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Velykų boba, or what many of us call babka, is one of the most traditional cakes baked at this time and without a doubt, the queen of the Easter table.

Cover Credits:
FRONT COVER: East Prussian ruin (R. Borisovas)
BACK COVER: Baby foxes in spring (V. Knyva)
INSIDE FRONT COVER: K. Almenas in Prussia. (R. Borisovas)
INSIDE BACK COVER: Shrove Tuesday girl monsters. (shutterstock, MNStudio)
Those magnificent men in their flying machines

Was a British comedy set in 1910, replete with antics surrounding a fictional London to Paris air race. The first part of the 20th century was a time when planes were a source of awe and inspiration, as evidenced by the symbolic power of the transatlantic flights of Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas in 1933, and of Feliksas Vaitkus two years later. In the January 2015 LH, Henry Gaidis described the adventures of World War I flying ace Vytautas Graičiūnas. In the January 2016 issue (“Giders on the Dunes”), Mindaugas Sereičikas recounted the exploits of Lithuanian Air Force pilots using gliders launched from sand dunes for training as well as fun. In the present issue, Sereičikas writes about a unique individual whose engineering prowess did much to advance Lithuanian Air Force readiness during the interwar years. His name was Antanas Gustaitis, and his ANBO series of plane designs was internationally recognized and renowned. In another story in this issue, Gaidis writes about a Lithuanian American U.S. Air Force Lt. Colonel, Arūnas Banionis, who was inspired by these aviation heroes from an earlier time.

The centenary celebration of Lithuania’s declaration of independence on February 16, 1918 continues, and Eric Sibul tells us how Lithuanian Americans pulled off a remarkable feat – getting the U.S. Congress and President to officially recognize the three Baltic nations as fully independent countries in 1922. To achieve that goal, state-of-the-art public relations methods were used, and our grandparents called up two of the nation’s premier experts in the field of P.R. (one of whom would earn the title of “The Father of Public Relations”).

The importance of fighting for one’s freedom and cultural identity is brought home by the realization that such struggles are not uniformly successful. The fate of the Prussian nation comes to mind, as poignantly recounted by the late Professor Kazys Almenas, and illustrated by the beautiful watercolors of Romanas Borisovas, whose work enhances not only the pages of Almenas’ article, but also the cover of the current issue of LH.

Some of us who are older had the opportunity to visit Lithuania while it was under Soviet occupation, and can compare what we saw then with how we experienced the country after independence. Constantine Kliorys, Professor of Management at Gannon University, remembers his brief sabbaticals in Lithuania during both periods, and reminds us how different things were, using restaurants as an example.

Jonas Daugirdas, Editor
Suggestions for the annual printed calendar

I would like to see a calendar of Lithuanian costumes and the regions to which they belong. I saw one in Lithuania but could not find one for myself.

Thank you,
Mary Ann Lariviere
Waterbury, Connecticut

Lithuanian Heritage as a Christmas present

Dear Draugas: (translated from Lithuanian): We’re sending along our subscription renewals to Lithuanian Heritage, which are Christmas presents to our children. Wish you all the best. We all value your efforts highly and are grateful for them.

Marija and Kazimieras
Marcinkevicius
Chagrin Falls, Ohio

Like the publications

Dear Ona and Jonas: I want to tell you how much I and my wife enjoy receiving and reading Lithuanian Heritage magazine. I appreciate all the work that you two are doing as associate editor and editor. I recommend all Lithuanians and those interested in Lithuania to subscribe to the English language Draugas News and Lithuanian Heritage.

Keep up the good work!
John V. Prunskis, M.D.
Knight of the Order of Merit Hon. Consul of Lithuania Dean, Aspen Consular Corps

Internet is fine, but print is even better

I am from the “old school.” I want a book/newspaper in my hands. I look forward to each issue of Draugas News / Lithuanian Heritage magazine. Thank you for making it available to those of us of Lithuanian heritage who unfortunately cannot speak the language. Have taken classes when available, but they never lasted long enough.

Frances Petkus
Dayton, Ohio

Editor’s responses:

To Mary Ann: Great idea for the calendar and we’ll keep it in mind. In the meantime, I found this on the Web: www.slideshare.net/lpla-diene/llkostiumas-6116088.

To Marija and Kazimieras: We really appreciate your idea of giving subscriptions to Lithuanian Heritage to your children for Christmas. Too often, Christmas gifts turn out to have little lasting meaning, and we at Draugas believe that gifting subscriptions is an important way of not only increasing our subscriber base, but also, helping ensure that Lithuanian culture and will continue to impact our children, relatives, and friends.

To Jonas: Many thanks for the kind words, and thanks also for your generous gift of $1,000 to help defray the costs of constructing the Draugas digital archive.

To Fran: No contest that a printed journal is better. However, with Draugas, we have been faced with slow and unreliable USPS delivery, and this now is affecting even delivery of Draugas News and Lithuanian Heritage. We’re trying to have the best of both worlds, making our publications available both in print and online in PDF format, archiving these PDF files in a searchable manner, allowing our readers to easily go back and find their favorite stories. When people write for one of our newspapers, their contributions will remain accessible. For example, I’ve been very impressed with articles I’ve been reading from the Draugas cultural supplement, Mokslas, Menas, ir Literatūra, which began in 1949, and which continues to this day as Kultūra.

We welcome letters and comments from our readers. Please address correspondence to: Lithuanian Heritage, c/o Draugas News, 4545 W 63rd St., Chicago, IL 60629; Fax: 773-585-8284. email: draugolaikrastis@gmail.com Include your full name, address, and telephone number or email address. Letters may be edited for space or clarity.
Celebrating the centenary

A number of interesting Facebook pages have been documenting how Lithuanians around the world have been celebrating the 100 year anniversary of the declaration of independence on February 16, 1918. Among them is a Facebook page linked to www.tautiskagiesme.lt, begun in 2009, the main purpose of which appears to be to archive Lithuanians singing their national anthem.

Poor birdie!

The Canadian archeologists keep finding interesting once-living relics in amber from their diggings in Myanmar. In this particular case, it was not only the feathers of a bird, but an entire skeleton that was found locked in the pinesap goo. Team member Ryan McKellar of the Royal Saskatchewan Museum in Canada, sharing the excitement, says, “It’s the most complete and detailed view we’ve ever had.” McKellar believes that the bird hatched on the ground, and then proceeded to move up into the trees. That would have made it more likely that it would get trapped, as is the case with the freshly found specimen.

Liola brothers and Neniškis win architecture design award.

The Journal of the American Institute of Architects organized a design competition in San Francisco late last year. The category of “Residential Architecture: Custom Home,” was won by an architecture studio (arches.lt) from Lithuania headed by brothers Arūnas and Rolandas Liola, and Edgaras Neniškis. As described by journalist Edward Keegan, “Local firm Arches designed Valley Villa for a wooded site just outside Vilnius, Lithuania. The two-story, 4478-square-feet residence is a collision of eccentric geometries, with a U-shaped base that is en- sconced in the sloped site supporting a V-shaped main living level above.”

“Somewhere Over the Rainbow” composer

His name was Harold Arlen, but he was born Hyman Arluck, and Litvak grandparents on both sides of the family hailed from the Vilnius region. Harold’s father was a cantor in the local synagogue. While growing up, he wrote show music for Harlem’s “Cotton Club.” In 1938, he was hired by Metro-Goldwyn Mayer to write music for the “Wizard of Oz” movie, and among the songs that he wrote was “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” for which he and lyricist E.Y. (Yip) Harburg won the Academy Award for Best Music. Another favorite from Harold’s more than 500 composed songs is “That Old Black Magic,” written in 1942 with Johnny Mercer.

