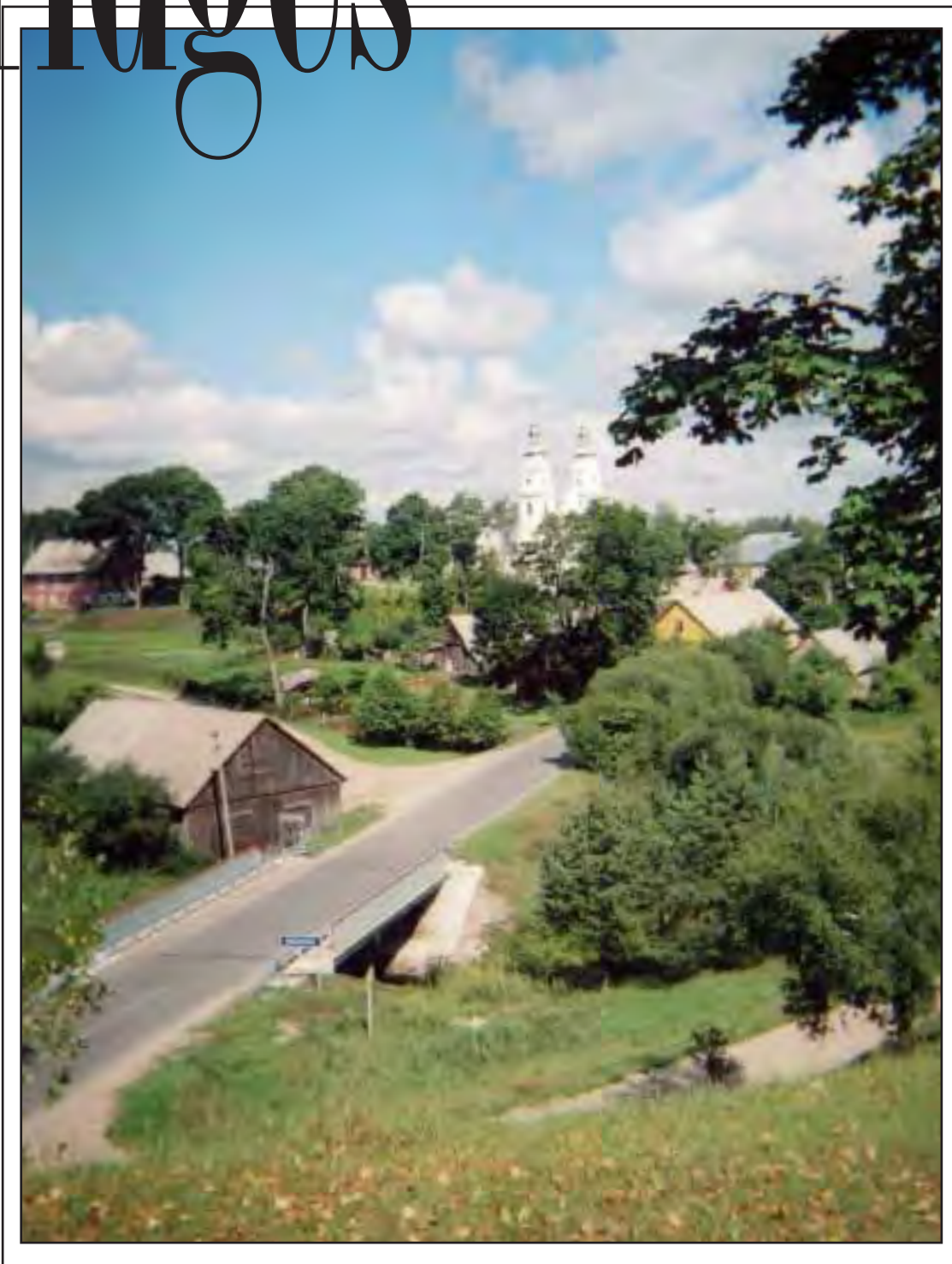


# bridges



october 2009

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\* *Cover Photo is by Ramune Kublius, from Illinois.*

*Back Cover and the Photo Album:*

*Ramune Kublius took some of the photos and others were taken by the staff and youth of the "Vilties Vėrinėliai" after school center in Žemaičių Kalvarija.*

## West 69th Street

Part 2

**Editor's Note:** In Part 1 the writer discussed the impact the Lithuanian neighborhood church, businesses and especially taverns had on the local population. One learned a way of life from being members of this large Lithuanian community. He continues to discuss those ways and how they influenced him.

