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*Cover: Painting of "Aušros Vartai in the winter, Vilnius, Lithuania"
by Š. Miškinis 2006 and Coat of arms - City of Vilnius





*Photo Album
of
Vilnius,
Lithuania*



Photos by:
* Julie Skurdenis from Bronxville, NY
** Dr. Banga Grigaliūnaitė from Vilnius, Lithuania

MEET OUR YOUNG WRITERS...



Holes

I woke up to an aluminum bat jabbing at my ribs. Three men in Soviet style infantry uniforms ordered me out of bed and told me I had two minutes to pack all of my belongings. I unzipped my suitcase when they blindfolded me and dragged outside. There were no good-byes, no showers, I couldn't even brush my teeth; just silence as I fumbled in the dark. I stumbled over the door steps and was thrown into a truck with what felt like twenty other people. The air in the truck tasted like sour milk. One of girls thrown on top of me complained how she lost an earring, how unfortunate. It was a bumpy ride. For thirty minutes, we were tossed like salad, thrown up into the air and mixed until we were all just a pile of limbs. The truck stopped. My chin slid across the floor of the truck as they hauled us into the woods. The officers sat me down on the dewy brush of the forest. Two pieces of bread were placed in my hands and a cup full of water was dropped in my lap. My blindfold was taken off and I looked up to see many of my friends, my brother, and my cousin. The sun drew lines on their faces as the light broke through the trees. The officers then came back with shovels, handed them to us, and ordered us to dig a hole ten feet wide and four feet deep. For three hours the twenty of us dug and moved dirt. No one spoke. By two o' clock, they gave us more bread and told us to refill the hole we just labored over. For the rest of day we transplanted dirt from one place to another until we realized our lives were meaningless.

This is History Day at Camp Neringa. Each year I attend a three week summer sleep away camp in Vermont called Neringa. It was founded by the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in order to preserve Lithuanian heritage and foster Christian values. By no means do nuns go around ordering teenagers to dig holes at the crack of a whip; but on History Day, the greenery of Vermont transforms into a flashback of his-

toric Lithuania. In years past, Neringa has become a Lithuania about to be invaded by Teutonic Knights, a Lithuania trapped in the midst of World War II, or in my case, a Lithuania suffering under the deportations to Siberia. This is a day where counselors pose as Soviet soldiers. Campers are challenged with smuggling Lithuanian books into camp. Passports are issued and Soviets "arrest" you with a cold shower and a cup of flour in your hair. This day is meant to help us understand what our ancestors experienced because they were Lithuanian in a country under Soviet occupation. During the deportations, men, women, and children were taken from their homes with nothing but a knapsack. They were packed into train cars for months at a time where the only toilet was the floor. If they survived the train ride, they mined for diamonds and dug meaningless trenches in Siberia while living off of sporadic Red Cross aid supplies. But I often wonder why I press pause on my life and return to a camp each summer to learn Lithuanian songs, folk dances, and a language spoken by only a few million people. It is because this is my heritage; and it's in my blood. I am proud to be a Lithuanian. I am proud to be from a country that has survived centuries of political turmoil, but still remains on the map. But I think it's more than that. I return to camp each year because my experiences at Neringa have truly allowed me to discover who I am. I have an awareness of my heritage that I feel so many people neglect. Neringa has reassured me that I am not just another suburban boy who loves a game of baseball or a weekend movie. My life is defined by more than three numbers on an SAT score or a list of activities on a resume. I am a seventeen year-old who carries the perseverance of my parents and grandparents; and take pride in my work-regardless of the endeavor.

As I observe those around me who try so hard to express themselves whether it be through their clothing, their music, or even their facebook profile page, I have come to believe that before we choose our path in life, before we even begin to make a difference in this world, we must first understand who we are and where we come from - even if it means digging holes.

