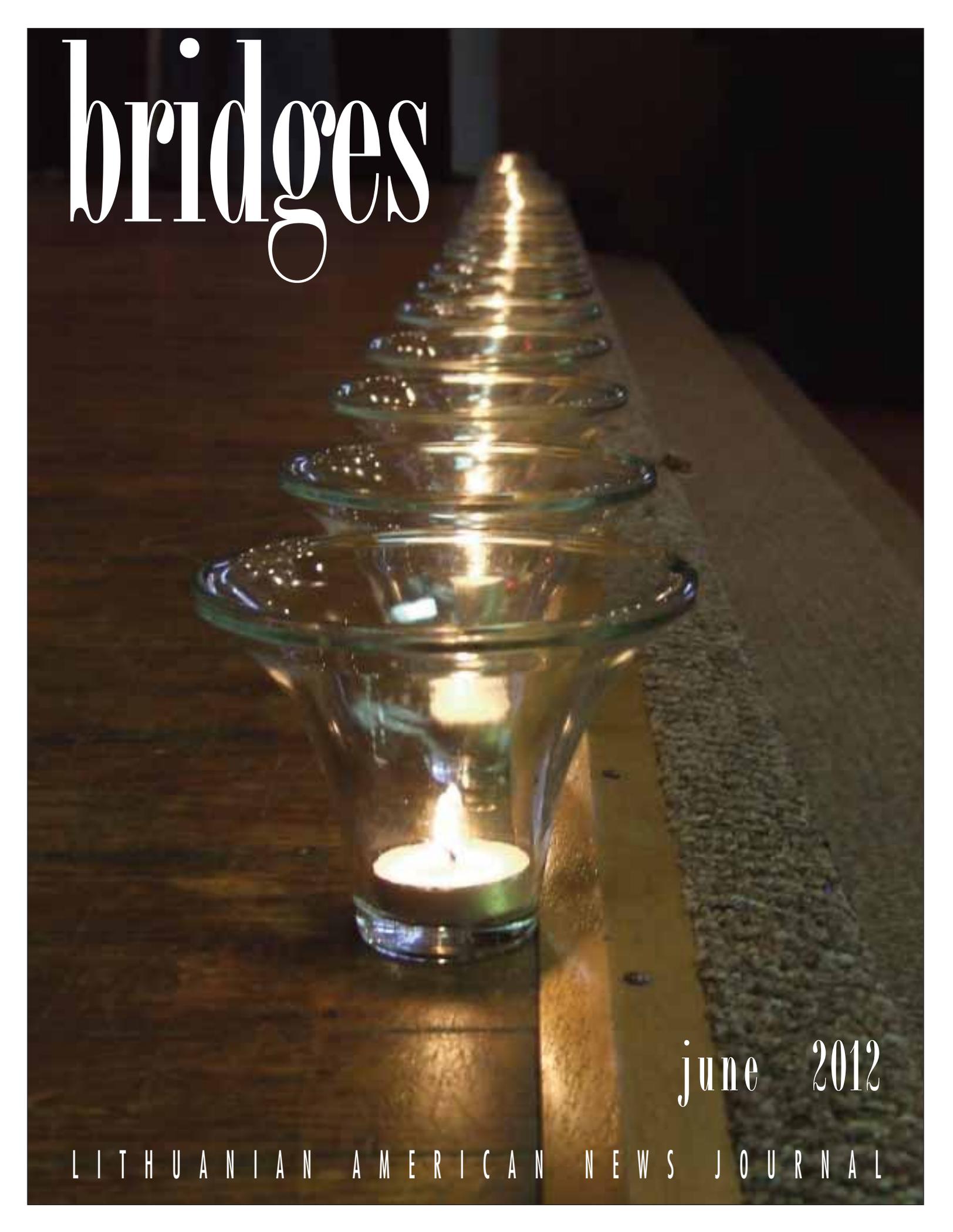


bridges

A long, receding line of lit tealight candles in clear glass holders sits on a wooden surface. The warm light from the candles creates a strong sense of perspective, drawing the eye towards the vanishing point in the distance. The background is dark, making the glowing candles stand out.

june 2012

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***FRONT COVER:** Members of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Communities gathered in New Jersey as their candles flickered in memory of those deported from their Baltic homelands and for those who never returned.

