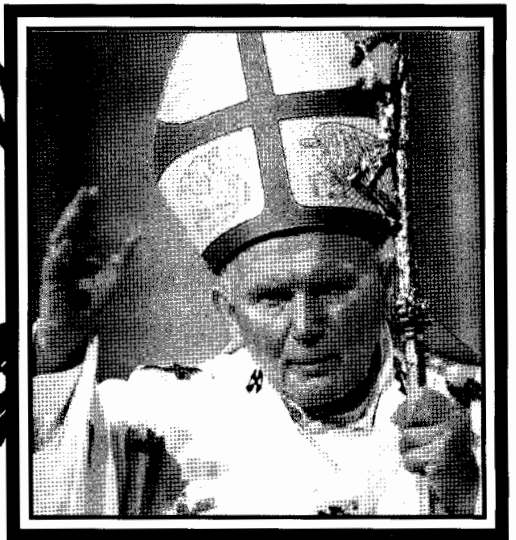


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Pope John Paul II
1920 - 2005

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* Illustration of Mother and Child by Sister Mercedes, SSC.

* This Photo of the Pope is from book "Pope John Paul II" - Gramercy Books.

Remembering Pope John Paul II

Lithuanians eagerly awaited his arrival. Advance publicity had been organized weeks beforehand and all the pupils and students were talking about this incredible event. Not only would they be the first of their generation to see any Pope, but this particular Pope, a very special personality. The year was 1993 and it was early September.

I had just begun my teaching assignment at Vilnius University's new department, the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, located then at the top of Didlaukio gatve in Baltupiai. The faculty was in a building that was a component of many buildings in that red brick complex, in front of the police academy and just across the short walkway from the nine storey residential hostel. Classes were in session. Instructors and students were busy getting settled.

A few days later, as I was strolling back to the residence from the faculty, I glanced ahead in the direction of my destination and was very surprised to see so many police Ladas in the car park. I wondered if the constabulary was having a special seminar. All was quiet otherwise, so I was not concerned about safety issues. My room was on the 6th floor and when I entered the residence building the concierge greeted me rather officiously informing me that my room was now on the 9th floor and would I be so kind as to take my belongings there. She handed me a new key with the regulation wooden knob attached. I asked why, that I was happy with the 6th floor and had no desire to change. No, no. No explanation just, "Prasom, Panele!" Right. Off I went. Well, the 9th floor had a better view anyway I thought.

The next morning, I hurried to the faculty and did not notice anything different in the car park. But that afternoon I did. Every space in the park was filled and some spaces had two cars very cleverly parked together. All were police Ladas! I wondered what was going on and telephoned a friend asking if there was something I should know about but hadn't been told. My friend called me back much later that evening and informed me that the security forces for the Pope's visit were being lodged in my building and wasn't it exciting, I would be very well protected! I thought this could be a terrible inconvenience if the police decided to make the building a cordoned off zone.

But, the police were on a mission elsewhere. Most of them were young, from out of town with a care-free air. In the evenings they were more interested in watching the Pope's various visits around Lithuania than in performing any kind of ultra security measures at their dormitory.

As it turned out, the police brought with them a special privilege that we regulars at the hostel would not have had otherwise and that was having the building's heat turned on in our rooms for a little while each day and hot water every morning for showers. Lithuania had been in the midst of practicing stringent measures against the use of electricity for heat and hot water.

When Lithuania declared independence from the Soviet in 1991, all connection to Moscow was severed. Even though transition from the Soviet generated fiscal policy had been implemented, the transformation had come with a thorn. Lithuania had been cut off from resources and had no funds. The new government was struggling with the problem. This was also the period of the Talonas, the new currency replacing the Rouble, when a rather large stack of paper money was required to buy a rather small meal in an ordinary café. Yes, Lithuania was an independent country now, and Moscow was gloating. Additionally, it was not just being without heat and hot water or the usual lack of basic consumer items that angered the people, it was the presence of the Soviet troops still marching around.

