

DŽOJA BARYSAITĖ DOCUMENTS LITHUANIA'S NEW PRESIDENT VALDAS ADAMKUS

Working as a photographer for the daily newspaper *Lietuvos žinios*, Džoja Gunda Barysaitė began to follow the campaign trail of Valdas Adamkus in 1997. The task may have started out as an assignment from her editor, but it soon turned into a personal passion. Barysaitė became so engrossed in her subject that she spent extra hours following the presidential candidate from America, and she kept her photos. Adamkus was a long shot, but his story was interesting, and she thought his campaign was worth capturing on film.

She was taking pictures of a man who was the retired regional head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, and who ultimately won the presidential election by a razor-thin margin of 11,000 votes. His story was well-known to Lithuanian audiences, but they never tired reading about the "comeback kid" - the man who fled Lithuania in 1944 and who returned in 1998 as the country's elected president. A newspaper account described him as a candidate "who came out of nowhere with a pro-Western platform to defeat a number of better-known candidates tainted by bribery scandals and accusations of KGB collaboration."

As Barysaitė was photographing Adamkus, she had no idea he would win, although she must have been following a hunch. The result was a chronology of photos that captured the key moments throughout his campaign. When the photos were all put together in chronological order, they encapsulated his campaign, and they were worthy of an exhibit. She sent the photos from Lithuania to her photographer friend in Chicago, Algimantas Kezys, and asked him to organize the exhibit for her.

That exhibit was held at the Lithuanian Museum of Art, Lemont, Illinois, in January 1998 - just after the presidential election and just before the presidential inauguration. It was called "Straight to the Finish Line." And in a way, that exhibit was a documentation of her own personal marathon because her career as a professional photographer in Lithuania was about to be catapulted. At the time, Adamkus was back in Chicago meeting with Lithuanian-Americans who supported his campaign. On the opening night of Barysaitė's exhibit in Lemont, Illinois, he was attending a congratulatory banquet in his honor, and throughout the evening, several guests asked him to sign his autograph on the catalogue of Barysaitė's exhibit.

In the catalogue, Barysaitė wrote about what it was like to follow Adamkus. "The campaign to elect Valdas Adamkus as president of Lithuania was a marathon. It was hard, exhausting, full of joy and disappointment. Not every team or politician could reach the finish line, but Valdas Adamkus and his staff touched the finish line first. They attained victory step by step, shoulder to shoulder.

"I was with them with my soul and my camera. Although I only followed the campaign sporadically, I tried to document the entire sequence of events chronologically, including the personalities and the moods. By now, the campaign is history."

Adamkus was intrigued enough to see the exhibit himself, and he must have been impressed because upon his return to Lithuania, he invited her to become his official photographer.

"She of course was thrilled," said Kezys. "She's a documentarian, and if you want to achieve a masterpiece in photography, you need great content and perfect form. To achieve a significant level in photography, you need to capture big stories or personalities and find an esthetic expression."

Her campaign photos began with worried faces and artificial smiles, all typical expressions found in a political campaign. Then there's a shot of Adamkus and his wife voting, both showing some strain in their faces. In another photo, staff's faces are tense while watching a television set and waiting for the election results. Finally, Adamkus arms are raised in victory as he's surrounded by jubilant supporters. The Lithuanian Museum of Art has now organized Barysaitė's second exhibit of Adamkus. This time, the photographs were taken as his official photographer. The exhibit encompasses the presidential inauguration and his first day as president.

"As the personal photographer of the president of Lithuania, Džoja has the opportunity to achieve great stature," said Kezys.

On the front of these photos, look for a documentarian who followed a presidential candidate to capture his finest flashes to victory. On the back of these photos, look for a professional photographer who achieved one of her own masterful moments in her career.

Silvia Kučėnas Foti



*The Candidate Valdas Adamkus signs copies of his autobiography
(Name of the Destiny - Lithuania)*



The first autographed book to the youngest fan



Meeting the Vilnius University students



President Elect Valdas Adamkus is escorted to the Inauguration Ceremony



Inauguration Ceremony of Valdas Adamkus - President of the Republic of Lithuania in the Vilnius Cathedral Plaza, February 26, 1998



Swearing in of the President Valdas Adamkus



On the Inaugural Day the President Valdas Adamkus and his Wife Mrs. Alma Adamkus arrive at the Parliament, escorted by the Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius and Raimundas Mieželis



Vytautas Landsbergis, Chairman of the Parliament, greets Mrs. Alma Adamkus and President Valdas Adamkus, February 26, 1998.