**Photo by Lisa Kurack*

THE BLACK DAYS OF JUNE

The first mass arrests were executed on June 14-15, 1941 and continued until war started between Soviet Russia and Germany on June 22. The deportees usually were seized between 1 and 4 a.m. The people had from half to one hour to pack the allowed household articles, and bid farewell to their homes and all they had acquired. The deportees came from all walks of life and represented all ages, not excluding infants, pregnant women, the sick or the very old.

The arrested were taken from their homes to railroad stations and loaded into freight cars, 50-60 persons to a car, although Serov's instructions specified only 25 persons. The windows of the cars were boarded up with only small cracks left open. Men were separated from their wives and in many instances children from their mothers. The people, locked in the cars lacking air and without food and water, had to wait several days until all the arrested were entrained. The long journey into the depths of Russia killed many of the weak and sick. Lithuanian deportees were transported to northern Russia, western and eastern Siberia, Kazakhstan, and the Soviet Far East. Most of the deportees were confined in forced labor camps.

Deportation after World War II, The same scheme of mass deportation adopted in 1941 was resumed during the second Soviet occupation from 1944. Thirteen waves of mass deportations were carried out in 1945-50, namely in July, August and September, 1945; February 1946; July, August, October, November and December, 1947; May, 1948; March and June, 1949; and March, 1950. Because of a shortage of transportation means and convoying troops, not all waves of deportation embraced all parts of Lithuania. Farmers resisting collectivization and those parts of Lithuania where partisans had been active in the fight for independence suffered most by deportations.

There are no published Soviet statistical data concerning the number of deportees. The Soviet census of 1959 reported a population of 2,711,445 in occupied Lithuania. Yet before the Soviet occupation at the end of 1939 the population was 3, 215,000.

Source: Excerpts from Encyclopedia Lituanica

*** BACK COVER:**

**The 14th Lithuanian
Folk Dance Festival
is coming to Boston on
July 1, 2012**

*Come experience this celebration of
Lithuanian dance and culture!*

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STRENGTH of SPIRIT

Marijona Venslauskaitė Boyle



Jan. 26, 1944 en route from Sweden on one of his secret missions.

I am searching for strength of spirit. Toward the end of his life, I met a man who embodied such strength. His name was Algirdas Vokietaitis. I saw him only a few times, when he was in his eighties. What an imposing figure he was, six feet tall, very erect. His strong features contrasted sharply with a soft, almost-rosy white skin. He had a handsome head of hair, pure white at this stage of his life. Dignity and grace seemed to float around him. His voice was soft and cultured, self-contained. He would bend his head in my direction as he turned his eyes toward me. They were the clear blue of a lake on a midsummer day. They seemed to glow with life. I wondered how that could be since I knew he was almost blind. I was fascinated by his story, which I gathered in bits and pieces through his sister Gražina, and later his writings, as well as articles written about him in the Lithuanian publication, *Dirva*.

He had studied in Marburg and Vienna in the 1930's and by 1939 received his Ph.D., and then taught at Vilnius University in the Institute of Physical Culture. He became a renowned athlete and Olympic participant. He was born in Kaunas, Lithuania to a family of educators and hoped to contribute to his country's development. Contribute he did, but not in the ordinary way in which he set out to do. His life became an accident of history because his country Lithuania, like the other Baltic States, would first be occupied by the Soviets, then by the Nazis, then again by the Soviets. For many patriots like Algirdas, this would be a no win situation. When the Soviets marched

into Lithuania as a result of the infamous and secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1940, the Soviet Secret Police, known as the NKVD at that time, listed Algirdas and his colleagues at the university as enemies of the new order. When the Nazis occupied the area in 1941, several underground resistance organizations began to form and became operational by 1942.

The Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (LLKS) produced underground publications, collected resistance documents and managed to establish contacts with the free world through neutral Sweden. Algirdas was a leader in this organization and managed a number of trips across the Baltic Sea in fishing boats. There were diplomatic contacts in Sweden as well as exile organizations that could help set up radio contacts, as well as document conditions in the occupied territories. On Algirdas' final secret mission, he was captured by a German War boat. He was imprisoned, tortured, questioned and

finally sent to Stuthoff Concentration camp in Poland. This was in the fall of 1944, and it was here that he would wait out the war's end. He had been operating in disguise under the name of Jonas Bartkus. Where Algirdas Vokietaitis had disappeared was not clear to anyone; family, colleagues, Soviets or Nazis. Family members hoped and prayed that by some miracle he would survive. What follows is part of his story as he told it in his writings.