Special thanks to Mr. Vytautas Kupcikevičius for sharing his memories with us of a time gone by.

### West 69th Street- Part 2

69th street taverns were a part of Marquette Park's Lithuanian community, the last 69th Street tavern opened in 1980. The only 69th Street bank went out of business and the building was sold and converted into a tavern. Actually it was a cocktail lounge, it was a clean, modern place, it had a fancy name, Knights Inn. It was a place where you could take your wife for a drink. The 69th Street did not need another tavern, but it survived and became a new member of the street.

In 1986 a small grocery store at 69th and Talman went out of business and my brother rented the store, remodeled it and his wife Marytė started a delicatessen store. She was an excellent cook and manager. The store was renamed Talman Delicatessen and in a few years it became a new proud member of 69th Street. It was a place where you could purchase all Lithuanian cold and hot dishes. Koldunai-lugan ravioli was the main selling product. Koldunai is a product which you can boil in water or beef stock for 5 minutes and have an excellent meal. Koldunai is not a Lithuanian dish, it is Russian, but we adopted it and are calling it our own. Today koldunai and cepelinai-potato and meat dumplings are main Lithuanian dishes. My koldunai story started in my mother's kitchen. She learned to

make them in Siberia-Russia in 1914. She used to make them by the dozens and in winter freeze them outside where the temperature could

reach 40 below 0. In Chicago every Sunday after church we used to stop at her house and eat koldunai for lunch. Since my brother's family lived in the same building, we all ate koldunai. This is where my, and my brother's children learned to eat koldunai and love them. Today my children and grandchildren still love koldunai, but my mother and Marytė are not here to make them and you cannot buy them on 69th Street. Lithuanian delicatessen stores are flourishing in the SW Chicago suburbs. Koldunai are for sale in Justice, Westmont and Orland Park. 69th Street without Lithuanian delicatessen and taverns is empty. I miss my mother's and Marytė's koldunai, Andrijauskas' beer and shopping at Parama.

On the west end the 69th Street was anchored by Holy Cross Hospital and Nativity BVM Lithuanian Catholic Church with grammar school. The church was one of the last built in the Chicago area. It was opened in 1955. For some reason, we, the second wave immigrants did not fit into the church community. Yes, we divided all our immigrants into groups: the first wave were immigrants who came before the Second World War, the second wave after the Second World War. We were political refugees, who left Lithuania to escape the advancing Russian army and Russia's communist regime. We were the DPs. The first wave immigrants consisted of persons, mostly men, escaping the Czar's Russian army and later people looking for a better life from already free Lithuania. The third wave were immigrants who came starting in 1990. They were looking for better life.

There was always friction between groups, even though we were all Lithuanian. I do not know how to explain this phenomenon, but it is there. The Nativity Church was built by the first wave, we DPs were too poor to take part in that undertaking. Our Lithuanian church was Holy Cross Church in Chicago Town of Lake neighborhood, located near the Chicago stock yards. This was the church we all went to on holy days and other special occasions. Only late in the eighties the Nativity Church became a Lithuanian church, embracing all three immigrant groups. It is amazing what a single person can accomplish, in this case an intelligent pastor united us all. We do not have those kind of priests any more, and we need them for our survival as Lithuanians.