Harold Arlen, circa 1960. (photo by Carl Van Vechten)
Vilnius getting into the blockchain programming space

Most people are not quite sure what blockchains are, exactly. As described by Wikipedia, “A blockchain is a continuously growing list of records, called blocks, which are linked and secured using cryptography. Each block typically contains a cryptographic hash of the previous block, a timestamp and transaction data... By design, a blockchain is inherently resistant to modification of the data. It is an open, distributed ledger that can record transactions between two parties efficiently and in a verifiable and permanent way... Blockchain was invented by Satoshi Nakamoto in 2008 for use in the cryptocurrency bitcoin, as its public transaction ledger.” Recently, Antanas Guoga, a Lithuanian businessman, poker player, politician, and philanthropist, organized the opening of “Blockchain Centre Vilnius,” housed in the new Green Hall 2 technology building. This not for profit center aims to be a “catalyst for the adoption of blockchain technology for the benefit of all,” according to the organization’s website, www.bcgateway.edu. Guoga is a fascinating person in his own right. Born in Lithuania, he moved to Melbourne, Australia when he was 11 years old, and later returned to found many businesses in Lithuania. His blockchain center in Vilnius may serve as a springboard to help make Vilnius a leading sector in this new technology, which can be applied not only to cryptocurrency, but to banking, and even secure vote counting during elections. Lithuania is positioning itself as “a gateway to Europe for Asian partners looking for opportunities in blockchain driven technologies,” the center’s chairman Paulius Kuncinas said in a statement.

“Better late than never” traveling companions visit Lithuania

As described on Wikipedia, this American reality TV show aired by NBC documents the experiences of “four ‘seasoned’ North American celebrities, William Shatner, Henry Winkler, George Foreman and Terry Bradshaw, accompanied by younger comedian Jeff Dye, as they travel overseas without luxuries, experiencing new cultures and checking off their bucket lists.” They finally got around to visiting Lithuania and one of the moving aspects of this episode was Star Trek captain William Shatner’s visit to Vilkaviškis, the hometown of his Litvak grandparents. The Lithuanian visit episode is available for watching on the nbc.com website, but before granting access, the site does require that you validate a link to your cable TV provider.

Ball brothers training in Prienai a source of comedy jabs

LaVar Ball is an American business man and the father of 3 basketball players. The eldest, Lonzo, is a guard for the Los Angeles Lakers. Next, his second son LiAngelo was enrolled as a student at UCLA and played for their team, but was suspended after he was accused of shoplifting while on a trip to China. His youngest son, LaMelo, was a high school basketball star. Father LaVar pulled both sons out from their schools and decided that they would benefit from basketball training in Europe, and for this purpose, he signed them on to the Prienų Vytautas basketball team in Prienai, Lithuania. Due to father LaVar’s rather eccentric nature and his public spat with President Trump after LiAngelo’s shoplifting episode, the experience of the two Ball brothers in Lithuania has become the subject of a lot of amusement and satire. The above youtube link shows how Saturday Night Live’s satirical news show, “Weekend Update,” views the situation.
The watercolors of Romanas Borisovas are beautiful. Works of art do not require any additional justification. However, I am certain that after viewing them, many will experience something more. Let’s call it the breath of passing history, or possibly an intimation of the vulnerability of the works of man. The watercolors were painted during the past several decades; the destructive effect of time and history is their unifying thread. They cover a period when cataclysmic change swept over East Prussia, a time when the cultural heritage of an entire historical era was being mercilessly destroyed, and when a totally different historical reality was to be built on its ruins.

The setting for Borisovas’ paintings is a unique corner of Europe, which for a long time was called East Prussia. Periodically glaciers advanced over this territory from the heights of Scandinavia. The marks left by these geological events can be seen clearly on the western shore of the Semba peninsula (just to the east of present-day Kaliningrad or Karaliaučiai), where the rolling hills of Semba meet the Baltic Sea. It is not a gentle meeting; there is no beach; the waves hurl their full force directly against the hills that impede their progress. Looking down their remarkably stable sheer faces, one can see the history of this land, stretching back for many millions of years. Layers of gravel created by the debris of melted glaciers are separated by layers of sand, which mark millions of years when oceans covered the land. Down at the bottom, almost at the level where the waves beat against the precipitous face of the shore-side hills, there is a dark, tarlike layer, the remains from when the climate here was tropical and enormous conifer forests covered the region. It is this layer that has left a unique gift to this land. The sap that oozed from those trees became fossilized and the sea washed segments of it onto the beach, giving the region its name — “The Amber Shore.”

The glaciers of the last ice age melted about 12,000 years ago, a mere blink of the eye on the geological scale; human settlement followed not long thereafter. Evidence of the first Neolithic settlers is present from about 6,000 years ago, and thus antedates the pyramids of Egypt. Archeological evidence shows that the inhabitants were Balts. They evolved here through Neolithic times, to the Bronze, and subsequently, to the Iron Age. They had amber to trade, and did so with Greece, Rome, and Byzantium. After the Roman Empire collapsed and entire nations moved across the face of Europe, the Prussian Balts did not join the wandering
throngs. Their neighbors, the Goths and the Galinds, moved; Slavs appeared in their stead. But the Baltic tribes remained where they had first settled. They cleared a part of the extensive forests and engaged in agriculture and fishery, and became artisans and tradesmen.

The glacier-swept land they inherited was not a wilderness anymore; it became desirable and attracted the attention of its neighbors. The Balts built numerous hill forts to defend their territory. It is at this point that written history begins. About 1,000 years ago, missionary Christianity reached the Baltic lands. The first meeting was not successful. Their neighbors, the Slavs and the Germanic peoples, had converted to Christianity a century or so earlier, but the Baltic tribes, including the Prussians, could not be persuaded. An additional two hundred years passed. Enormous changes occurred in Christian Europe during that time. Under the influence of the Crusades to the Holy Land, the teachings of Christ, the Prince of Peace, had become subverted. Christianity deformed into a war-like religion; the teachings of Christ were now spread by the sword. In fact, spreading of Christianity was just a façade; actually, the movement of Christian armies to the north was motivated by the knowledge that here lands could be won and held.

The following two centuries were bloody. In 1233 the Teutonic knights, an order of armed monks with origins in the Holy Land, transferred their base to Torun, Mazovia (a region in north central Poland, about 100
miles south of Gdansk), and, aided by volunteers from Christian Europe, began a war of conquest and conversion against the Prussian tribes. It took half a century to conquer the Prussians, then another 150 years during which the war was prosecuted less successfully against the Lithuanians. The numerous castles which dot the Prussian lands hark back to this time.

Until the Second World War this prolonged war dominated the historical consciousness of Prussia. This was due not only to the extraordinary length of this conflict, but also because in the medieval context, it was a clash of civilizations. The stakes were high – for the Baltic peoples, losing meant not just a change of religion but also servitude and acceptance of Germanic societal values and language. In the end the Lithuanians won and maintained much of their territory and most importantly, their identity, but the Prussians had to accept the lot of the conquered.

It took a long time for the conquerors and the conquered to meld into a new society. In conquered Prussia, the Prussian language survived for four hundred years, into the 17th century. In its northern segments Lithuanian was spoken well into the 20th century. Books were published in these languages, church services held. Baltic place-names survived in slightly Germanized versions; the legends, folk-tales, and songs of this region were a blend of local and German traditions. It is now apparent that the conquest was not a sudden destruction of the existing society, but a gradual, centuries-long coexistence and eventual blending of two peoples. As a result, a unique Prussian ethos developed.

Characteristics of the monarchical system and some unique historical accidents led to the ironic development that in the 16th century, “Prussia,” the name of the conquered people, was transferred to the region of Brandenburg (surrounding current-day Berlin), and later became synonymous with Germany. This changed the image of “Prussia,” and it was not a change for the better. It is well to remember that the inhabitants of the real Prussia were not responsible for the sins committed in their name during the 20th century by the government in Berlin.

Let’s return to the watercolors of Romanas Borisovas. They show the cultural heritage of the original Prussians only indirectly. It could not be otherwise. Prussian dwellings and hill fortifications were built of wood and vanished long ago. However, in choosing locations to be fortified, they chose well. The conquering Teutonic knights recognized this and built their own fortifications on the same sites. Usually they did not change the name of conquered territories, or changed them only slightly; thus Balga remained Balga, Ragainė was changed to Ragnit, and Šakiai to Schaaken.