Into this environment, Pope John Paul II arrived. The first thing he did when he descended from the plane was to kneel down and kiss the ground. People who were at the airport were amazed. Watching that moment on television later in the evening, I stood off to one side, the community hall packed with the Lithuanian police guards. They were absolutely mesmerized. The room was silent, as though we were all in church. It was such a remarkable sight. The Pope had given Lithuania a great blessing in that act. He had restored dignity to the country. No one moved or said anything for a long time afterward. Such an uplifting wave of emotion filled the atmosphere.

Each evening, after finishing my classes, I would run back to the residence to watch the day's proceedings on the big television, standing with the police guards to see where the Pope had visited. He went all over the country giving especially great attention to the Hill of Crosses at Siauliai.

I have been to the Hill many times during those years I spent in Lithuania and each time was different, each time I saw things that I had missed before, such as worshippers on their knees making the arduous pilgrimage up those long wooden steps. There is a path just on the down slope of the Hill, on the other side overlooking the meadow. At that place, the wind is very strong, catching the thousands of rosaries hanging on the arms of the giant crosses. As the wind moves among the rosaries, swinging

them back and forth, they touch each other emitting a symphonic melody. It is a sound almost as if they are whispering out the names of the villages and persons who suffered in the awful decades. To stand there and see and hear it all is a riveting experience. Without a doubt, Pope John Paul II was personally deeply touched by his own visit.

Wherever he went, Lithuanians and visitors to the country lined the streets, the crowds being kept orderly by waist high partitions and rows and rows of police guards. I had the chance to see the Pope from afar when he motored to the Cathedral in Vilnius, Katedra ir Pilies. It seemed as though the entire populace had come to that square, there were so many people. The Cathedral and the clock tower had been newly painted in advance of this occasion and a permanent wide ramp had been installed to accommodate his vehicle from the roadway directly to the main Cathedral doors. That famous Cathedral has seen powerful history and it endured the indignity of being used as a weapons storehouse during the Soviet period as well as losing its three saints who had stood over its crown. The saints were later restored with great celebration to their original places during President Adamkus' first term in office.

For most Lithuanians, John Paul's visit was an affirmation that spirituality lived; resurrected, in fact, from death. Since 1991, the churches had been reopened to the public for worship, and they were well attended. But there was a distinct sense, an odd feeling that prevailed among some people that going to church was a quaint thing to do, or that it no longer mattered any more, attitudes that had been fostered by the Soviet regime and the Communist hierarchy. Weren't there still uniformed Soviets still on the streets? Maybe it wasn't safe after all.

To that aggregation of Lithuanians who had lost their spiritual belief, the Pope addressed several of his sermons. His speeches were simple and appealing. He was a teacher of the faith and he urged the people to remember the lessons of Christianity. His message to the Lithuanians was very specific. Lithuania was coping with the fallout from Communism and this new time of independence was especially unsettling for many older people, particularly for those of that generation who had known only Communism from birth, with its guaranteed bread and shelter routine but godless tenets and hypocritical demagoguery. For the Pope, those dispirited ones were the lost sheep that he had come to embrace.

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski knew the Pope well. In a discussion on the PBS News hour, April 5th, 2005, he remarked succinctly regarding the Pope's legacy to the world. When asked if the Pope deserves all the credit for the downfall of Communism, Dr. Brzezinski replied that,

"Certainly the Pope deserves some credit for it, but not in

the way that has been expressed in the American mass media... the Pope did not collude with the U.S., nor the CIA or any other group... to overthrow Communism; it didn't work like that."

Dr. Brzezinski emphasized that the Pope had two natural qualities that he was able to utilize in the very best way.

"One of these was fundamental: faith with charisma... He was confident and serene. The second was instrumental: his ability to communicate. He knew how to reach out to people... He bonded divinity with humanity and these qualities were felt especially by the young people."

Dr. Brzezinski is certainly correct in his assessment of the fall of Communism and he put the proper stamp on that assessment when he stated:

"What the Pope achieved in Poland was not a political victory, but something very different, a spiritual victory. He was not a politician but through his spirituality he showed the opposing political sides that they shared the same things in common, civil rights and human rights and a resentment of the totalitarian government that was in control and the people were universally against that control. The Pope stripped Communism of its myth of invincibility and he demonstrated that the appearance of unanimity in Communism was a sham. The Pope's belief in Christianity, and its teachings, was his contribution to the fall of Communism."