Algirdas' Story – Episode One

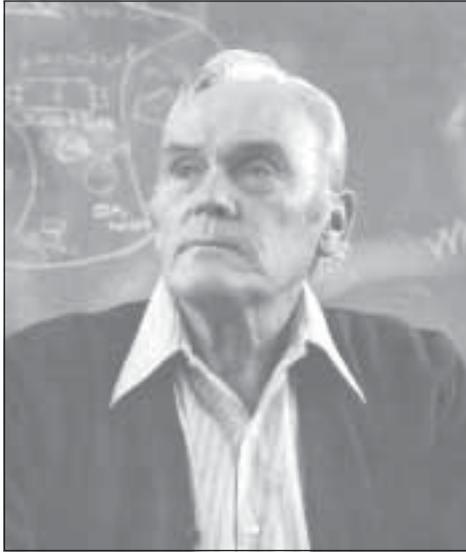
I remember a widespread outbreak of typhus in February of 1945 in the camp at Stuthoff. I got it too, raging typhus fever they called it. There were no medicines and little food. The Nazi war machine was grinding to a halt, but still the officers were ordered to try to save the rest of the camp from the spread of typhus by arranging a hasty transport. We were thrown into trucks if we couldn't walk, and brought to another camp called Riebene. Here I was thrust with the dead and dying into a small dark cell. The Germans called it the "death chamber" where I heard metal doors closing. I welcomed the cool, hard cement. I thought it would douse the flames in my cheeks and forehead. I guess it did because I mercifully lost consciousness and have no other memories of that place.

For a long time, I drifted in and out of strange dreams. There were sirens, black nights on the Baltic, waves rocking me to and fro, leather straps, harsh lights, blood and sweat mingling. I must have been reliving my capture at sea. Then the dream seemed to lift. I began to hear muted footsteps, soft feminine voices. Merciful dreams, I thought. I tried to remember my last conscious memory.

All I could recall was the hard cement floor, the dark cell, moans and groans on every side. I knew I was one of the dying. Where was I now? I tried to open my eyes but closed them quickly because the light was blinding. Cautiously, I tried again; it was indeed light, sunlight on white walls, white pillows under my head, women in white moving noiselessly to and fro. It could only be a dream of heaven.

What else could it be? I recognized nothing in my surroundings. Outlines of other beds became clear, white covers, soft pillows and gaunt faces. This had to be some kind of hospital. Charts were attached to the foot of each metal bed. Should I rejoice that I had been saved? It didn't seem to matter. My body and mind were too weak to care. Eventually, I began to recognize the language spoken by the ladies in white. It was Russian. I had been saved by the Soviets and was in one of their field hospitals. I should have been happy to be alive. Instead, cold sweat poured over me when I realized I had no idea which name was written on the chart at the end of my bed to identify me. If it were my actual name, Algirdas Vokietaitis, that would soon be matched with the NKVD lists and I would have exchanged a Nazi camp for a Soviet one. The Soviet camp would be in the far reaches of Siberia, even farther from my beloved homeland, Lithuania, than the Nazi camp. In my mind, my captors had just changed shirts from brown to red. What did it matter?

On the second day of my return to consciousness, I garnered enough strength to question the patient in the next bed as to where we were and what had happened. He told me the Soviets had pushed the front past Danzig and were heading for



Algirdas in the later years of his life.

Germany. He thought the war would end soon. When the Soviet army marched through, they liberated those who were able to walk, buried the dead and attempted to nurse survivors like me back to health. I was still too weak to do more than move cautiously in my bed. I could not get up without feeling dizzy. I practiced sitting on the edge of my bed for three nights in a row until I finally succeeded in crawling to the floor to check my name and identity. Relief poured over me. It was my fictitious name, Jonas Bartkus.