There is not much stone to be found in the glacier-scraped land, so the builders of forts, churches, and castles used mostly bricks. This is evident in the water-
ruins mark the relentless passage of time. But look partially collapsed towers – all of that seems almost Openings in weathered massive walls, which allow a view into a stark interior, arches which support no roof, are ruins. Ruins of medieval castles do not dismay us. natural. Castles have long ago lost their function; their again. Many of the ruins documented in these watercolors are ruins. Ruins of medieval castles do not dismay us. Openings in weathered massive walls, which allow a view into a stark interior, arches which support no roof, partially collapsed towers – all of that seems almost natural. Castles have long ago lost their function; their ruins mark the relentless passage of time. But look again. Many of the ruins documented in these watercolors are the remains of churches! Not only churches in the large towns which were bombed during the war, but in small villages, like Tarava, Lapynai, Pavandenė, and Obeliškiai, which survived the war intact. Borisovas recorded what he saw over several decades, thus the presented view is a glimpse not of what is, but what was. In the course of these decades, destruction proceeded apace, and some of the depicted church towers are now just piles of rubble.

That is the painful component of Borisovas’ work; it starkly shows us the changes that engulfed the Prussian land after 1945. The ruins of churches do not reflect the relentless, gradual action of time; they are evidence that a uniquely destructive historical shift engulfed this region. They show that no ties exist between the inhabitants who worshiped in these churches, some of them dating back to the 13th century, and the latest conquerors who replaced them. This time historical continuity was severed completely.

It is difficult to write about the fate of Prussia after 1945. The changes which took place there are so unique that it is difficult to find a point of comparison. There simply are no recognizable analogies. In 2003, after repeated visits to the region now called Kaliningrad (Karaliaučiai), I tried to summarize what I saw in an article titled “Consciousness Determines Reality.” An excerpt follows:

“IT IS ‘Kaliningrad’ not ‘Königsberg,’ which falls so much more gently on our ears. The historical city is gone, now there is just ‘Kaliningrad.’ I had to face this fact during my first visits here in the beginning of the 1990s. Not a trace was to be found of the old Königsberg. When I first visited this sad city, the ruins of the cathedral stood roofless, Lenin glared across the huge, concrete-paved ‘Victory’ square, surrounded by pompous, massive, colonnaded Soviet buildings. On the flat roofs of seemingly endless five-storied buildings of crumbling concrete, slogans such as ‘Slava Sovietskomu Narodu’ (Glory To the Soviet Nation) were spread out. The huge letters made of rusting iron matched the desolate gray, peeling facades of the buildings…

“The prime example of this ‘glory’ squatted right in the gutted heart of old Königsberg. There, at the location where Königsberg’s landmark castle, the defensive, administrative, and cultural center of Prussia, had stood for 700 years, rose an uncompleted concrete monstrosity of unique ugliness. Try to imagine a twenty-story high structure of bare gray concrete; rows of empty, glassless windows, and strange concrete protrusions. It squatted among piles of abandoned structural elements, garbage, and weeds, surrounded by a weathered wooden fence marred by scatological graffiti. Those who have seen the ‘Building of the Soviets’ know that my description of it is inadequate. Before giving up its ghost, the Soviet system built a monument to its impotence…

“It was still like that five years ago. At that time the first supermarkets had been built in Lithuania, pizza was replacing shashliks, and many facades of the Vilnius Old Town were gleaming with new paint. In comparison, Kaliningrad appeared even bleaker than during earlier visits. German funds were slowly restoring the cathedral, and the cleansed ancient brickwork contrasted with Soviet bleakness. Another change was a huge crater dug in a ramshackle park behind the statue of Lenin. A weathered billboard proclaimed that a cathedral was to be built in this place. At that time there was water at its…
bottom, trash floated on top of it, and Lenin did not seem overly concerned. So far, the evidence of capitalism around him consisted of numerous ramshackle kiosks...

“I noted that things had started to change during my 2003 visit when I reached the bridge across the Pregel River. From this position one had a good view of the blocks of concrete buildings which had been adorned with the huge rusting “Slava Sovietskomu Nar-odu” slogan. The slogan had now vanished! In its place, in somewhat smaller and considerably more elegant Latin, not Cyrillic, letters there was just one word – SAMSUNG.”

It is evident that changes are occurring. What will follow now? Lenin had cause to be worried. He is gone from Victory (formerly Hansa) square. In place of the crater behind his back there now rises a large Orthodox cathedral with five gold-plated domes. The generation which was born and grew up in this land does not harbor the destructive hate which their parents and grandparents brought with them. They are still very uncertain with regard to their identity, but many of them have developed a nostalgia for that which was destroyed. Pictures and mementos of old Königsberg have become very popular, and some of the remaining structures in old Königsberg have been restored.

The latest historical glacier which engulfed East Prussia in 1945 is melting, leaving enormous destruction and much debris behind. Like a block of hardening amber, the watercolors of Borisovas capture what happened to the cultural heritage of East Prussia. Even when the paintings depict evidence of barbaric destruction, they remain beautiful. That is the mark of the artist. However, the artist is free to choose what he will depict. Borisovas chose to depict the vanishing cultural heritage of Prussia and Königsberg. His accomplishment is not just the result of artistic talent, but also recognition of what is truly valuable. The technique is professional; it is the choice of subject matter that makes his work unique.

Adapted with permission from: “Disappearing East Prussia” (Išeinantys Rytprūsiai). Catalog for an Art Exhibition by Romanas Borisovas. Kaunas: Kopa, 2006. Watercolors can be purchased directly from the artist: romanas.borisovas@gmail.com.
As we celebrate the centenary of Lithuanian Independence, we look to the past to find people and symbols to serve as reminders of the concept of statehood embodied in the February 16, 1918 Declaration of Independence. One of the individuals who embodied this concept of Lithuanian statehood was fighter pilot and airplane builder Antanas Gustaitis. In 1925 his future wife Bronė came up with the acronym ANBO from the words ‘Antanas Nori Būti Ore’ (Antanas wants to be in the air). This acronym was used on all the planes that Gustaitis built and became one of the best-known symbols of nationhood in Lithuania in the years before the Second World War.

Antanas Gustaitis was born on March 26, 1898, in the village of Obelinė, near Marijampolė. On May 28, 1916, at the age of eighteen, he graduated from high school and began studies in Saint Petersburg, Russia, at the School of Engineering named after Czar Alexander I.

As the battles of the First World War dragged on for more than three years, farmers, factory workers and students lived in constant anticipation. In 1917 it became clear to Antanas that he, like other students, would not be able to avoid service in the Russian imperial army. In 1917 he enrolled in the Constantine School of Artillery, but the Bolshevik Revolution cut short his military service. The war and the revolution caused turmoil to spread over the Russian empire. In 1918 Gustaitis returned to Lithuania as the revolution was spreading.

By the end of 1918 it became evident that military force would be needed to establish and defend Lithuanian independence. This led to the creation of the Lithuanian Army, and on March 12, 1919, the Lithuanian School of Military Aviation was created. Its purpose was to train fighter pilots for the Lithuanian Army. Gustaitis enrolled at this school on March 15, 1919. From that day forward his entire life became connected with the Lithuanian Air Force.

As the Red Army attacked Lithuania, work at the Air Force School became especially difficult. Because it lacked its own facilities, the School at first operated out of the parental home of its first commandant, Konstantinas Fugalevičius. The school lacked supplies, textbooks, and most importantly, instructors who were knowledgeable in the theoretical disciplines of aviation and who could teach flying. Military Aviation School students received only fragmentary instruction in warfare and aviation.

Flying lessons began when the school obtained three Albatros B.II training planes from the Germans, who were retreating from Lithuania. The students at the School of Military Aviation were divided according to their abilities into pilot and scout groups. On July 21, 1919, Antanas was assigned to the first flying-lesson group, headed by senior lieutenant Haris Rotteris. By the end of August a group consisting of six advanced students was created, and Antanas Gustaitis became part of that group. Unfortunately, flying instruction soon came to an end after instructor Rotteris stole a plane and fled Lithuania. This led to the firing of the remaining German instructors for fear that they might be untrustworthy.

As 1919 drew to a close, Gustaitis’ superiors made the decision to accelerate his studies at the School of Military Aviation so that they could be concluded by the end of the year. He graduated on December 12, 1920.
16, 1919, with the degree of lieutenant of engineering and was assigned to the Lithuanian Air Force.

In 1920, as battles for Lithuanian independence continued, flying lessons intensified and pilots solidified their flying skills by making flights into battle. In 1920 Gustaitis, who had just begun flying on his own, made three flights to the front. His fourth flight ended before it could begin: on October 4th the plane he was piloting crashed on takeoff because it was overloaded with bombs.