The other institution, probably more popular than Nativity Church was Parama grocery store. Two Lithuanian DPs opened a grocery store in an old building on the south side of the street. The street needed a store and the business flourished. After a couple of years at this location



Maria High School

the store expanded. A new building was built on the corner of 69th and Maplewood. It was a modern, up to date grocery store. It was a beautiful supermarket loaded with domestic and imported foods and drinks. Funny, but when we were in Germany, everything made in the USA was at a premium, but as soon as we settled in the USA everything made in Germany became a premium product. I remember one day meeting one of our contractors, probably after stopping in one of the street taverns, asking everyone in the store where he could find German eggs!



*Monument to Darius and Girėnas*

Parama stacked almost everything, but German eggs were not available. The store flourished, the owners, one capable businessman and the other an excellent public relations person, handled the business with skill and pride. Parama, English translation (Support) became a major institution of 69th Street life. For us, the DPs, the street was a school; a university of American way of life.

The Paulius hardware store taught us what we could do to improve our apartments. The Lekas funeral parlor taught us how to bury our parents. From all the lessons I had to learn, this was the strangest one. It was completely new. I still remember when my father died, the funeral director took me to a casket showroom to pick out a casket. The salesman, dressed in black, started to explain the features of the casket, but when he started to demonstrate how soft the springs were, I was ready to punch him, but I survived and learned another lesson.

Tulpe (Tulip) diner served well prepared meals. At Parama we learned to shop for food and at Azukas' drug store we learned that the drugstore was selling not only drugs, but also all kinds of goodies. The dentist took care of our teeth and the Nativity Church taught us how to pray and behave in church. It was strange when you had to pay a dime to get in. Men had to sit on the right side and women on the left. Also, women had to wear a head cover and modest clothing. We learned, or learned to ignore all the strange rules. While learning all those lessons we could take a break and stop in one of the taverns to refresh ourselves. Oh yes, the taverns and saloons also had a lesson; how to order a drink and how to drink it. We learned to drink whiskey with ginger ale and scotch with soda. We also learned that a screwdriver was not a tool and a boilermaker was not a pot to

boil water in. But we knew how to order and drink beer. After five years in Germany we did not need any instructions. We had our share of drinks, but we survived and did not become alcoholics.

In the eighties the Chicago politicians finally recognized the Chicago Lithuanians and renamed 69th Street "Lithuanian Plaza Court." The street was repaired, trees were planted and the street acquired a new scrubbed look. Each summer Lithuanian Day was celebrated. All the establishments sold goods on the street. Tents were built with tables and chairs. You could eat, drink and party outside. This was a glorious time for the street. The street was alive and the Lithuanian community was alive and flourishing. The street saw presidents and Pope John Paul II when he visited Chicago in 1977. We were all waiting to greet him standing on the street.

But time goes by and everything changes. Our lives have changed and the street has changed. Most Lithuanians moved away and slowly the businesses and taverns started to close. The street was dying. Today when you look down the street you can still see the Hospital and Nativity Church. Both have lost most of their Lithuanian identity. The buildings are still there, but the soul is gone. Putis tavern is still there, it was renamed to Gintaras (Amber). It is the only Lithuanian name left on the street. I do not know which was opened first, the old Nativity Church or Putis tavern. My guess is that the street started with Putis tavern and will end with it.

*Vytautas Kupcikevičius*

*Vytautas Kupcikevičius was born in Kaunas, Lithuania. He is the holder of 51 US Patents in the food packaging field. His hobbies include art water colors and drift wood sculptures.*



*Holy Cross Hospital*



*Photo Album*  
2009  
Žemaičių Kalvarija





*Kaunas Castle*



**KAUNAS IN WINTER -  
MY KIND OF TOWN!**

*Kaunas Cathedral in the winter*



*St. Casimir's Mugė (Kaziuko Mugė)*

*In the September 08 issue of Bridges, I reflected upon my numerous trips to Kaunas, discussed the beauty and cultural richness of the city, and I proclaimed it to be my kind of town! During the winter of 2009, my love of Kaunas was put to a severe test as I traveled to Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) for another teaching stint. I survived and came away with a renewed respect for Kaunas and its people.*