The newly elected President Valdas Adamkus, Mrs. Alma Adamkus and the Former President Algirdas Brazauskas



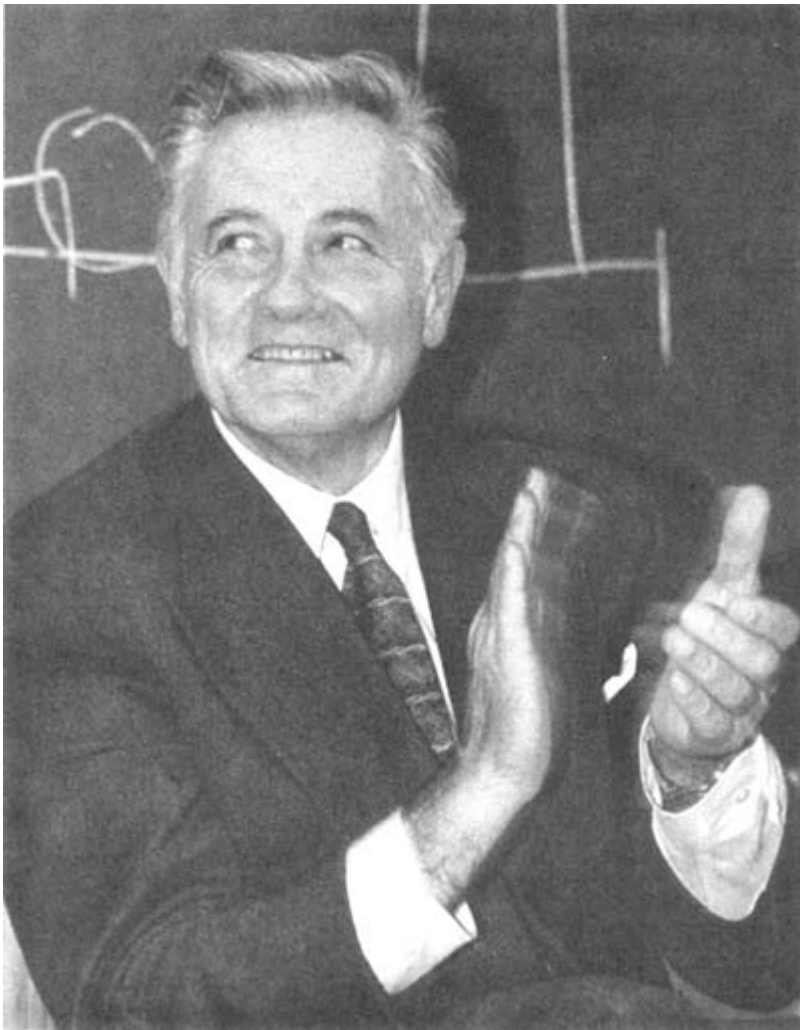
First official meeting in the Presidential Office with the Outgoing President Algirdas Brazauskas



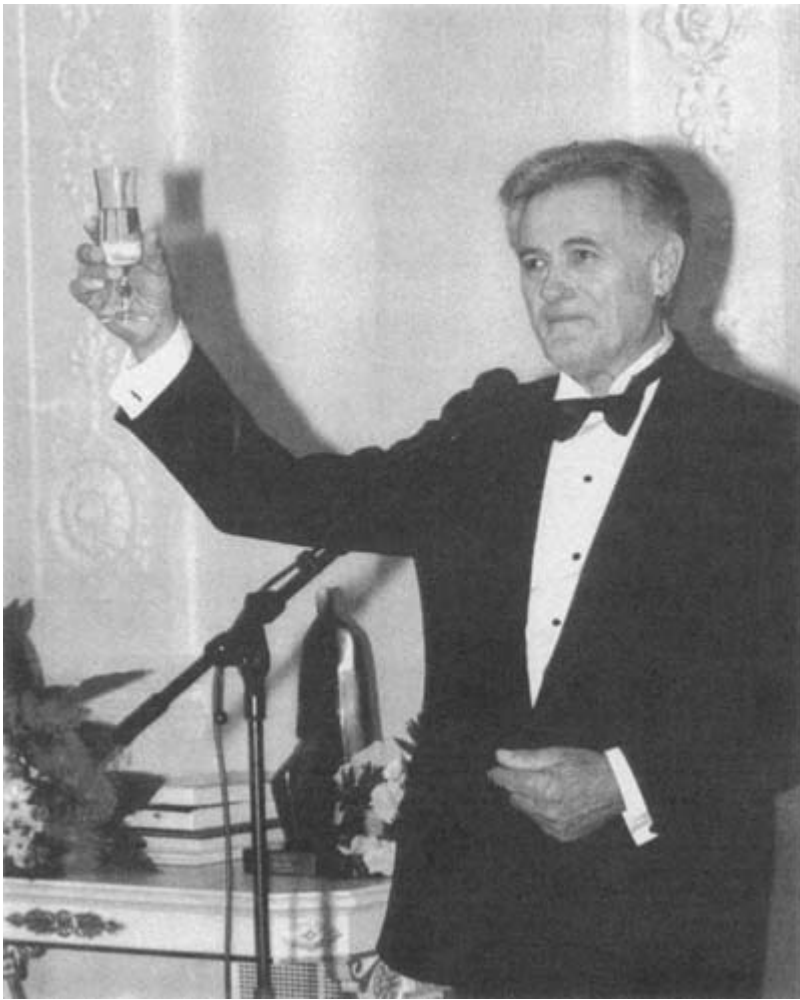
Walking to the Daumantas Plaza on Inaugural Day with Mrs. Alma Adamkus



A view of the Parliament in Session



Valdas Adamkus - President of the Lithuanian Republic



Presidential toast at the Inaugural Festivities in the White Room, Vilnius, February 26, 1998.