After the battles for independence ended, a more peaceful life began. New squadrons were formed, pilots were trained, and new planes were purchased. Gustaitis took courses for pilots and scouts, and he later completed advanced acrobatic piloting courses. On August 29, 1922, he was awarded the title of fighter pilot.

In 1923 the career of Gustaitis took a leap forward: at age 25 he was made head of the Training Squadron. He was entrusted with organizing advanced piloting classes and was promoted to the rank of senior lieutenant. Gustaitis had a talent for mathematics. He got permission from lieutenant general Juozas Kraucevičius, head of the Lithuanian Air Force, to build his first plane, which he began to do at the end of 1924 in factories of the Lithuanian Air Force with money he himself had saved.

Gustaitis constructed airplanes which were very practical and met the needs of the Lithuanian Air Force. His first plane was a compact, low-winged sports monoplane. He himself made a trial flight in this plane, which was made of metal pipes and woodwork, in Kaunas on July 14, 1925. The plane was named ANBO-I. The Roman numeral indicated that it was the first to be constructed. Upon completion, the plane was turned over to the First Squadron, whose pilots used ANBO-I to conduct accurate landing exercises. This plane is the only plane constructed by Gustaitis which has survived. It is on display in the Vytautas Magnus War Museum in Kaunas.

The commanders of the Lithuanian Air Force took note of Gustaitis’ talents, and the Ministry of Defense awarded him a scholarship. In the fall of 1925 he left to study at the prestigious Paris Advanced School of Aeronautics and Mechanical Construction. He returned three years later after having been trained as a professional engineer of aeronautics and mechanical
construction. He soon used the systematic knowledge of plane construction he had acquired to build a new plane, the ANBO-II. This was a two-seater designed to train beginner pilots. The style dominant in Paris influenced the techniques that Gustaitis used to construct the ANBO-II. It was a high-winged monoplane with wings supported on props. Gustaitis took a pragmatic approach to the materials, attachments and motor needed to construct the plane: he took cost, quality, and use of the various elements of the plane into account. When he returned from Paris in the summer of 1927, he oversaw construction of the plane, and in 1931 it was donated to the Lithuanian Flying Club.

While still in Paris, Gustaitis attained the rank of captain. When he came back from his studies, he was made a major, and also chief of staff for the Lithuanian Air Force. A few months later he assumed the post of Head of the Technical Department of Lithuania’s Air Force, which included Air Force manufacturing plants. Even though he was still a young engineer, he was made responsible for all of the aviation technology of the Lithuanian Air Force, and he was entrusted with the care, assembly and repair of all of its planes.

Gustaitis returned from Paris with plans and preliminary drawings for a few more airplanes. One of them was a plane designed for advanced training of pilots, the ANBO-III. Pilots training in the Lithuanian Air Force had to make between 80 and 130 trial flights with an instructor before flying on their own. From the beginning of the 1930s, it was the ANBO-III that was used for further pilot training after a pilot’s first solo flight. ANBO-III was the first plane manufactured serially. In 1930-1931 nine of these planes were manufactured in Lithuanian Air Force plants.

After finishing ANBO-III Gustaitis began working on his most famous airplane, the ANBO-IV. In this new plane he combined the characteristics of a scouting plane with those of a bomber. The new plane was smaller than planes used for scouting missions at that time. It was fast, more nimble, and had the capacity to carry a small number of bombs intended for enemy land targets. Gustaitis made a trial flight with the prototype of this plane from the Kaunas airfield on July 14, 1932. In 1932 the command of the Lithuanian Army and Air Force announced an international contest for the best new scouting plane. Gustaitis won the contest with his ANBO-IV plane. He beat out three other planes entered by world-famous airplane manufacturers. This led to serial manufacture of the ANBO-IV plane. There were 15 ANBO-IV planes built in Lithuanian Air Force plants from 1932 to 1935.

In the summer of 1934, on the first anniversary of the flight of Darius and Girėnas across the Atlantic, three ANBO-IV planes led by Gustaitis flew around Europe. They visited 12 countries and covered 10,000 kilometers by air. The ANBO name became known all over Europe and brought international acclaim not only to Gustaitis, but also to the Lithuanian Air Force.

After this flight the British engine manufacturer Bristol used the ANBO-IV plane in its advertisements. After the European flight, Gustaitis was given the military rank of colonel and was made head of the Lithuanian Air Force. On November 23, 1937, he was made a brigadier general.
The years 1935-1939 were especially productive. Gustaitis began to perfect the ANBO-IV. The new ANBO-41 had a three-blade propeller and a larger wing span. From 1936 to 1939 twenty ANBO-41 planes were built. They became the most highly regarded of the planes constructed by Gustaitis.

The Lithuanian Air Force grew considerably after 1930. New squadrons were formed. The network of airfields expanded. In 1932 the Lithuanian Air Force School was reestablished. More pilots and more training planes were needed. In 1931 Gustaitis began to design a new training plane, the ANBO-V. Soon after the first flight of ANBO-V, Gustaitis created the ANBO-VI plane, which was designed to train a new generation of pilots.

At the end of the 1930s the airfields of the Lithuanian Air Force still had a fair number of German planes made during the First World War, but in 1931 the ANBO-V designed by Gustaitis began to take the place of these uneconomical, outdated and unsafe planes. In 1936 Gustaitis designed and built his last training plane – the ANBO-51.

In 1938 he took on his last project – designing a light bomber. It was a two-seater low-winged monoplane of mixed construction. The ANBO-VIII, piloted by Gustaitis, made its first trial flight on September 5, 1939. It was anticipated that this well-equipped and aerodynamic airplane would enable the greater part of the battle squadrons of the Lithuanian Air Force to be ready for combat. Unfortunately, the beginning of the Second World War and the Soviet occupation which followed put an end to the construction of ANBO-VIII.

During his years of service in the Lithuanian Air Force, Antanas Gustaitis built and made trial flights in nine different types of ANBO planes. In 1940, of the 120 planes in the Lithuanian Air Force, 56 were ANBO-construction planes. Gustaitis designed all of the training planes and a large part of the scouting planes. When the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania, the Soviets seized some of Gustaitis’ planes and transported them east, and they destroyed the others, using them for target practice. In March of 1941, the Soviets arrested Gustaitis, accused him of anti-Soviet activity, and conducted a sham trial. They condemned him to death and executed him in the Butyrka prison of Moscow on October 16, 1941.

Mindaugas Sereičikas is a Ph.D. student of History at Klaipėda University (www.ku.lt/en/). The main sources for this report, which are available on request, include unpublished documents from Office of the Chief Archivist of Lithuania, Lithuanian Special Archives and the Lithuanian Aviation Museum. Also used were articles by Algirdas Gamzika, Estela Gruzdienė, Eugenijus Raubickas, Gyta Ramoška, Viktoras Ašmenskas, Vilius Kavaliauskas, and Vytautas Asevičius. Memoirs used included those by Jonas Martynas Laurinaitis, Jonas Mikėnas, Juozas Namikas, Leonardas Peseckas, Pranas Hiksa, and Simas Stanaitis, as well as unpublished memoirs by Bronė Aleksandričiūtė-Jablonskienė Gustaitienė.

Translated from Lithuanian by Rimas Černius.
To anyone born after 1990 the term “Iron Curtain” is just a historical term of no more import than the term “Hadrian’s Wall.” Unless it falls again, no one will experience it again. As a professor of mathematics I had the opportunity to lecture in Lithuania both behind the Iron Curtain and after it was lifted. Luckily mathematics is the same, $2 + 2$ is still 4 for both communists and capitalists. Most other things are different.

In 1980, as a newly minted assistant professor I lectured for about 3 months on Algebraic Number Theory at the Institute of Mathematics and Cybernetics of the Academy of Sciences of Lithuania in Vilnius.

After much thought, I decided that my entire experience could be best described by one word, “opposite” in the sense that the real meaning of a word was the exact opposite of its literal meaning. It was like living in Orwell’s 1984 and in Alice’s Wonderland. If Orwell had a Ministry of Truth, a main Soviet publication was “Pravda” (Truth) which of course published everything but that. When Humpty Dumpty used a word incorrectly and Alice objected he replied that when he used a word it meant only what he wanted to, what was important was who was to be the master.