Through his teachings, the Pope was successful in helping the people recognize in themselves the right to strive for spiritual freedom.

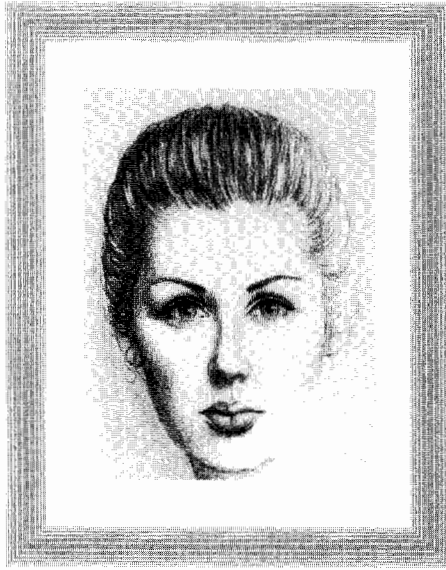
"In this way, Pope John Paul II influenced the politicians to take those concepts of civil rights and human rights and promote them," Dr. Brzezinski added. In effect, the Pope taught the politicians without himself being political.

Pope John Paul II seemed truly innovative with a fresh style. But, his approach to the spiritual liberation of people all around the world was not new. It was the way that Christ had practiced the faith, traveling everywhere to preach, "Remaining above politics and speaking across borders, trans-denominationally," Dr. Brzezinski pointed out.

Pope John Paul II really did follow in Christ's path. And his trip to Lithuania in 1993 was in every way as an emissary of the Lord.

Barbara Bilksy

Barbara Bilksy lived and worked in Lithuania for eight years. She currently lives in CA. Barbara was a regular contributing writer for "Lithuanian Weekly" and also contributed to "Lithuania in the World" which is the flagship journal for Lithuanian Airlines. She was a frequent contributing writer for "Baltic Newsletter" published in Berkeley.



Portretas THE PORTRAIT

Rima Augaitiene is on her way home from work, every muscle aching with weariness. Her head aches, and melancholy, hopeless thoughts, like plagues flies, continually torment her.

--- How much longer will I be able to continue this heavy factory work? Can I bear it? Will my health hold up?

--- I must bear it! – she thinks, but doubtfully, because as she continues her difficult, hard work at the factory, she can feel her strength waning daily, like an advancing darkness. Each day as she leaves work she feels exhausted. Her head spins, and it seems as if the sky and land merge, whirling, swinging....

Rima with her husband and children came to America about ten years ago. That very first year, her husband perished in an automobile accident. She was left alone with three small children. Andrius was then eight years old, Laima, four, and Vida, just two years old. The poor mother knew hardship. She worked hard at difficult jobs, so that her children could grow and be educated. And now, her heart and mind were burdened by troublesome thoughts.

Andrius had recently graduated from high school and wanted to proceed to higher learning. His dream was to be an atomic engineer. He was clever, able and hard-working. But how to arrange for study? Where would they get the money? Education was expensive.

Rima walks slowly, deep in sorrowful thought. Suddenly it begins to rain, and she is still several blocks from home. Taking a short-cut, she hurries down a nar-

row side-street. She trips over something heavy and just saves herself from falling.

She looks down at an old framed portrait being washed by the rain. A pair of lovely blue eyes looks at her from the surrounding dirt. Rima, recovering from her fright, looks all around, and sees a pile of old, used, discarded items – and the portrait. The eyes, full of grief, attract and draw Rima's pity. Glancing around once more, she picks up the portrait, and carries it home.

Reaching home, and stepping onto the porch, she gently wipes the dirt from the face of the portrait, and sees an elderly, gray-haired woman, her pleasant features marked with wrinkles, and her remarkable eyes, imploring, as though brimming with unshed tears, her sorrow unknown yet heart-wrenching.