*Old Town in the winter*



*Santakos Parkas*



*Musicians and dancers at St. Casimir's Mugė (Kaziuko Mugė)*



*Crowd at Užgavėnės*



Author with beautiful Lithuanian women at Užgavėnės (L-R Viktoriya Simaitytė, the author; Zenona Simaitienė, and Greta Simaitytė)

For the last four years I have lived in the Green Valley area of Southern Arizona, which is about 20 miles south of Tucson and about 40 miles north of the US-Mexico border. I have grown accustomed to the delightful sunshine, warm weather, and low humidity of my new residence. Thus, stepping outside of the Vilnius airport in the middle of February into the cold, snow, and bleakness was a bit of shock for me. I had played golf two days earlier in the warmth and sunshine of Arizona and now I was confronted with being in some sort of polar region.



Wedding Party on the banks of the Nemunas River

Arriving at the VMU guesthouse in Kaunas, the radiator heat in my room was supplemented by a space heater at my request. Even after an hour, I was still cold. In the evening of my first day in Kaunas, I made my way despite the frigid weather and the icy walkways to a tavern (the Skilautas) in Old Town to meet some friends. After a few rounds of alus and catching up on things, I asked my friend, Sigitas, if it was always this cold at this time of year. Sigitas responded that he loved the cold weather and snow, and this was the first “nice” winter Kaunas had experienced in the last few years. I thought, “You have to be kidding” or that Sigitas had been overcome by some sort of “snow madness.”

Over the next couple of days, I tried to stay warm in my room with an additional space heater that I had borrowed and I ventured out into the Kaunas bleakness and cold only when necessary. Finally on a Saturday morning, the sun was bright in the sky and I decided I should get out and enjoy the sunshine. When I got to Rotušės Aikštė, I discovered that I was not alone as a number of other folks were out and about. Walking in the snow of the adjacent Santakos Parkas, I saw couples holding hands, families just walking, and kids on sleds. On the banks of the Nemunas River, I spotted a wedding party standing around a fire and drinking some alcoholic beverages, so this is what Lithuanians do on a sunny winter day!



Musicians and dancers at St. Casimir's Mugė (Kaziuko Mugė)

The next day, I was invited by Will Gordon, an American friend living in Kaunas, to join him, his girlfriend, and her family, to experience Užgavėnės in nearby Rumšiškės. Sunday arrived, while it was rather cold the sun was shining brightly. I prepared by putting on two sweatshirts under my winter coat and “long johns” under my fleeced winter pants. Much has been previously written about Užgavėnės, so I need not go into detail. However, there are some highlights to report about my experience. Hot beer mixed with honey, did not seem “right” to me. However, after a few mugs, this delightful mixture worked rather well to give me a warm glow to enjoy the winter festivities. I was encouraged to roll in the snow as a means to help usher in an early spring. Whether folklore or being made a fool of, I did the snow roll and much to my surprise I enjoyed it. Having lived in New Jersey for nearly thirty years before my relocation to Arizona, I have acquired a fondness for bagels. Part of the Užgavėnės experience is to wear and eat a Lithuanian delight that looks and tastes like a bagel. Also available were traditional Lithuanian dishes sold by numerous vendors and I took the opportunity to sample some of the dishes. At the end of the day there must have been several thousand Lithuanians standing in the snow and cold and watching the large bonfire. I was a part of the crowd. As I enjoyed a cigar, I pondered that I had participated in a uniquely Lithuanian event. Hot beer and honey, bagels, good food, cigars, and rolling in the snow; Užgavėnės should be on every Lithuanian-American’s “must do” list.



*Young singers at St. Casimir's Mugė (Kaziuko Mugė)*

Wednesday, March 4 arrived and I dutifully attended morning Mass at the Kaunas Cathedral to celebrate St. Casimir's Day. The Mass was well attended, but in all other respects the day was just like any ordinary day in Lithuania. I was surprised that in this heavily Roman Catholic country, the patron Saint of the nation was seemingly not honored and celebrated. That evening, I mentioned this observation to my class; the response was to wait until the weekend.