As I walked down streets, red banners proclaimed “liberty,” but the people were enslaved. The Soviet constitution had very strong declarations on freedom of religion, but that meant you had better not go to church or it would be the worse for you. I became a godfather to a colleague’s baby son. We arranged the baptism in a darkened church through a back entrance in the middle of the night. Examples of these reverse, opposite meanings abounded in everyday life. What is a bar? A place for a beer? Of course not, that is a place where there is no beer or at best it will be warm. A typical Soviet joke describes a tourist who by mistake walks into a butcher shop and asks for bread. The indignant clerk replies that this is a butcher shop: we have no meat here. Next door is the bakery: that is where they have no bread. This type of phenomenon was so pervasive that it actually appeared in literature (which of course was banned: what is a book? something you cannot read).

Here is a short dialogue from Mikhail Bulgakov’s Master and Margarita. It is a hot day and the poet Bezdomny would like a cold drink. “A glass of lemonade, please,” said Bezdomny. “There isn’t any,” replied the woman in the kiosk. For some reason the request seemed to offend her. “Got any beer?” inquired Bezdomny in a hoarse voice. “Beer is being delivered later this evening,” said the woman. “Well what have you got?” asked Bezdomny. “Apricot juice, only it is warm,” was the answer.

It continues. A hotel is a place where you cannot stay. Every tourist that travelled to Lithuania under Soviet rule knew that all hotels were off limits except “Gintaras” where here it was now off limits to locals. Restaurants were usually places where you could not eat. First, it was because it was very difficult to get in past the doorman. The standard greeting was “there are no empty places,” which meant there were empty places (the opposite principle...
The invariant answer will be “meat” and if you ask what kind, the standard answer is “cooked” (kepsmys). The beverage will always be “drink” (gerimas), and if you ask what kind, you will get an angry retort that it is a “brand drink” (firmsinis). Of course, you have no idea if you will get beer or buttermilk, but you will get the “drink.” So I happily ate my meat and had my drink while the poor students were still engaged in the hopeless task of trying to order from the menu. It was like a skit from Saturday Night Live, where whatever you order you will always get “cheeseburger, cheeseburger, cheeseburger, no Coke, Pepsi.”

Even having discovered the “opposite” principle, it was not that easy for a capitalist like me to implement it in a communist society. Knowing how to enter a restaurant and how not to look at the menu was not always enough. I entered a restaurant where all the tables had either two chairs or four chairs. All the two seaters were occupied so I sat down at a four seater. I was ignored for about ten minutes. Finally, I grabbed a passing waiter to try and order. He rudely muttered, “we don’t serve at that table.” I figured maybe that section of the restaurant was closed, and moved to a different four person table. The same result, the waiter even more angrily stated that they don’t serve at that table either. Desperately, I asked, “where do you serve then?” He replied that a single person must sit at a two person table (which were all occupied). I left without eating, but with a much deeper understanding of the beauty of the “opposite” principle. You cannot sit where there is room, but must sit where there is no room. But I was not about to starve in a communist paradise, after all only capitalists in America were starving. The next day I returned to the same restaurant and the same scenario began to replay itself. All the two person tables were again full, but there were plenty of empty four person tables where I again sat down. Only this time when the waiter went by I collared him and said “there are four of us at this table and I would like to order four dinners.” When he brought the four dinners, I happily began eating mine. A few minutes later the waiter came by and asked where my three friends were. I replied “Oh they are enjoying their meals very much, only they are invisible.” I had learned how live in the theater of the absurd.

This “opposite” principle also surfaced in more serious situations. The purpose of the “Iron Curtain” was not to keep people from entering the communist paradise, but from leaving paradise (opposite again!). In conversations with some of my relatives I lamented the fact that they could not travel to other countries. To my surprise they answered that they were free to travel. They said they could travel to any democratic country. At which point I exclaimed, well then come visit us in America! We would love to see you. Oh no, they replied America is not a democratic country, it is a capitalist country. Totally befuddled, I asked, so what are the democratic countries? Democratic East Germany, the Democratic Country of North Korea, Democratic Peoples Republic of China, was the list. I could have kicked myself. Here I thought I was mastering the “opposite” principle and it turns out I was still a neophyte. Of course! A Democratic country is one where there is no democracy, how could I forget.

When Communism was destroying Lithuania and pushing it back into a Stone Age, all the newspapers, radio, T.V., and government agencies trumpeted the great progress that was being made. Of course that now makes sense. Under
the “opposite” principle all regress was labeled progress.

I returned to Lithuania in 2001 as a lecturer at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. Then the “Iron Curtain” was just a historical memory. Yet when much progress was already made, there were people still stating that it was better under Communism when the total meat in a butcher shop was a row of cow’s hooves. So vestiges of the “opposite” principle still remain. If things get better, it is still important to say that they are worse.

However, for restored independent Lithuania I have a new summary descriptor word, “contrast.”

You walk past a gleaming steel and glass Omnitel building, but you also pass crumbling cement and broken door multistory apartment buildings. You walk into a store whose cash register is an abacus (no need for electricity!), but next door is an Internet café where kids proficiently are surfing the web. Some clever hackers broke into Parliament’s website and posted a game “Vytai, Vytai” where the object was to blow off Vytautas Landsbergis’ head.

Violent games are routine in America, but this caused a sensation in Lithuania. It was amusing to listen to parliamentarians admit that they saw the game, but certainly did not play it (an interesting opportunity to apply the “opposite” principle to their comments).

Expensive cars clog the streets, but beggars also sit on the curbs. There is a surprising number of young people in churches, but also a number of them sitting on curbs in the morning drinking beer. I learned in my first grade Lithuanian grammar book “alu gerti sveika” (to drink beer is healthy), but I cannot understand how one can drink it in the morning.

The prices are also mysterious. Are they high or are they low? The daily paper is more expensive than my Cleveland Plain Dealer, but a plate of cepelinai (potato dumplings) is dirt cheap. Is the city safe or dangerous? Under Communism I walked everywhere at all hours in perfect safety. There were militiamen and blinking blue lights on every corner. Now I was warned to avoid certain sections of town, day or night. Cars are routinely stolen. But the reverse vocabulary of Soviet times is still useful. Ads appear in newspapers stating that a car “disappeared” on such and such a day in such and such a location. Reward for “finding” it. You get your car back by paying ransom to the thief. I kind of enjoyed those ads about “disappearing cars.” It reminded me of my invisible dinner companions.

Reflecting on my trip to now independent Lithuania I was surrounded by contrasts. And I was not sure if I was happy or sad. Perhaps the “opposite” principle was still in effect.
Given the contemporary importance of strategic communications, information operations, and counter-propaganda for the Baltic countries, it is perhaps useful to look at the Lithuanian experience in its relations with the United States in the 1918–1922 period, when Lithuanian Americans needed to sway American public opinion and ultimately influence American policy.

The problem the Lithuanians faced in 1919 was that the U.S. Department of State accepted some form of autonomy for the Baltic Countries in an “indivisible Russia” but not full independence. In contrast, the independence of Poland and Armenia from Russia was supported, largely because of influential electorates in the Pittsburgh and Chicago areas and in Southern California. State Department policy was driven by “old Russia hands,” who had associated with Baltic Germans, and Polish and Russian aristocrats during diplomatic missions to Moscow and Saint Petersburg and had come to share the beliefs and biases of their social acquaintances.

There were other factors in play as well. There existed a powerful a “white Russian” lobby which supported an “indivisible Russia” due to worries about recouping American investments in the Tsarist Empire. There were also fears by petroleum interests that the Japanese might gain control of oil bearing Russian territories with the dissolution of the Empire. Both of these interest groups were working hard to influence Congress and the State Department to not recognize Baltic independence. All of the major Allied powers maintained a consensus of recognizing the de facto independence of the Baltic countries, but not de jure. Among the Allies, Great Britain was perhaps the most supportive of full independence and the United States the least. In order to change this situation, and to influence the American government to support de jure recognition of Lithuanian independence, Lithuanian Americans enlisted the assistance two of the foremost pioneers in the fields of public relations, public opinion, and propaganda, Edward Bernays and Carl Byoir.