Her children were surprised, when their mother, having brought this discarded, old, faded picture home and cleaned it up, hung it in her own bedroom. They didn't see anything special about it: it was just an old, deteriorated oil portrait, not at all interesting. But Rima saw a living something in the portrait, and couldn't bring herself to throw it out again. The picture spoke to her, drew her in. But Andrius, especially, seemed to be almost ashamed, that his mother would actually pick up a worthless discarded object from the street, and bring it home. All three children appealed to their mother that she should allow them, under cover of darkness, to return the picture to the place where she had found it. She was about to give up and accede to their wishes, but she looked once more at the face, with eyes so alive and grieving. The woman in the picture was saying something to her, something she did not understand, but which she could not ignore.

So she kissed each of her children, and firmly told them:

--- Do not dare to touch this portrait! It is going to stay right here, and when I have some money saved up, I'm going to place it in a fine, new frame. In this picture, I see a living person, full of pain.

The children backed off, and saw that they would have to accept their mother's whim. And so the old lady's portrait remained in the mother's bedroom. Sometimes, when the children didn't see, Rima would look at the old lady's face, and, in her thoughts, she would speak to her, telling her all her problems. The unknown lady became familiar to her, like a dear relative. Perhaps Rima was reminded of her own dear old mother who was left in Lithuania?

The years passed. Andrius was now a college student, Laima had finished grade school and had applied to a

Catholic high school, and Vida was in the fourth grade. But now, an unexpected misfortune: a heart attack sends Rima to bed. Now, there is no bread-winner, no one to pay for education. Andrius has to leave college and take his mother's place. Rima lies in bed, downcast and worried.

Spring in all its decorative beauty – with blossoms and birdsong – trod the earth. Tulips bloomed, and narcissus. Lawns sprang into bright green life. Joy came to all of nature. But Rima's cheeks were pale, exhausted by illness. Her eyes often bathed in tears, seeing her children's hardships. And the lady in the portrait, her friend in grief and trouble, seemed to see and understand, and send her sympathy.

Sunday morning. Church bells ring in the distance, calling people to the Lord's sanctuary, to distance themselves, at least once weekly, from earthly troubles, and through prayer, join themselves to the Almighty. Rima somehow felt better that day, and sat up in bed. Her door suddenly opened, and all three children entered, bearing flowers, wishing her a happy birthday, with hugs, kisses and loving compliments. Ah, those children – they were her life's good fortune. Rima's heart basked in the glow of happiness. She felt enlivened, healthier, refreshed by her children's love. They draped her in a new, soft, white shawl, put new, warm slippers on her feet, and her younger daughter placed the flowers in a vase. She disappeared into the next room, and quickly returned, hiding something behind her back, laughing:

--- And here, Mama, is something for your friend – she said, and handed her a handsome frame.

Rima was surprised and delighted. Andrius took the portrait down, and everyone gathered to help. When they removed the yellowed paper from the back of the old frame, they were astonished to find a large, thick, worn envelope stuck to the back of the portrait. Almost breathless with excitement, Rima opened it, finding 20,000 dollars and a letter. And such a letter! All four read it in amazement.

"I wish you the Lord's blessings, and leave you all my hard-earned money. All I ask is that you pray for me. My children all wait for my death: my two sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. They never loved me. All they cared about was my property. I signed my house over to them, and they allowed me to live with them, though not truly as a mother, but as an unwelcome tenant. I loved them all greatly, but they only waited for my life to end, so that they could have the last bit of my wealth. Only one of my grandchildren, my dear Antanas, loved and honored me. It was he who painted this portrait of me. But he died in the Korean War. May

the Lord give him heavenly peace, and grant that we may be together upon my death. I have decided to put all my money in this envelope and hide it within my portrait, as a test of my children's loyalty and respect. I believe that when I am dead, they will scorn my memory and discard this portrait in the trash with the rest of my small possessions. And so I leave this money to you, who have found my portrait and recognized the heartache so well captured by my dear Antanas. I wish you much happiness, my good friend, you who pulled this unhappy old mother's picture out of a trash-heap. I ask for your prayers, and thank you."