I began a slow recovery. Daily rations were meager—thin broth or gruel and a piece of bread sprinkled with sugar. Even so, I regained enough strength to exercise daily with the other survivors in the outside courtyard. Fear was my constant companion. I was afraid that someone among the hospital personnel or patients might come from Kaunas, my home town, and reveal my true identity. One day I got a glimpse of myself in a mirror. What I saw shocked me, and at the same time eased my fears. My face was only vaguely familiar. It was attached to the body of skeleton. I stopped worrying.

After ten days on our feet, about thirty of us former camp inmates were considered fit enough to leave the hospital. There was no civilian clothing available, so we were issued uniforms the Reich Labor Force had left behind in its retreat. We were transported to a working farm the Germans had hastily abandoned. We were housed six to a room and put to work there. There was one armed guard at the front gate. A war weary Soviet Major, survivor of many campaigns, spoke to us as the commandant. The situation seemed incongruous. It was the spring of 1945 and we stood in a flowering meadow, never to leave the perimeter outside our fence or gate. We were in a war zone, he indicated, subject to military law. We could simply be shot on the spot by the regular army if we ventured out. On the other hand if we avoided being shot, we could help in the great work of rebuilding Mother Russia. He assumed we were all Russians or at least Slavs, and would be delighted with this task.

Still, there was a normalcy to be close to the land again. I became friends with my bedmate, Janek, and we exchanged stories. Janek was a Pole, a student from the University of Warsaw. He had been imprisoned in 1944 in one of the last uprisings of the Polish resistance movement against the Nazis. Most of his companions had been killed. We often talked long into the night, mainly about freedom and food. Food was probably uppermost in our minds since our rations were still limited to the thin soup and sugared bread we had received in the hospital. Planning and dreaming kept us alive. We surveyed the surrounding area from the knoll on which our farmhouse was situated. We decided that there had to be a

number of farms in the area. It would be worth the risk. Visions of country bread laced with fresh butter sustained us. Just a few drops of fresh milk would soothe our parched throats. Our obsession grew. One day we discovered the only Soviet soldier in charge of us was the guard at the gate. Our Major had driven off early in the morning in a small one horse wagon. This would be our chance to look for food outside our gates. We hid in the brush and held our breath after we climbed the fence. The guard had not noticed our escape. Our hearts sank when we saw the first neighboring farm. It was desolate and abandoned, completely bombed out. The farmhouse was only a shell and the outbuildings were tilting dangerously. Still, we decided to explore. In the ruined garden behind the house, I found my first trophy. I quickly pulled out a number of stalks of rhubarb that must have been overlooked in the fall. My mouth watered with images of the delicious rhubarb compote my mother had made in my childhood. Our cook might be able to leach much needed vitamins for us, even from these sad withered stalks. A good addition to our soup, I thought. I stuffed the rhubarb in my pocket.

Meanwhile, my companion Janek found his own treasures in the abandoned house. He called excitedly, "There are papers and books all over the floor." The books were in German and Janek, having been a student of that language, finally selected a classic novel that he knew would help pass the weary nights. I looked over the other debris and noticed a large pile of what seemed like tissue paper. There were lines and markings printed on the soft paper that I finally recognized as dressmaking

patterns. I was delighted. What luxury. I folded and stuffed as much of this paper as I could in my shirt front and pockets. There might be enough to last for a week in our outhouse, which up until now offered no such amenities.

Suddenly, we heard shots and shouts and noticed what seemed to be Soviet soldiers on patrol. We thought they might be practicing or shooting in the air until a few shots whizzed by our ears. I still didn't worry. I thought we'd wait for the soldiers to approach and then explain ourselves. I had forgotten our Major's warning and had also forgotten that we had no proof of who we were and where we came from. I had also forgotten we were wearing jackets of the Reich Labor Force, embellished with swastikas. Jack seemed to grasp the situation faster than I and kept moaning, "...my German book." With that he tossed it in the bushes. I remember shivering from head to toe, while the patrol approached with guns pointed at our heads. "Dokumenty." shouted a young Red Army Lieutenant. "We have none." I answered as calmly as I could in my best Russian. I tried to explain that we were Nazi camp survivors, now working for the Russians. He cut me off with blazing eyes. "What are you doing in a war zone?" I answered mildly, "Out walking, looking to beg food from the farmers." In retrospect, the truth sounded indeed very lame.