*Crowd at Užgavėnės enjoying large bonfire*

On Friday morning, March 6, I had to go into New Town to attend to some business. As I left Old Town and entered New Town through the underpass walkway, I noticed vendors arriving and some were already putting up their stands. In the center of New Town, I came upon a vendor of hot beer and honey ready for business. Needless to say, I stopped and enjoyed a couple of mugs and I ate a cepelinai. As I approached Miesto Sodas on my way back to Old Town, I heard what seemed to be country music. I had come upon a free concert performed by the Lithuanian singer-musician, Jonis, and his group. I lingered for a while to enjoy the Lithuanian country sound. As I resumed my walk, I realized I had just experienced the beginnings of the St. Casimir Mugė (Kaziuko Mugė) in Kaunas. Yes, there was much more to the Mugė as I discovered when the weekend finally arrived.

Saturday, March 7, I walked into New Town for an early lunch and to meet a friend. From one end of New Town to the other, I discovered vendor stands, numerous shoppers, and many passer-bys. Food, drink, varieties of sausages, leather goods, wood carvings, clothing, souvenirs, singers, dancers, and multitude of other items were everywhere. I noted the location of a few stands that caught my interest with the intent of returning on my way back to Old Town. An hour later, it was wall-to-wall people, and I couldn't easily get close to any vendor stands. It took me over an hour to get back to Old Town; albeit I made a couple of stops to see and listen to the Lithuanian traditional dancers and musicians. The next day after Sunday Mass at the Cathedral, I made a bee line to New Town to make my purchases and enjoyed some drink and food before the crowds arrived. What a wonderful experience, seeing Lithuanians getting out and actually enjoying this winter weekend. The St. Casimir Muge in Kaunas is another "must do" and delight for the true shopper or anyone who just enjoys the Lithuanian culture.



*Singers at St. Casimir's Mugė (Kaziuko Mugė)*

In Kaunas there are some diversions away from the winter elements. The massive Akroplis offers indoor mall shopping, eating, and a multiplex cinema. The cinema is a nice interlude for non Lithuanian speakers as most major American films are in English with Lithuanian subtitles. English has many nuances that may elude the non-native speaker and it is interesting to note whether the Lithuanian audience laughs at the same jokes in an American comedy movie as the English speaker. Of course, there is the Kaunas Žalgiris basketball experience. During this recent trip one of my students invited me to attend a Žalgiris game. On game day at the arena, I asked him where we would be sitting. He pointed to a spot behind the basket and responded that we would be standing in the area, despite the fact that the area had seats. This is where the Žalgiris "bleacher bums" viewed the contest. Throughout the game, the fans dressed in their finest Žalgiris attire stood, shouted slogans, sang, banged drums, and generally had a great time.

While I have attended several Žalgiris games before, this time I had a very different perspective as I was with the “die hard” fans.

Basketball may be a religion to some in Kaunas, but I discovered something new along the streets of Kaunas – the Hara Kristanas. Every Saturday, a small group of Kristanas dressed in their orange colored robes parade and chant along the streets of Old Town and New Town. Without getting into the theology of the matter, I truly admired them as to me it was almost arctic cold as they paraded and chanted along the streets. I wondered whether I would be willing to endure that sort of cold to proclaim my Catholic faith. I also encountered American Mormons. As noted in my September 08 article, I look forward to meeting Mormon missionaries on the streets of Kaunas and engaging them in conversation about what is going in America and sharing with them my Lithuanian experiences. Since my arrival in Kaunas during this trip, I had looked unsuccessfully for the tell-tale black outfits worn by young folks in their early 20s. Finally on my last full day in Kaunas I met two young male Mormon missionaries. We chatted for a half hour about American sports and Lithuania. It was nice to encounter something familiar as I neared the end of my Kaunas winter adventure.