Harry Rogers

Harry Rogers is a high school senior from Bucks County, PA and has attended Neringa's Heritage Camp for the past nine summers. This essay reflects the personal experience he has had and its impact on him as he attends University next fall. For over 30 years Neringa has served children and families with the mission to foster understanding and love for Lithuanian heritage. As a non-profit organization it seeks contributions from the Lithuanian communities for support www.Neringa.org

SIGISMUNDUS & BARBARA

A
LITHUANIAN ROYAL
ROMANCE



Traditionally a royal wedding arranged especially involving the future ruler of a nation is planned in every detail by the bride and groom's parents. Sigismundus Augustus' (Sigismund Augustus, Zygmunt) first wedding was such an arranged affair. Still he could not have expected more since his father was Sigismundus I the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania and his mother Bona Sforza the Italian born Queen. His paternal great grandfather was Wladyslaw II Jogaila, who with his grand uncle Vytautas the Great, led the combined Polish-Lithuanian Army that decisively defeated the Teutonic Knights at the famous Battle of Tannenberg in 1410. His grandfather had been Casimir IV Jagiellon who reigned as King of the Poland-Lithuanian Commonwealth from 1447 to 1492 and his mother had been Elizabeth of Austria. His father had succeeded to the throne in 1506 after his brothers Jan I Olbracht (1492-1501) and Alexander (1501-1506) died without male heirs. His mother Bona Sforza d'Aragona was the Princess of Bari and Princess of Rossano. She was born in Vigevano, Italy and raised in a life of luxury. On his maternal side, her grandfathers had been Sigismund the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund and Albert IV the Duke of Austria. Her father was Prince Gian Galeazzo of Sforza and her mother Isabella of Naples. An aunt, Bianca Maria Sforza, was married to Maximilian I the Holy Roman Emperor. His mother, who was raised in travel among all of the royal houses of Europe, was sophisticated and well educated. Queen Bona is credited with having brought Italian culture and cuisine to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Sigismundus' father had been a successful ruler and respected by all the royal heads of Europe. His parents married in 1518 after his father's first wife died unex-

pectedly. Sigismund was born on August 1, 1520 in the royal castle at Krakow, Poland. Since his birth, his mother was constantly involved in all things related to her son's succession to the throne. Although largely a formality, the throne of the Polish-Lithuanian State was not hereditary and complicated by the constant squabbling between Polish and Lithuanian nobles over who would be their next ruler. Frequently the Lithuanian nobles sought to control the situation through their selection and coronation of a Grand Duke of Lithuania, prior to the death of the reigning monarch, forcing the Poles in turn to elect their candidate king in order to hold the Commonwealth together.

Two years after his birth, Queen Bona had succeeded in obtaining the tentative recognition of the Lithuanian Lords for her son's succession and he was officially coroneted as Crown Prince on February 29, 1530 in Wawel Cathedral in Krakow, Poland. In 1543, these Lithuanian nobles suggested the twenty-three year old Crown Prince be deputized as the ruler of Lithuania and in the following year he was officially proclaimed the Grand Duke of Lithuania. He is said to have grown into a dashing young man. Well educated, cultured, and loved by his subjects. Sigismundus soon became known as a poet, humanist, and champion of religious tolerance. Although his father retained control of Lithuania's treasury and foreign affairs, Sigismundus moved to Vilnius and begin his reign over the country.

With his succession to the throne assured, Queen Bona quickly turned her attentions to finding her son a suitable consort. As the sole heir of the Jagiellonian dynasty it was crucial that Sigismundus produce a male heir to continue the link between the Polish and Lithuanian State. After an exhaustive search, Elizabeth, the seventeen year old Princess of the House of Habsburg, was selected to be his consort. She was the daughter of Ferdinand I, the Holy Roman Emperor and Anna of Bohemia and Hungary was Sigismundus' paternal cousin. She was selected for these reasons and because their marriage would not only lend prestige to the family, but a great political alliance. The arranged marriage between Sigismundus and Elizabeth took place on May 5, 1543 and the couple settled down in their loveless marriage. Sigismundus engrossed himself in court activities and took a special interest in the arts. The young Prince took a special interest in embellishing the Royal Castle. He purchased exquisite Flemish tapestries to decorate the palace walls and added a theater, choir, and art gallery. Sigismundus also constructed a zoo which contained lions, bears, and camels and his stable was said to have been second to none. Noblemen from across the commonwealth were soon traveling to Vilnius to take part in the festivities of his court.