Edward Bernays can perhaps be considered one of the foremost figures in the early conceptual development of the field of public relations. A Cornell University graduate, Bernays was initially not involved in corporate communications or political campaigns but rather, was a publicist for the arts – the theatre, the opera, and the ballet in New York City. However, as the United States entered World War I, he joined the U.S. Committee on Public Information headed by George Creel. According to Bernays, the Committee on Public Information “bolstered the morale of our citizens and of our allies and helped to break down enemy morale. Its propaganda efforts were so effective that one historian later wrote that words won the war.” Bernays greatest contribution to the Committee on Public Information was creating the League of Oppressed Nations which represented various ethnic groups in the U.S. who had relatives in Europe under Austrian or German rule.

In March of 1919, Bernays left the Committee on Public Information and returned from Europe to the United States. Of his experience with the committee, he stated, “I had learned much in the war that could be applied to peacetime pursuits.” On return to the United States, Bernays opened a public relations firm – his first two clients were the American government, that wanted someone to conduct a campaign encouraging businesses to hire recently discharged veterans, and the Lithuanian National Council.

Bernays took on a partner, Carl Byoir, to work with him in the effort to assist Lithuania. Byoir was born to Jewish immigrant parents from...
of the siege to observe the police operations and was met by spectators with boos and shouts of “Oo let’em in?” (who let them in?) referring to the Liberal Party’s immigration policy that had allowed the influx of immigrants from the Russian Empire. On the other hand, around 1915, Latvians gained some positive publicity regarding the organization of Latvian Rifle Regiments in their homeland; the stout defense of the Riga front by these Latvian soldiers, while the rest of the Russian Army seemed always to be failing, was widely reported in American newspapers. There was negative press about the Latvian Riflemen as well, however; this had to do with their involvement in helping install the Bolsheviks to power in Petrograd in October of 1917.

The best known Estonians in America and the rest of the world at the time, although not identified always as Estonians, were professional wrestling champions George Hackenschmidt, George Lurich, Aleksander Aberg and women’s champion Maria Loorberg. Hackenschmidt, Aberg and Lurich all had toured America and were household names. As early as 1915, Aberg identified himself as an Estonian to American newspapers and sporting journals; he even became dubbed the “Estonian Giant” on American sports pages.

The Lithuanians, though larger in population and having a large immigrant community in the United States, were similarly unknown to much of the American public. Most Americans knew of the ancient Lithuanian empire from school textbooks and maps; many Americans had perhaps read or heard about the large Lithuanian neighborhoods in Chicago and the anthracite producing towns of Northeastern Pennsylvania, but they knew little to nothing about the contemporary situation in Lithuania.

In order to support the effort to get Congress to recognize Lithuania’s independence, Byoir and Bernays, the two public relations innovators, employed techniques they had learned while working with the Committee on Public Information, including using printed media, arranging for prominent local spokesmen to speak to civic organizations, placing editorials in influential publications, and directly engaging key individuals in society, politics and government.

Winston Churchill at the Siege of Sidney Street. (Illustrated London News, 1911)

Their’s had to be a comprehensive effort, as not much was known about Lithuania, nor about Estonia nor Latvia for that matter, by the American public at the time. What the public knew of the three Baltic groups was spotty and not invariably positive. As one example, shortly before the outbreak of the world war, Latvians had been associated with some negative notoriety relating to the “Siege of Sidney Street,” an event that occurred in London in January of 1911. On that occasion, a gang of Latvian and Jewish jewel thieves/anarchists had engaged in a spectacular shootout with the London Metropolitan Police and the Scots Guards. Liberal Party politician Winston Churchill arrived on scene

One of the many rallies supporting independence for Lithuania.

On the advice of Byoir and Bernays, the Lithuanian National Council gathered together prominent Lithuanian Americans and established a Lithuanian information bureau. They made an exhaustive study on every conceivable aspect of Lithuanian history and culture and presented this information to the American public to garner the most interest and widest spread of information.

According to Professor Harold D. Lasswell, writing about the Lithuanian example of creating public opinion in 1930, “For the amateur ethnologist there was presented interesting and accurate data about the racial origins of Lithuania. The student of language was provided with authentic and well-written studies of the development of the Lithuanian language from its origin in Sanskrit. The sporting fan was told about Lithuanian sports. American women were introduced to Lithuanian clothes. The jeweler was shown the beauty and desirability of Lithuanian amber, and the music lover was invited to concerts of Lithuanian music. Senators and representatives were furnished with multitudes of facts about Lithuania. Mass meetings were held, petitions signed, and presented. Personal calls were made on the members of the Senate and House of Representatives. The mails carried statements about Lithuania to prominent individuals. Lecturers embodied the pleas of Lithuania in their addresses. Newspaper advertising was bought. The radio carried the messages of speakers throughout the country. Even motion pictures con-
tributed their share. [Radio and film were very new media at the time. The first commercial radio station KDKA went on the air in Pittsburgh in 1920] The Lithuanian Bureau furnished corrections to the press of incorrect news from interested sources and in turn received the publicity which they desired from the correct facts.”

Despite the extensive work of Byoir, Bernays and the Lithuanian National Council, the United States remained the last major power in 1921 not to have granted de jure recognition to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In contrast, Great Britain, France and Italy had recognized the independence of the three Baltic nations on January 26, 1921, and Japan followed soon thereafter, on March 8, 1921.

In 1921, a new presidential administration came into power in the United States under Warren Harding. Before the Harding Administration came into office, American foreign policy had been directed by Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby, whom University of California international law professor, Melbone W. Graham described as a “sinister figure…a ci-devant liberal, who turned out to be one of the most unfortunately reactionary secretaries of state in America’s history… Colby was a Progressive who had gone sour in the process.”

The influential Senator Henry Cabot Lodge was a political “king-pin” in the new Republican administration. Through careful research it was found that some several thousand Lithuanian American voters lived in Lodge’s home state of Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Lithuanian American population was made aware of the situation—a solid guarantee of Lithuanian American votes in Senator Lodge’s upcoming re-election campaign in autumn of 1921 could cement the election for him and thus bring the Lithuanians great influence with the Harding Administration. Furthermore, Lodge thoroughly disliked the effete Colby and the late, arrogant Woodrow Wilson and could utilize the case of the Baltic countries to his own advantage to discredit Colby’s policies and those of the previous administration. The issue was settled and sealed in a Boston hotel room with a Lithuanian from Texas acting as intermediary between the Lithuanians and the Republican senator.

The Lithuanian Americans of Massachusetts were mobilized to vote and did their part in helping to elect Lodge. Lodge delivered on his end of the bargain, when he was able to obtain recognition of all three Baltic countries in the summer 1922. When Lodge brought the issue up directly with President Harding, the President immediately called Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes on the telephone. “Don’t we recognize Lithuania?” the President asked the Secretary of State. “No,” said Hughes. “Well, why in the Hell don’t we?” Hughes was stumped for an adequate reply. Harding cut the conversation short, “Well, go ahead and recognize them then.” At 11:00 a.m., Eastern standard time, on the morning of July 22, 1922, the United States fully recognized Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia.

The recognition of the Baltic countries was generally praised in the press and engendered no political opposition in the Congress; all issues of an “indivisible Russia” and worries about recouping American investments in Russia were forgotten. Regarding the issue of petroleum, in 1921 Standard Oil had come to a secret agreement with the Bolshevist government and had taken over operations of a refinery in the Caucasus formerly operated by the Nobel Brothers, which it could use to supply the Standard Oil distribution network in Europe. Other elements of American business looked optimistically at new trade opportunities that might arise from recognition of the Baltic countries. Thus, despite, not yielding quick results, overall the Lithuanian information campaign was successful and it benefited Estonia and Latvia as well.

According to Professor Lasswell, the Lithuanian example “helps one to see how tremendous is the influence which can be brought to bear on a situation in a community or country if adequate leadership is provided and the campaign well organized.”

Abridged from an article by the author in the Baltic Military History Newsletter (August 2013).

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Henry Cabot Lodge.
Most American live traditional mundane lives, going to work five days a week and spending evenings and weekends with family and friends. Some are blessed or cursed in having a more active lifestyle where they work odd shifts, hours, and days of the week. Generally one finds these people in the first responder, military, or medical fields, where their services are needed twenty-four hours a day. Still others have traditional lifestyles, but chose not only to have an active family and social life, but also chose to be active in various areas of interest. Occasionally, one finds a person who not only works in one of the active lifestyles and is a devoted husband and father, but who also participates in a series of activities at the same time. One of these rare people is Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Arūnas Banionis. Arūnas lives with his family in Poulsbo, Washington, and practices family medicine in Bremerton, Washington. Besides being on twenty-four hour call for his wife and two sons, he has also served as a flight surgeon for over twenty years in the United States Air Force Reserve and now the Washington Air National Guard. Although such a lifestyle would wear out a normal person, Dr. Banionis throughout his life has been a Lithuanian American activist as well. Since Dr. Banionis is not the kind of person who brags about his exploits, a guy like myself has to do it for him.