There is something special about the look of newly fallen snow lying upon a city and its streets. In the crisp air the snow serves as a blanket and hides many of the city’s blemishes. Kaunas is no different. Kaunas is truly beautiful in the newly fallen snow and there is something magical about the city. When the winter sun slowly begins to reveal what lies under the snow blanket, the blemishes of Kaunas as any city are again brought to light. On the other hand, the true character of the city remains with residents who thrive and enjoy the winter weather. As I was on my departing plane on the Vilnius airport runway, it began to snow. Part of me just couldn’t wait to get back to the sun and warmth of Southern Arizona; another part of me wondered whether the new snow would blanket Kaunas and give its residents another opportunity to enjoy the “nice” winter. Yes, Kaunas is my kind of town any time of year!

*John J. Chernoski (Cerniauskas)*

*John J. Chernoski (Cerniauskas) is a retired attorney. He resides in Green Valley, AZ.*

## TRIVIA QUESTION

(No.31)

Who are the largest minority in Lithuania ?

- (a) Russians
- (b) Poles
- (c) Roma
- (d) Belarusians

Answer to Trivia Quiz  
on page 19

## What We Should Know About the Bible

*“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path” (Psalm 119)*

Many religious books are written to tell us what people think about God. The Bible is a different book. The Bible is a message from God. The writers of the Bible report things by stating “this is what the Lord says.” The writers made clear to us that what they said and wrote was not something they themselves thought. What they wrote and said was God’s message to all people.

The Bible is very old. It is really a collection of 66 different books that were written by many different people. The first books of the Bible are nearly 3,500 years old. God did not wait until the time of Christ to give Himself to the world, He spoke to some prophets before that. The Bible says, “all scripture is given by God” (2 Timothy 3:16), “men led by the Holy Spirit spoke words from God” (2 Peter 1:21). God did not speak the exact words to be written down by the Bible writers. What they wrote was the exact message God intended to share. Because of divine inspiration what the Bible says is true for our message from God to His people. Only the Bible reveals things that without it we would not be able to know.

Prophecy gives us this kind of proof. God told Isaiah, **“At the beginning I foretell the outcome...”** (Isaiah 46:10). The Bible talks about many things that were to happen in the future. The prophet Micah named the town where Jesus would be born 700 years later. (Micah 5:2). And Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The prophet Isaiah described Jesus’ death (Isaiah 53). He died on the cross. Everything happened just as the Bible predicted. Only God knows the future. What the Bible says is true- and it really is a message to us from God.

Jesus trusted the Bible as God’s Word. When talking about the Old Testament Jesus said, “Surely you have read what God said to you” (Matthew 22:31); Jesus also said “ You should believe everything the prophets said” (Luke 24:25). The Bible is the only book inspired by God. It is also important because of what it tells us. The Holy Bible is not a book just for learning things. It is a guide; it shows us how to live. The Holy Bible tells us how we can know God and become His friend. From the Bible we can find out how much God loves us and we can learn how to love God in return. The Holy Scripture tells the story of how God has revealed Himself to people. From the creation onwards He permits Himself to be known all people who faithfully follow their consciences. Jesus Himself loved and taught the Jewish Scriptures as the Word of His Father. “ I have come not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).

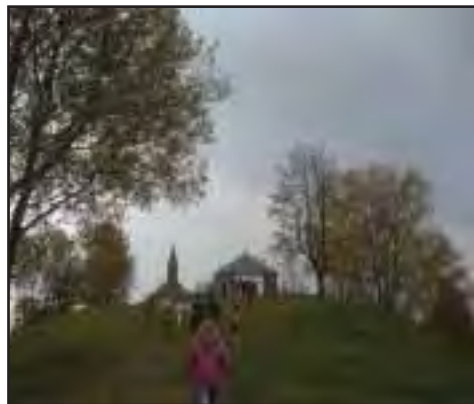
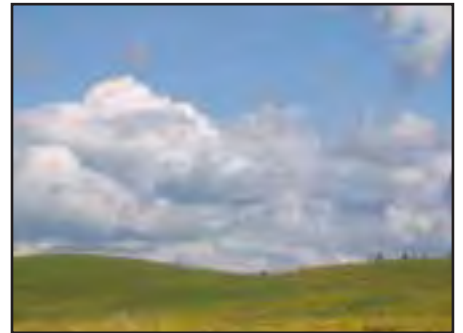
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