During his loveless marriage, Sigismundus met and fell in love with Barbara Radziwill (Radvilas, Radvilaitė). Barbara was a young widow from one of the oldest noble families of Lithuania. Her parents were Jerzy Radziwill a powerful magnate and hetman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Barbara Kola and her deceased spouse Stanislaus Goštautas the Palatine of Trakai. Chronicles have described her as having been slim and shapely with blonde hair and sparkling white teeth and being one of the most beautiful women in Europe. She reportedly had a fond interest in fashion and cosmetics using perfumes and face powder. Barbara was not only beautiful but intelligent. She spoke Lithuanian, White Russian, and Polish and could read and write in White Russian, Latin, and Polish. She was well versed in history and political affairs of the realm. Soon after they met during some court functions, Barbara became the constant companion of the Grand Duke.

As their love bloomed it was learned that Elizabeth was an epileptic and that illness could be passed to her children. The situation was soon rectified when Elizabeth fell from a horse and died of her injuries on June 15, 1545 barely two years after her marriage. She was buried with full honors in the Cathedral of Vilnius. In some circles there was talk that the Italian born Bona may have been involved in her death as her illness jeopardized the throne.

There was no question that Sigismundus, as the sole male heir of the Jagiellonian dynasty, would have to marry again. The situation escalated with the death of his father on July 26, 1548. As the 81 year old King was buried in Wawel Cathedral political pressure mounted in the Polish court for the young monarch to find a queen. Unknown to the court, Sigismundus had done the unthinkable and secretly married his beloved Barbara in Vilnius more than a year earlier. When Sigismundus' marriage to Barbara was revealed the Polish court, abetted by his mother, was strictly against the marriage as Barbara, being a mere Princess, was not a fit peer for the King. She was cast as being a woman of easy virtue and her reputation was drug through the mud. The situation was further compounded by the fact that Barbara had been raised a Calvinist and his mother and the royal Polish court devout Catholics. As a result, during the King's first session with Parliament (Sejm) in 1548, the deputies threatened to renounce their allegiance if he did not divorce his wife. Sigismundus remained resolute and advised the Polish court that he was united to his Queen through the holy sacraments of the Catholic Church and could not violate his marriage vows. With Sigismundus steadfast refusing to divorce his wife and accusing the



BONA SFORZA

Parliament during their second session in 1550 of attempting to diminish the legislative prerogatives of the crown their opposition to his marriage ceased. Although their hostility subsided, the Dowager Queen Bona avoided meeting her daughter-in-law and retired to Masovia.

After more than two years of bitterness and intrigues, the Poles finally yielded and Barbara was crowned Queen in Krakow Cathedral in 1550. Although the royal couple dreamed of returning to Lithuania in full regal splendor, that was not to be. Just five months after her coronation Queen

Barbara became stricken with an unknown malady. The distraught King did everything in his power to save his bride, but to no avail. Barbara succumbed to her illness on May 8, 1551 in the royal Polish Castle at Wawel. Although the Dowager Queen had remained uncompromising during Barbara's illness, she had relented just before her death. Bona expressed a desire to recognize her daughter-in-law. Legend holds that Sigismundus prevented their meeting fearing for Barbara's life. On her deathbed, Barbara asked that her body not be laid to rest in Poland where she had suffered so much. Honoring that request, Sigismundus escorted her body from Krakow to Vilnius while riding or walking the whole distance beside her bier. Barbara was interned in a crypt in Vilnius Cathedral. With her demise it is said that Sigismundus wore black for the rest of his life.