That lady's gift came to Rima and her family as a true miracle. Rima was able to consult the best cardiologists, and her health returned. Andrius went back to the university, and after a few years, reached his goal, becoming an atomic engineer. Laima finished high school and then nursing school. Vida, the youngest, attended a prestigious art school.

Several times each year, Rima requests that Holy Mass be celebrated for her unknown benefactor. And the portrait, restored and magnificently framed, hangs in their comfortable parlor. The deep blue eyes look upon that fine family with loving kindness and endless blessings.

Vanda Tomasauskaite-Vaitkeviciene was born in Lithuania in 1909 and was a teacher in Lithuania, Germany and the United States. She was a well-known prize-winning author of many books of stories and legends, as well as a textbook used in teaching pupils in Lithuanian Saturday School. She now lives in honorable retirement in Florida.

Vanda Vaitkeviciene

English Translation by Gloria O'Brien

Gloria Kivytaite O'Brien is a frequent contributor to Bridges.

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Ecos de Lituania

A very important aspect of Argentina's Lithuanian community is to focus its efforts on maintaining Lithuanian language, culture, and traditions. It is for this reason that two years ago, in the city of Berisso we created the radio program "Echoes of Lithuania" ("Ecos de Lituania", FM DIFUSION 98.1 Mhz). Every Sunday from 19:00-20:00 we broadcast news of current Lithuanian events, recount important aspects of Lithuania's history, teach traditional Lithuanian recipes, etc. We also play traditional and modern Lithuanian music.

We collect our information from publications and magazines which come from Brazil, Australia, Canada, United States, Germany, Belgium, Denmark. An example of a publication we reference is "Pasaulio Lietuvis" (The Lithuanian World).

Current members and staff include: Alejandra Cagliardi Semenaite, Ana Lujan Gedzeviciute, Cesar Gruce, Fabián Meschini, Isabel Kalvelyte Fourment, Juan José Fourment and the Director of the radio program Juan Ignacio Fourment Kalvelis.

All members and staff are active in the Lithuanian communities "Mindaugas" and "Nemunas" (both in the city of Berisso), the Argentinean Lithuanian Community (ALOST) and in the Argentinean Lithuanian Youth Community (ALJS). We also collaborate with the communities of Buenos Aires and Rosario.

In Argentina, our greatest problem is that the Lithuanian language has faded over the years. It is very important for us to send our youth to the Lithuanian high school "February 16" in Germany so that they can learn the language and rejuvenate it here in Argentina.

We would like to be able to broadcast "Echoes of Lithuania" over the internet, so that the radio program

could be listened to anywhere in the world. This is our dream. However, currently we are in a very difficult economic situation, and all of our efforts and budget are focused upon maintaining the radio program we have.

We are very proud that our efforts have not gone unnoticed. This past year we entered an annual radio competition, "Faro de Oro" (Lighthouse of Gold) which is based out of Mar del Plata. It is a competition in which different ethnic communities may enter their radio programs. It was a pleasant surprise that we made it to the final round of the competi-

tion, since this was our first time participating. We are currently in the final round, having been chosen among 100 other Argentinean radio programs.

We had a special live broadcast during the 8th annual South American Lithuanian Youth Conference, which occurred in Argentina (Buenos Aires, Rosario and Berisso) from January 15-22. We had a special opportunity to have foreign guests on the show and wanted to share their knowledge with Argentina's Lithuanian community.

We can be reached via e-mail at: ecosdelituania@yahoo.com.ar.

E-mails can be written in Spanish, Lithuanian or English.

Integral Organizing Committee "Suvaziavimas 2005"

Director "ECOS DE LITUANIA"

Juan Ignacio Fourment Kalvelis



The White Witch

THE WHITE WITCH - PART II

BALTOJI RAGANA

I siaures vakarus nuo Eisiškiu, prie Bartautu kaimo, yra nedidelis gražius miškelis, o prie jo is rytu puses kalnelis, zmoniu vadinamas Baltos raganos kalneliu.....

In the spring of 1851, Lithuanians rose in rebellion against the Russian oppressors.