The Lieutenant turned from me with a disgusted shrug and turned to Janek. "What did you throw in the bushes?" "A book." Answered Janek. "Why?" countered the Lieutenant. "I don't know, I guess I was frightened," replied Janek. When the soldiers found the book and realized it was in German, they concluded we were spies. They had no

doubt that book was encoded with military data and secrets. This was often the case in those war years. When they searched me, my simple treasure affirmed their view. They had never heard of or seen rhubarb and couldn't imagine that it could be added to soup for nutrition. Poison, they concluded. My hoard of soft "toilet" paper got us into hotter water when I tried to explain why I was carrying it. The imprinted lines, letters and numbers did resemble maps and secret codes. The irony of being branded German spies on the basis of this paper hadn't dawned on me yet. I kept trying to explain how this misunderstanding could all be cleared up if they would only take us to our work camp.

Instead of listening, the soldiers pushed and prodded us down the road. They made us sit at the edge of a lake which bordered our farm road. Their weapons were pointed almost in our faces. We began sweating and shaking. The Lieutenant marched off in the direction of the village carrying the espionage evidence he had gathered. When he returned, I assumed we would be shot. Our homely search for milk, bread and butter would probably cost us our lives, I kept thinking. My head seemed to be thumping, so I closed my eyes. The thumping continued and grew closer. Thump, thump, clump, clump! When I dared to look, my heart leaped with joy. It was the one horse wagon with our own dear Major, our commandant.

He recognized us immediately. His anger was interspersed with curses and questions. He wanted to know what we were doing here, how we got here. He scolded, raged and fumed, called us impossible idiots, all in the most powerful curses for which the Russians are

Continued on the next page

THE UNINVITED

Source: "Vilniaus Gatvių Istorija"

Author: Antanas Rimvydas Čaplinskas

Translation by Gloria Kivytaitė O'Brien

The middle class in Vilnius of the sixteenth century and later, who owned apartment property there, were obliged to provide living space to any and all delegates to the Seimas (Parliament) who came to the city for frequent preliminary meetings, etc. This obligation was known as *prievolė* (conscription, national duty) and was the cause of much inconvenience for city dwellers.

The "VIP's" would descend upon the city with their escorts whenever a meeting was scheduled, and behave like a victorious army in a defeated land. The *Seimūnai*, quite legally, would take over attractive apartment space, without so much as a "by your leave". It was the duty of the citizenry to provide the space. Moreover, the *šeimininkas* (householder) could find himself and family out on the street, if their "guests" thought they were insufficiently obsequious in service to the *bajorai* (nobility) and their *palyda* (entourage), which could be numerous.

Many of these politicians, or their retinue, traveled to Vilnius with pleasure in mind, rather than the nation's business, and took advantage of an opportunity to raise hell. Drunkenness and disruptive rowdiness were the order of the day. (Just think of a group of foreign soccer fans.)

When the serious business of planning for the Seimas in Warsaw had been done, they should logically have collected their retainers and hangers-on, and gone home. But, too often, this wasn't the case, and the *bajorai* continued to demonstrate their *bajorystė* until all resources were exhausted. And sometimes, before they would finally leave, a ransom payment was demanded. Even then, they could spitefully remove the doors and windows, or carry the keys away with them.

The householders were all people of substance: traders, merchants, artisans, or other petty nobility, whose apartments were well-appointed and hand-

somely decorated. Some of them, hoping to avoid these visitations by presenting a less attractive space, began to decorate with less costly items and postponed building or reconstruction projects. Grand Ducal decrees were written in 1536 and 1568 prohibiting the taking of apartment space without first obtaining permission from the burgomaster, but no one paid a bit of attention, then or later.

Hospitals, convents and monasteries, tradesmen's guilds, fraternal houses, and the *Rotušė* (town hall) were exempt from the requirements of *prievolė*. Others who enjoyed the *privilegija* of exemption were members of the magistracy, residents of specific named jurisdictions, and other townspeople who had somehow, successfully obtained that *privilegija*. Some unlucky householders without it took other steps to shield themselves from uninvited guests.