Sigimantas Augustas with his dying wife Barbora Radvilaite
Painting by Józef Simmler

Rumors again arose that Queen Bona may have had a hand in Barbara's death and historians to this day have repeated that charge. If that were the case, her despicable act went unrewarded. Sigismundus' love for Barbara continued after her death. Although Sigismundus agreed to remarry in the interest of the state there was no personal happiness in his life. His third marriage to Catherine of Austria, the sister of his first wife, was again arranged by his mother. Catherine's first marriage to Francesco III Gonzaga Prince of Mantua ended after just four months with his unexpected death from unknown causes. Although Catherine succeeded in becoming pregnant she had a miscarriage. As a result, the King lost hope of having children by her, believing their marriage was cursed and vainly sought to have it annulled. The Polish Primate, on bended knees, is said to have attempted to persuade the King to try again, but he has lost all interest. With the King's failure to produce an heir, Queen Bona lost favor in the court and returned to her native Italy. The Dowager Queen of Poland died in Bari, Italy in 1557, reportedly having been poisoned by her private secretary acting on behalf of King Philip II of Spain who wished to avoid repaying sizable debts which he owed her. Queen Catherine also left Poland in 1566 and retired to Linz where she died in 1572. During their loveless marriage, Sigismundus sought comfort from Barbara Gizanka and Anna Zajackowska, two of the most beautiful women in Poland. The Polish Parliament, in desperation for an heir, did not object to his philandering and even expressed their willingness to legitimize any male child that might be born to such a liaison. However the King remained childless.

Sigismundus' love for Barbara had left a lifelong impression upon the monarch who remained mournful for the rest of his life. Sigismundus finally retired to Knyszyn Castle where he surrounded himself with astrologers and quacks and ordered all of the palace's walls to remain draped in black in her memory. From a Lithuanian prospective Sigismundus' greatest contribution was the granting of the Second Lithuanian Statute of 1566 and from the Polish prospective the Treaty of Lublin in 1569 which officially joined Poland and Lithuania together as one nation. Still, he is most remembered for his ill fated love affair with Barbara. Sigismund II August, the last Jagiellon king of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, died there on July 7, 1572, thinking of his beloved Queen. Since that time the ill fated love story of Sigismundus and Barbara has inspired legends, paintings, literary works and film rivaling that of Romeo and Juliet.

Henry Gaidis

Henry Gaidis is a contributor to Bridges. He is a member of the Board of Directors of JBANC and among his many interests is military history.

*** Foot Note of names:**

Battle of Tannenberg	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Žalgirio mūšis (Battle of Žalgiris)
Royal titles, in Latin:	
“Sigismundus Augustus”	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Žigimantas Augustas
Sigismundus Augustus (Sigismund Augustus, Zygmunt)	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Žygimantas III Augustas I
Wladyslaw II Jogaila	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Jogaila Algirdaitis
Casimir IV Jagiellon	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Kazimieras Jogailaitis
Sigismund I the Old	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Žygimantas II Senasis
Barbara Radziwill	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Barbora Radvilaitė
Jerzy Radziwill	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Jurgis Radvila
Jagiellons	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Jogailaičiai
Jan Gostautas	- <i>Lithuanian:</i> Jonas Goštautas
Stanislaus Gostautas	

ANSWER TO TRIVIA QUESTION

Trivia Quiz
on page 9

ANSWER

Source: “The Lithuanian Language” (page 43-44)
by Alfred Senn

“In the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth century the Lithuanians came in contact with the Swedes who may have some influence on the Lithuanian vocabulary. The word “gatvė” (street) is of foreign origin and its geographical distribution points toward the north as place of origin. It may be Swedish.

Modern Lithuanian is not completely free of foreign elements, but nether is any other language. Moreover, loanwords which are retained look so characteristically Lithuanian that it is difficult to detect their foreign origin. We thus witness an amazing vitality of this conservative language, a vitality enabling it to assimilate completely even recent acquisitions.

Lithuanian is most of all a youthful language, a fact which is usually overlooked because the scholars are overawed by a few striking archaic features.”

Edward Shakalis is a retired Electrical Engineer and a ham radio operator. He and his son Rick run “The Lithuanian Open” golf tournament.

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