The village smitty, Petras Balcius, disappeared and his house was padlocked. At the same time, many of the village youth began to disappear. The villagers had no way of knowing what was going on in the rest of Lithuania and the wider world, especially since Darunas, a poor but educated man who traveled from place to place, had stopped visiting them.

Much later, in the autumn of the same year, more rumors spread, this time that the Russians had beaten the Lithuanians, consolidated their position, and again taken over the country. Darunas returned, weary, older-looking, and depressed, reluctantly describing the rebellion and its defeats. A few of the missing village youth came home, saying that the rest had retreated to Prussia. But Balcius, the smith, did not return, and his property remained padlocked.

It appears his house is being occupied by a stranger and the problem must be dealt with by the village seniunas.

THE WHITE WITCH – Part II

The seniunas went home with a clear conscience, knowing that he had done his duty and need fear no consequences. His neighbor, hearing about this later on that day, shook his head in disagreement.

“The Russians go hand-in-hand with the evil one”, he said, “but for us, good people, there could be problems. What if this witch conjures up some kind of illness for the people, or our animals? Then it will be too late. Something must be done now. The pastor must be informed, and he will resolve the situation.”

“Well, then, why don’t you go ahead and tell him? I myself would rather not visit the rectory,” answered the seniunas.

“Oh, you don’t have to go to the rectory if

you’d rather not. Just tell the pastor, the next time you go to confession, that a witch has moved into the smithy, and he’ll know what to do.”

The seniunas thought this over, and decided that next Sunday he would walk over to the church and go to confession.

At that time, the pastor of the Eisiškes church was a Pole, who did not know the Lithuanian language, but understood several individual words, and had learned a few sentences which he found useful in meting out penances. The few words he understood helped him to know what sort of transgressions the penitents were talking about, and he answered them in his own way. He wasn’t much bothered that the people didn’t understand him. He was very energetic, however, in battling superstition and sorcery, still left over in the villages from the old days, severely scolding and punishing those who believed in it.

Having found the old pastor hearing confessions in the church on Sunday morning, Raciūs waited his turn, then knelt at the grated window and whispered,

“A white witch is living in our village smithy.”

Having said this, he waited for the pastor’s reaction.

“That’s all?” asked the pastor, having understood only two words, “smithy” and “witch”.

“No, answered the seniunas, “also a black cat and a raven”.

“That’s all?” asked the priest, having reached the conclusion that the villager was a believer in witches and black cats.

“Yes, that’s all” said Raciūs, greatly relieved.

“For your penance you will say five prayers, and give five kopeks toward the repair of the church’s roof”, said the pastor.

The seniunas left the confessional very disappointed and irritated. It would be easy enough for him to say five prayers, but five kopeks weren’t so easy to come by, and would leave a big hole in his budget. He would have to sell a chicken. All the way home, he considered why the

pastor had given him this penance, and came to the conclusion that he must have been offended by his mentioning a witch. This made him angry with his neighbor, who had sent him to the priest in the first place.

This neighbor visited him that evening, and they walked outside, to discuss the situation without witnesses.

"Did you tell the pastor about the witch?"

"I suppose I didn't tell him in the right way, and he didn't say anything about the witch", complained the seniunas.

"So what kind of seniunas are you, then, if you don't know how to inform the priest about what has happened here? If you can't do the job yourself, you should ask someone else to do it, someone who knows how. If I had gone, I would have told the pastor everything he needed to know, and the next day, the pastor would have come and driven out the witch."

"Well, then, why don't you go and do that?"

"Alright, I will, and you'll see, the next day, the pastor will come".

The following day, the neighbor went to the church. But it wasn't as easy as he had imagined, to impart his news. In his own village, amongst his own people, he was bold and able to say whatever he wanted, but now, finding himself amid the church's tall columns he began to hesitate. He thought he would with pleasure turn around and go home, but then he would be ashamed. What would the seniunas say, what would the people say, when they found out that he hadn't even approached the pastor? In that same instant, the pastor came to the confessional and seated himself, ready to hear confessions. The villager found himself kneeling at the grate, just then opening.

"A witch with a black cat and a raven has taken up her abode in our village smithy!" he announced in one long breath.