They made changes in their houses, narrowing entrance gates and courtyards, that made it impossible for a carriage to enter, and without a carriage and group of servants, a *bajoras* wasn't in much of a position to take over someone's apartment. He would have to search for a place elsewhere, perhaps an apartment whose owner had vacated it and fled to his country home in anticipation of a wave of occupation.

Not all of the arriving delegates were accommodated by the terms of *prievolė*. Tartars and Muscovites came with very large family and servant groups, causing problems and confusion. To resolve these problems, city management purchased a parcel of land near the present Green Bridge, (*Žalioji Tiltas*) on the right coast of the Neris, and built an inn with a tavern. From that time, Tartar and Muscovite delegations were allowed to be housed only in this location.

The system of *prievolė* continued until the breakup of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795.

Gloria Kivytaitė O'Brien is a frequent contributor to Bridges. She grew up in Brooklyn, Annunciation Parish. Gloria can be contacted at Senaboba@aol.com.

Continued from page 6

famous. What music to our ears. We knew he would quickly clear up the question of our identity and take us back into his fold.

*Photos: Courtesy of

Gražina Vokietaitytė, Medford, OR.

Marijona Venslauskaitė Boyle is the daughter of immigrant parents raised

in Pennsylvania's coal mining region in Schuylkill County. She studied languages and history at Penn State and the University of Pennsylvania and taught many years in Swarthmore. Like other families of those who worked in the mines, almost all the men in her family died of "black lung" disease or in mining accidents. She recently pub-

lished the biography, "Search for Freedom, The Man from Red October", in English and Lithuanian. She is currently writing "Whistles and Bells: Growing Up In Coal Country." Marijona is a member of the Lithuanian-American community of the Portland/Vancouver area and of Vytis. She can be reached at bmarijona@comcast.net

Everyday Miracles

Jeanne Dorr



Some of the many crosses at the Hill of Crosses

At the word miracle we usually expect the “wow” factor. Words such as Fatima, Lourdes or the successful rescue of the miners in Chile come to mind. And yet, every day of our lives we experience minor miracles and we never give them a second thought; an almost missed car accident, medical tests that show cancer is in remission, a job offer after months of being unemployed, or finding an object that was lost for years.. No, these miracles don’t make the headlines, but they have an impact on our lives. For me crossing a city street alone is a miracle since I never lived in a large town or not getting lost when I’m driving since I have no sense of direction even using a GPS.

I would like to share with you my day of everyday miracles in Lithuania last summer. I decided I would take the cross that was on my husband’s casket and leave it at the Hill of Crosses. My husband was not Lithuanian, but



One of the everyday miracles appearing right as the cross was left at the Hill of Crosses.

he was a far better Lithuanian than I will ever be. He opened the doors of our house to people we never met, went without dinner too many times that I dare to remember and never minded when I spent the summer in Lithuania where he often joined me for the final two weeks of my trip.

Before I left I had the cross engraved with his name, dates of birth and death, and home country. I wrapped it carefully and carried it in my hand luggage and proudly showed it to my family upon arrival in Lithuania.

I wanted to have both my cousins with me when we went to the Hill of Crosses. One had to come back from Ireland and she did so gladly because my husband loved her like a daughter. We finally got everything together and the big day arrived. My grandson, who was fourteen at the time, got dressed in a white shirt so he could properly honor his grandfather when he placed the cross. My friend Joanne, who also brought a cross from Philadelphia for her family, could not come with us as there wasn’t enough room in the car so we brought the second cross with us. I began to get nervous when I found out my cousin’s boyfriend’s car had been in his family’s garage for about nine months while he was in Ireland. The car sputtered a bit, but finally we were leaving Kaunas. And then the unthinkable happened. Suddenly the sky was dark and after ten days of beautiful weather, heaven opened its flood gates all the way to Siauliai. There was no let up, it was difficult to see where we were going and my nerves were on edge. Should we turn around and go back to Kaunas? But my cousin wanted desperately to go and she had to go back Ireland in two days. I kept staring down at my open toe shoes and the fact that no one even had an umbrella. How in the world could we even get out of the car and walk around the Hill of Crosses in this torrential downpour? I realized that the weather reports in Lithuania were about as accurate as the ones in Philadelphia.