Arūnas was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. His parents, Mindaugas and Regina Banionis, née Šeškas, were both Lithuanian born who came to the United States as immigrants via Displaced Person Camps in post World War II Germany. When Arūnas speaks about his parents, he describes them as having been ordinary people who lived through an extraordinary time. Their life stories could fill the pages of a book, but time and space allow for only a brief recounting. Arūnas’ father, Mindaugas, was born in Kauņas in 1924, and his mother Regina was born in Tauragė in 1934. His grandfather Matas Banionis was an officer in the Imperial Russian Army who fought in both World War I and the 1918 Lithuanian War of Independence. His grandmother Maria Banionis was a partisan during the wars who rendered first aid to Lithuanian Army soldiers and volunteers. His paternal great grandfather Kazimieras Steikūnas was an ordinary farmer in the Molėtai region of eastern Lithuania, but who happened to be one of the delegates to the 1905 Great Vilnius Seimas, which laid the groundwork for Lithuania’s 1918 declaration of independence. Arūnas’ Lithuanian roots intertwine deeply with those of 20th century Lithuanian history.

Although father Mindaugas wanted to fight for his country during the Russian and German invasions, his parents forced him to work on a farm to avoid military induction. Mindaugas decided to flee his homeland in July of 1944, several weeks before the second Soviet invasion of Lithuania, at which time he made his way to the Prussian border. He was stopped there by the German army and forced to work digging tank defenses before being allow to flee into Germany proper. After Germany’s surrender, Mindaugas was housed at the Hochfeld Displaced Persons Camp, where he resumed his technical studies at the Lithuanian Technical School. Mindaugas wanted to immigrate to America and initially immigrated to Canada where he worked in the East Malarctic Gold Mines in Québec.

Subsequently, Mindaugas moved to Windsor, Ontario. He attended the Chrysler Institute of Engineering in Detroit and was trained as a draftsman. He was active in the Ontario and Detroit Lithuanian communities, where met his future wife, Regina Šeškas, at a Lithuanian dance. Regina and her parents had similarly fled
Lithuania before the approaching Russian Army. The Šeškas family lived in various Displaced Persons camps in Germany, mainly in Bavaria. During her stay in Germany, Regina was the personal secretary to Monsignor Mykolas Krupavičius, the Chairman of the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (VLIKAS) and even met Juozas Lukša (Daumantas), the fabled Lithuanian Partisan leader. Mindaugas and Regina were married in Detroit in 1959 and then moved to Los Angeles, California. They settled close to St. Casimir’s Lithuanian Church in order to be closer to fellow Lithuanians. There Mindaugas became active in the Lithuanian National Guard in Exile (Lietuvos Saulių Sąjunga – Juozo Daumanto Kuopa) and Regina joined the Lithuanian choir at the church.
Arūnas attended St. Casimir's School and each day, along with the other Lithuanian American kids, attended a Lithuanian class where they were taught Lithuanian reading, writing and grammar as well as history. In his youth, he became active in the Lithuanian Cub Scouts (vilkiukai) and Lithuanian Boy Scouts. After the first Lithuanian Air Scouts troop was created in Los Angeles, Arūnas joined them and he learned to build models and eventually became proficient in flying gliders. One of his first major accomplishments was to become a Skautas Vytais, equivalent to an American Eagle Scout. Arūnas remained active in this unit for many years and eventually assumed command of the Los Angeles Darius and Girėnas Troop.

Although Arūnas’ childhood appears to have been ordinary, he had many close extraordinary friends and neighbors. General Stasys Raštikis, the former Commander of the Lithuanian Army, and his wife Elena lived two doors down from his home. As a boy, Arūnas would see the general walking down the street in his gray suit and fedora and frequently walk with him while talking about all sorts of topics in Lithuanian. When Arūnas and brother Vytais became older, they would help the general and his wife with chores for which they were always paid. On several occasions, Arūnas and his brother both drove the general to see his Lithuanian doctor, Dr. Zigmantas Brinkis, and Arūnas frequently proclaims that he was once the general’s driver. General Raštikis was a humble and honorable man and a true gentleman and officer. Many notable Lithuanian figures would frequently visit the general and the Banionis family would be invited over to meet them.

Space precludes recounting the many historical figures that Arūnas met in his childhood. One who would play a significant part in Arūnas’ future activities was the former Lithuanian Air Force pilot, Gregorius Radvenis, who was a recipient of the coveted Iron Wings (Plienio Spernai) award. Radvenis became Arūnas’ mentor in his youthful involvement in the Los Angeles Lithuanian Philatelic Club. Arūnas continues to take an interest in Lithuanian postage stamps, and his entry won the 2013 Lithuanian government stamp design competition to mark the 80th anniversary of the Darius and Girėnas transatlantic flight.

Eventually all boys have to grow up, and how Arūnas grew up is just another chapter in the life of an extraordinary individual. Arūnas attended California State University – Northridge, where he majored in Molecular Biology. As his academic demands accelerated he had to withdraw from Scout activities and focus on his studies. Four years later he earned his Bachelor’s and shortly thereafter his Master’s degree in Molecular Biology. In 1991, Arūnas was accepted into medical school on a full Air Force scholarship and spent that summer attending Air Force Officer training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. Medical school was tough and the equivalent of mental boot camp, especially during the first year. Arūnas spent his last year of medical school attending the Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine at Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Once more, ordinary was not enough and Arūnas, while in medical school, was also able to complete flight training and gain a Private Pilot rating.

Upon graduation from medical school, Arūnas was awarded the U.S. Air Force rank of Captain and the coveted silver wings of an Air Force Flight Surgeon. After completing a general internship, Arūnas was assigned to Vance Air Force Base in Enid, Oklahoma, which is a pilot training base. Here he served as a flight surgeon with the 71st Medical Group, providing support to the 8th Flying Training Squadron. This group trained aboard the Cessna T-37 twin-engine jet trainer, which at the time was the primary U.S. Air Force training aircraft. Once again,
In 2003, Arūnas was called to support Operation Deep Freeze and was temporarily assigned to Christchurch, New Zealand, where he provided medical support to flight crews involved in the operation. While there, Arūnas had the opportunity to land in Antarctica where he tended to a post-surgical patient who was subsequently air-lifted back to New Zealand. For his efforts, Arūnas was awarded the Aerial Achievement Medal as well as the Antarctica Service Medal. In 2016, Arūnas provided support to USAF crews in drug interdiction support missions in Colombia.

From 2004 to 2016, Arūnas served with the 446th Aerospace Medicine Squadron (AMDS), which is a physical exam unit at McChord Air Force Base in Washington (now designated as the Joint Base Lewis-McChord). During that period, Arūnas conducted many physical exams for Air Force Reserve personnel and routinely flew all over the world aboard the Boeing C-17 Globemaster, the largest military transport aircraft. Several missions were flown to Germany, England and Estonia in direct support of NATO operations.

Surely anyone reading this article would agree that Arūnas has had an outstanding military career, but one would be remiss to not at least briefly expound upon how his Lithuanian heritage benefitted both the United States and his ancestral homeland. In 1997, Arūnas was tasked along with several other Lithuanian American military officers to take part in Exercise Cooperative Nugget at Fort Polk, Louisiana. During this international NATO peacekeeping exercise, Arūnas served as translator to a battalion of Lithuanian Army cadets commanded by Lieutenant (now Colonel) Remigius Baltrėnas. The following year Arūnas participated similarly as a translator during Exercise Cooperative Osprey at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, where he worked closely with members of the Klaipėda-based Lithuanian Grand Duke Butgeidis Motorized Dragoon Infantry Battalion. While on that assignment, this extraordinary officer took it upon himself to compile a Lithuanian-American military dictionary that was utilized by the Lithuanian armed forces throughout their NATO acceptance period. For this service, Arūnas received a personal letter of commendation from General Jonas Kronkaitis, the Commander of the Lithuanian military.