"That's all?" he heard the pastor's calm voice.

"That's all." he replied.

"Then for your penance you will say five prayers and donate five kopeks toward the repair of the church's roof."

When the villager returned early from his church visit, the seniunas hurried to ask him if he had informed the

priest about the witch.

"Yes, I certainly did, but the pastor forbade anyone to speak about it. He said she was there as a punishment, and no one is permitted to speak about it. Evidently, he knows all about it."

And in this way, the white witch became a recognized resident of the Bartautai village smithy, though the people never spoke of her. Only after a year had gone by, did Raciuss's neighbor admit to him, that the pastor had given him a penance, ordering him to say five prayers and donate five kopeks towards the repair of the church's roof.

"Well, that's the same thing that happened to me", said Raciuss, "and I had to take a hen to Eisiskes market, so I could sell it to get the five kopeks for the roof".

The tramp Darunas again appeared, and began to visit the village more frequently, not so much, it seemed, as to beg charity, but to keep company with the inhabitants. He would always visit the smithy, and one boy told of having seen him seated on a bench against the lean-to, feeding bits of bread to the raven, which had flown down from his tree to sit on Darunas's shoulder.

One day a child in the village became suddenly very ill, and Darunas advised the mother to seek aid from the witch, saying he was certain she could and would help. Though fearful, the mother carried the child to the smithy, where the witch examined him and gave them medicine; after three days the child was well. From that time, whenever one of the villagers happened to get sick, they would turn for help to the white witch, and she healed them. And even when one of the teenagers suffered a severe injury to his leg, which bled profusely, she stopped the bleeding, bathed the wound with some sort of liquid, and bandaged the leg. After three weeks, the wound had healed and only a small scar remained. When Raciuss's son broke his arm, the witch surrounded it with thin boards, tied it with bandages so that it couldn't move and fastened it all with a scarf around his neck. When six weeks had passed, the arm was straight, strong and well again.

In thanks for her help, the villagers brought cheese, butter, milk and other foodstuffs, though the white witch never ever asked them for anything. No one knew how she was able to live, or what resources she may have had.

The witch always wore the same big black hooded cloak, avoided people, and no one from the outside world ever visited her, except for Darunas, who sometimes even remained on the property for longer periods of time. No one wondered about that, as everyone knew him, and recognized his willingness to help and advise anyone who needed him. He was often seen cutting or chopping wood or fixing a garden fence. But most chores around the property were carried out by the villagers, in thanks for medical treatment or advice, or for the water they drew from Balcius's well. Without being asked, they ploughed the garden, weeded the flower beds, and even planted and harvested the vegetables. A close bond developed between the villagers and the witch, though the name remained unchanged. The people always called her the white witch, as no one knew her real name.

She treated her patients using herbs, roots and berries, supplies of which she always gathered from fields and forest during summertime. She also drew from a stock of other medicines, but where they came from, no one knew.

An influenza epidemic ran through Lithuania in 1840, killing many people in surrounding villages, but only one person from Bartautai died, and he, not from influenza, but old age. If illness visited any family in the village, the white witch would hurry to the house, to nurse and medicate the patients, and in this way, she prevented the epidemic from overtaking the village.

She lived on the Balcius homestead for ten years, and then disappeared in the same way she had arrived – unseen by the villagers. By pure chance, however, one person observed her departure, as he led his horses at the edge of the woods. He told everyone later, that about four in the morning, just as the sky began to lighten, he saw a handsome carriage drawn by fine black horses, with coachman and servant, approaching by the road from Valkininkai. The carriage followed a round-about path, avoiding Bartautai, and drove directly into Balcius's yard. He had never before seen such a fine carriage, and continued to watch with great curiosity.

A dignified, well-dressed gentleman with gray hair descended from the carriage and entered the house, where a light already burned. He soon came back out, and with him, a fine young lady with long white hair, carrying a bag with a black cat. They seated themselves in the carriage, while the servant and coachman climbed down, entered the house, and returned carrying a grand-

looking trunk and a large cage housing a raven. The coachman fastened the trunk in back of the carriage and handed the cage to the young lady inside, while the servant doused the light and closed the doors, hanging padlocks on both. As the carriage turned around and left the property, the servant closed the gates and took his place next to the coachman, and then the carriage took off with the horses at a quick trot towards Eiskas. But as they reached the Lydos road, they turned towards Vilnius and passed over the horizon.