I think we all remember the scene that took place in the movie about Fatima when the sun, hurtling toward the earth, stopped. I am not exaggerating when I tell you that the moment we reached the entrance the downpour stopped. It didn’t let up or slow down; it stopped as .



Thomas Dorr has the honor of placing his grandfather's cross among the others.

though someone turned it off. The sun was shining in all its glory and it was a gorgeous day.

I have to admit that at first I was a little disappointed when we entered. I had been here several times before but not in the past ten years. The road was paved and the vendors who set up little tables were no longer there. Many sold hand carved religious items while others sold plastic crosses and rosaries. Now it seemed to me the Hill of Crosses was going commercial. A building now stood in a new parking lot that was once a field. The building housed a gift shop, vending machines and rest rooms. I felt that everything in the building was overpriced as it is in most gift shops around the world. Even more surprising was the charge to use the rest rooms as well as the charge for parking. The parking lot had many, many tour buses as well as license plates from several countries in Europe. I know that the Hill of Crosses needs money for upkeep, but somehow the experience didn't seem the same to me as it had been on earlier visits. Perhaps if this was my first visit I would not have known the difference.

We walked and walked admiring all the crosses from the very big and elaborately carved ones to the smallest of crucifixes. As we walked the wooden steps to the top looking for the "right" place for it, I have to admit I was having second thoughts about leaving Tim's cross because I knew I would never see it or touch it again. But these thoughts were fleeting as we kept walking and I saw all the other crosses, statues, rosaries, prayer cards, photographs and flowers. Among all the crosses there was a beautiful Star of David in memory of the Jewish people who perished in Lithuania.

The walking continued and I have to admit everyone was patient with me. I couldn't find a place that "felt" right. In the meantime, the sun continued to shine and although I felt overwhelmed with sadness, there was a feeling of being at peace. I didn't care how many times we had to

walk the Hill of Crosses, I would find the right place.

We finally reached what was the back of the Hill of Crosses. It was the final row and then there was a big, open field. I felt this was where my husband would want to be as he loved nature and I was sure the field was home to many living things. The birds were serenading us with their songs from the trees around the edges of the field. My grandson, who was very close to his grandfather, reverently placed the cross atop a larger one. Joanne and I are from the coal mining regions of Pennsylvania and I wanted our crosses be together in death as well as life. We prayed after Thomas placed both crosses. And then I could not believe my eyes. We all stood with our mouths open and staring.

In the field, standing so close to me that I could almost touch it, stood a beautiful stork. I know it sounds unbelievable, but the stork looked me right in the eye and then took off. As some of you know, since I became the editor of Bridges I have printed numerous photographs of storks. I love their beauty and their grace and have taken countless photographs of them in their huge nests. The photos were always taken from afar as they were high up in their nests, during flight or on the ground at a distance, but I was never really close to one.

I knew without a doubt that I was a right to leave the cross and that I found the perfect place for it. I received more miracles than I deserved that day.

Jeanne Dorr is the Editor of Bridges and is a member of the Board of Directors of Lithuanian Orphan Care, a branch of the Human Services Council of the Lithuanian American Community, Inc.

Continued from page 21

located at the Kruopiai Village Park selected by the Town Mayor and Town Elders, there will be other expenses which will be needed such as literature, commemorative booklets recounting Ann Wigmore's history, event souvenirs, Living Foods at monument site, etc. We have started the "Ann Wigmore Memorial Fund" for that purpose and will send additional information to all with in 1-2 weeks. There will be a sister fund, Ann Wigmore Atsiminimo Fondas in Lithuania also. We expect serious contributions from all the Institutes, Living Foods related companies and many of us who have been affected by the teachings of Ann Wigmore. OUR GOAL IS TO GET FUNDING IN EXCESS OF \$100,000 TO COVER THE COSTS OF THIS HISTORIC EVENT. We will venture to say that this will be one of the MAJOR events on Lithuania's calendar in the Year 2012. We endeavor to make this historic event in Lithuania unprecedented in scope and magnitude to appropriately honor ANN WIGMORE'S GLOBAL CONTRIBUTION.



*The 14th
Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival is
coming on July 1, 2012
to Boston, MA*

Photos are by Vytenis Lietuvninkas from the "XIII Folk Dance Festival 2008", Los Angeles, California

*Photos reprinted with permission