In 2013, Arūnas visited his Lithuanian Air Force colleagues at the Lithuanian Air Base in Šiauliai, where he observed the rotating NATO Baltic Air Police mission, which continues to this day to protect NATO and the Baltic States from Russian encroachment. In early 2017, Arūnas was transferred to the Washington State Air National Guard and now provides medical support for combat air controllers, as well as air traffic controllers, for the Western Air Defense Sector.

One would think that this Lithuanian American who has provided medical assistance to thousands and defended his nation for decades would be content in growing older gracefully. That is not the case. Dr. Banionis has recently become even more involved in the Seattle area Lithuanian American Community. For some time now, Arūnas has been teaching Lithuanian history classes at the non-profit Linas Lithuanian Saturday School (Lino Lituanistinė Mokykla). In addition, Dr. Arūnas has recently taken up writing articles for various Lithuanian American publications. Needless to say, what has been reported about Dr. Banionis is just a brief summary of the many exploits of this extraordinary man.
The origin of the Lithuanian name for Easter is the subject of some debate. Linguists and etymologists claim that the word Velykos is borrowed from our neighbors to the east, the Belarusians, who call Easter velikij denj – literally, great (or grand) day. But žemaiciai, or Lowlanders, insist that the name comes from velkinis, their word for the first springtime egg. In turn, the Highlanders, or aukštaiciai, maintain that the name comes from vėlė, a word for soul. Traditionally, the people of this region visited the graves of their dearly departed on Easter, after which the souls left for the fields to act as guardians of the upcoming growing season.

Whatever the origin of the name, everyone who celebrates Easter knows that it is a period of special customs and of very special food. Velykų boba, or what many of us call babka, is one of the most traditional cakes baked at this time and without a doubt, the queen of the Easter table.

In olden days, women would commission potters to make special tall clay pots for baking, because the taller their babkas, the better the wheat harvest would be. Historians have found recorded recipes for this sweet raisin bread in the chronicles of Žemaitijos bajorai (Lowland nobles) from at least 200 years ago. Our mothers and grandmothers have been faithfully continuing this tradition, and now it’s your turn to bake a babka.

A very special babka

I don’t know if the recipe I am sharing with you is 200 years old, but it’s been used in our family for over 50 years. I do know that it came from a convent in Europe, and that the nuns who originated it definitely knew a thing or two about baking. While there are hundreds of babka recipes available, this one is special.

Firstly, because it makes use of a very old baking technique where a portion of the flour is scalded (plikyta). Today there is a lot of new science explaining the rationale behind this. It involves starch gelatinization, gliadin and glutenin, and water molecules leaving and entering the flour protein structures. Scalding (called tangzhong in Japan) is now actually becoming quite the fad in bread baking because it results in bread that is especially light, moist and with a fine crumb. I suspect the nuns knew this not from science, but from centuries of collective baking experience. They simply knew that it resulted in heavenly babkas.

The second secret to this recipe lies in the egg yolks. Most of today’s babka recipes ask for 3 or 4 measly eggs. The nuns, on the other hand, require a real commitment – 15 egg yolks, people, or don’t even bother. All these years I thought this was a bit extreme, until I read that “Didžioji Virėja,” the Lithuanian cookbook “bible” published in 1936, had recipes for babkas that used 24, 36, 60 and even 90 egg yolks! So bakers, 15 egg yolks is nothing...

And the third secret is three risings. There is science behind this, too. But all you need to know is that yeast is a mystery and mysterious things will happen three times.

A journey of my own

In Lithuania, babka is traditionally baked on Holy Saturday and brought to church with other food items to be blessed. This is how my own grandmother did it, my mother did it, and how I do it. But for many years, my inexperience with yeast-based baking resulted in a very, very long Saturday... Married and living in Chicago, every year on Holy Saturday morning, I would call my mother in Cleveland. “Mom, I’m getting ready to make the babkas,” I would announce with grim resolve, “don’t leave the house and stay close to the phone.” Every year, my mother would laugh and reassure me that everything would be just fine. Of course, her confidence was greatly misplaced... Her babka-support hotline got lots of phone calls.

I remember the smell of baking babka that filled the house when I was a child. My mother’s babkas were so light and delicate, that they had to be handled with extreme gentleness. We were not permitted to run around during the rising and baking, and as befits a queen, after removal from the oven, the babkas were enthroned on soft down pillows to cool. I remember the magical moment when my mother cut into the little baby babka she always
made for us. Everything else was hands-off until Easter morning, but this bit of heaven was our special early treat.

Continuing traditions is a way to respect history, to connect generations and to enjoy the treasures of our rich culture. So this year, let’s do this together – let’s all channel our good baking energies on Holy Saturday and bake! May your babka be the tallest!

Easter Babka
Velykų Boba

**Sponge**
- 2 cups (16 oz.) milk
- 2 cups sifted flour
- 2 packages dry yeast (regular, not rapid-rise)
- ¼ cup lukewarm milk
- 1 tsp. sugar

Prepare the sponge:
1. Scald 2 cups milk (bring just to a boil). Remove from heat and add 2 cups sifted flour all at once, stirring hard to prevent lumping. Mix until very smooth. Cool.
2. Dissolve yeast in ¼ cup lukewarm milk and 1 tsp. sugar. When bubbly, add to cooled scalded flour mixture and beat in well. Cover and let rise until doubled (*first rise*).

**Dough**
- 15 egg yolks, large
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup butter, melted
- 6 cups sifted flour
- 1 cup golden raisins
- 1 tsp. salt
- zest of a lemon+orange

Prepare the dough:
1. Meanwhile, separate eggs, saving whites for another use. Beat egg yolks with 1 cup sugar until very, very thick and almost white. Melt the butter, cool to lukewarm.
2. Add beaten egg yolks and melted butter to risen sponge. Mix in. Then add 6 cups sifted flour, salt, raisins and citrus zest and mix well. Knead until dough is smooth and blistered and leaves fingers.
3. Cover and let rise in a large, well-greased bowl until doubled (*second rise*).

**Icing**
- confectioners sugar
- milk

My mother made babka using only a wooden spoon, a mixing bowl, and a rotary egg beater. I’ve begun using a stand mixer. You decide what’s best for you. Note that the recipe asks for cups of “sifted flour,” not “flour, sifted.” It makes a difference.

Prepare for baking:
1. Get your baking pans collected well before baking day. You can use an assortment of tall metal cans or other oven-proof cylindrical containers in a variety of sizes. Make sure the interiors of the cans don’t have a protective coating. Gener-
Baking

1. Before baking, be sure to check the height of your babkas in the oven. If they are close to the top heating element, remove some racks.

2. Preheat your oven to a little less than 350° F. Place the biggest babkas in the back of the oven—it’s hotter there, plus they won’t get in the way of removing the smaller ones as they are done.

3. After about 15 min. of baking, cover the taller babkas with foil to prevent over-browning. Baking time will be VERY individual depending on the sizes of your babkas. You will have use your baker’s judgment for this. As an example, my babka in the 3 lb. coffee can bakes approx. 35–40 minutes; 2 lb. can – approx. 30–35 minutes; 1 lb. – about 25 min. Note: Same size cans from different products can bake differently. Perhaps the metal or gauge is different? Be alert and watch your babka and not the clock to assess doneness.

Cooling, glazing and slicing

1. After removing from the oven, cool for 5–10 min. in the pans, then carefully slide the babkas out onto a towel-covered down pillow to cool. Carefully change their positions several times during cooling.

2. While the babkas are still a bit lukewarm, spread the cap with an icing made from confectioner’s sugar and a little milk. The amount and consistency of the glaze is your preference. Traditionally, the icing is allowed to drip prettily down the sides.

3. The best way to slice a tall babka is horizontally. First, cut across to remove the cap, then continue slicing generous round slices. These can be divided into desired serving sizes.

Post-script

1. Babka is best while fresh, but it also freezes very well. Wrapped in wax paper and foil, then placed in a plastic bag, a frozen babka will keep a long time. Defrosted, it tastes like you made it yesterday.

2. The reserved egg whites can be used in a lovely angel food cake (12 egg whites), meringue cookies, or frozen up to a year. Recipes and techniques abound on the internet.
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