When word spread through the village, many didn't want to believe that the white witch was gone, and went to the Balcius homestead to see for themselves. All was quiet, the doors locked, the windows covered, and neither cat nor raven was to be seen.

vThe white witch had truly gone.

Three days later, residents woke to sounds long unheard. A hammer striking an anvil reminded the villagers that, ten years ago, there had been a smithy in that place. Clearly the smith had returned. The seniunas hurried over, and found Petras Balcius hard at work.

Balcius seemed much changed, looking stronger, with heavier arms, but one leg up to the knee, was of wood. Many questions were asked, but Petras maintained a strict reserve and answered all questions vaguely or with a deliberate joke. The seniunas asked where he had been all that time and Petras answered, "out in the world". Asked where in the world, he answered, "everywhere". When asked how he had lost his leg, he replied that bad things happen. He was asked about the white witch, and said he knew no witches and had no knowledge of anyone living in his house.

The villagers discussed, considered, made a few guesses and eventually calmed down. Petras resumed work at his smithy, but now with a more experienced hand, and was more contemplative. Darunas came to visit the smith, staying with him for three days, which was unusual, but when he left, he didn't return to the village for a very long time.

Talk about the white witch never quieted down. People would often remember her, and as time went by, they heard that, in truth, she was not a witch, but the daughter of a Lithuanian nobleman. She had studied medicine in France, and at the start of the rebellion, she had returned to Lithuania and joined the rebels as their doctor.

Continued on the back page

The White Witch

Balcius also joined the rebels, and when a cannonball shattered his leg, she treated him and hid him at her father's estate, where he passed ten years working as their blacksmith. She had been in great danger when the Russians beat down the insurrection, and at Balcius's suggestion, hid herself at his own homestead. Only when Russia finally declared an amnesty, was she free to return to her estate and Balcius to his own home and smithy.

Twenty-one years after Balcius returned to his home, in 1865, a Bartautai farmer stopped at Balcius's smithy, and found it again empty and closed, padlocked just like the house.

A second insurrection against Russian rule in Lithuania had spontaneously risen, and the Rudninku forest was again alive with rebel troops, often with small groups active far from their main units.

Petras Balcius was a rebel messenger, and, disguised as a tramp, gathered whatever information he could about Russian troop movements. As he escorted a Franciscan monk with important information from Gardinas to Vilnius, they were set upon near Valkininkai by a group of Cossacks. The Cossack leader wounded the monk with his bayonet, and was about to finish him off, when Balcius pulled out his pistol and shot him and one other. During the ensuing fight, the monk was able to get away and conceal himself deep in the forest, but the smith was overpowered and backed to death. The Cossacks dragged his corpse to Valkininkai, where one resident recognized and identified the smith from Bartautai.

The following day, a group of ten Cossack police rode

out to search the Bartautai smithy. They did no harm to the people of the village, but looted and ruined the smith's property, finally burning everything down to the ground. The well collapsed, leaving no more than a small mound, to be known by later generations as the "White Witch's Hill."

The Cossacks, riding back to Valkininkai, were ambushed by a group of rebels near the village of Cebatoriai, and all shot to death. It was said that this had been an act of revenge for the destruction of Balcius's property, and had been carried out by a rebel group called "The White Witch's Unit".

The fate of the "white witch" was unknown for a long time afterward, but eventually, people learned that she had escaped to Paris immediately after the second insurrection failed. And Paris was where she died. Just before the First World War, in 1914, in the Montparnasse cemetery, one could find a moss-covered stone monument with this inscription:

"Here rests a daughter of Lithuania, who was forced to leave her enslaved homeland and here found peace - 1870".

There is no name inscribed on the monument, but judging from the date of death, this is believed to be the last resting place of Lithuania's "White Witch".

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