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THE IRON WOLF AND THE CHARGING KNIGHT

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The Iron Wolf and the Charging Knight are very important Lithuanian symbols which best illustrate my Lithuanian heritage. Like the Iron Wolf, howling before the Tower of Gediminas, I learned to speak Lithuanian as a small boy, and like the Charging Knight, I am attempting to learn to read and to write Lithuanian as a man. Indeed, a recent editorial, "Blood in the Baltics,"¹ which appeared in the *Raleigh News and Observer* on Wednesday, January 16, 1991, served as a catalyst to bring back the memories of the Wolf and to energize the Knight. On Saturday, February 2, 1991, my letter regarding that editorial appeared in the *News and Observer*.

The caption in the Letter-To-The-Editor read: "Courage in The Baltics." "This is to express appreciation for your excellent editorial 'Blood in the Baltics,' and particularly for the photograph showing Lithuanian protesters attacking a Soviet tank with their fists. Indeed, there will be several more crosses honoring the dead on the Hill of Crosses north of Šiauliai, Lithuania. Grandmother Josephine Norkūnas-Cizauskas taught me a great deal about her native land. Your editorial and photograph reminded me of her character and courage."²

Josephine Norkūnas left Lithuania in 1895 when she was twenty years old. After a five-year wait in Hamburg, Germany, she arrived in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. There she met and married Anthony Cizauskas, a coal miner in Johnstown and originally from Kaunas. They had ten children; four of them survived to adulthood. One of these lucky four was Mary Margaret Cizauskas born on April 20, 1918, in Harrisburg, Illinois.

Mary Margaret Cizauskas graduated from Christopher Community High School in 1933. She was an exceptional student and was elected most popular girl by her class. She was accepted at Columbia University. "She never attended. No money. But she was proud of that recognition. Until the day she died November 4, 1970, she carried her letter of admission to Columbia University in her purse."³ In 1934, she married her high school sweetheart, George Joseph Antonelli, and on October 6, 1941, they had their first son George Anthony Antonelli. This is an account of his search for a cultural identity.

There is a scene in *The Deer Hunter* which rings with a loud silence for me. It takes place in a hospital in Vietnam. A medical doctor asks the protagonist if his last name is Russian. The wounded and disoriented soldier from Pennsylvania retorts: "No Sir!" "It is an American name." Yet, there is no question that my Lithuanian heritage howls out more and more as the years begin to pile up. In a sense my rearing was unique and in another sense it was not. Because of historical circumstances my primary language was Lithuanian, but I grew up in a very American coal mining town in southern Illinois. Indeed, how does someone named George Anthony Antonelli come to St. Andrew Elementary School in Christopher, Illinois, in 1946 speaking Lithuanian and not English?

Because of World War II, my father served in the United States Navy. My mother had to work. Indeed, all the women I ever knew were working women. As a result of this situation, my grandmother, Josephine Cizauskas reared me for the first five years of my life, and she taught the wolf to howl in Lithuanian. Now, my grandmother was a very talented person who spoke German, Polish, Russian, Estonian, and Latvian. She learned these languages while serving as a midwife in Germany and in the coal mining towns of southern Illinois. Grandmother Cizauskas refused to speak English to me. I can still remember her saying, "Angliška kalba yra negraži kalba."

The Franciscan nuns had a time with me at St. Andrew, but in due time, my English grew as I matured. It was in 1947 that Joseph Breene arrived at St. Andrew Elementary School. It seemed he was someone called a DP, a displaced person, and he spoke only Lithuanian. For the first time in my young life, I felt a cultural identity. I was the only person in the school that

could understand and communicate with Joe. I served as his translator. Joe and I became fast friends, learned Latin together, were altar boys, and class mates for several years, but Joe and his family eventually moved away.

During those early and adolescent years, I spoke Lithuanian with my grandmother and mother on a daily basis. Indeed, mom and I would have great fun shopping in places like St. Louis by discussing the value of something in Lithuanian. More times than not, salespeople would ask us if we were Russian. Much like Sandra Marefat's experiences described in an excellent article "My Buried Lithuanian Past,"⁴ I knew that Russians were not the best of folks and that mom and I were not like those eastern European people depicted on the television and movie screens of the sixties. Even as late as 1987, at a Rotary Club meeting in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a well-meaning individual asked if my mess partner, John Yesulaitis and I were speaking in Russian. In short, I came to feel like Jurgis Rudkus in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. I was culturally broken and alone with memories of my Lithuanian childhood and youth, the Iron Wolf was howling within me.

It was during this time that I began to incorporate into my presentations on the Minimum Admissions Requirements of the constituent institutions of the University of North Carolina the fact that English had not been my primary language. As a recent introduction in the October 1990 *North Carolina School Counselor Newsletter* indicates: "Dr. Antonelli pursues several interests outside his work setting: Raising and training Labrador Retrievers, maintaining physical fitness, studying Baltic cultures and general issues regarding Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and speaking Lithuanian."⁵

I would end many of my presentations by saying: "Ar jūs mane suprantate?" After one such presentation in Burlington, North Carolina, a very big, athletic man walked up to me and said: "Taip, prašau kalbėt pamažu." His name was John K. Gozjack. He was a biology teacher who came to Elon College in Burlington from Pennsylvania on a football scholarship. John and I became friends. John had been a DP like Joe Breene and he still had relatives in Lithuania, a mother and a brother. As our friendship grew, I decided to become literate in Lithuanian too!

It was John who put me in contact with the Knights of Lithuania. Through them, I found out about the *Introduction to Modern Lithuanian* and obtained a copy of it from Draugas Press in Chicago. Indeed, it was with the help of Dr. Violeta Kelertas, a professor in the Department of Slavic and Baltic Languages at the University of Illinois-Chicago, that I learned of the language tapes that accompanied the text. I obtained the tapes from Baltic Associates in Boston.

Needless to say, I am very busy these days learning to write and to read Lithuanian. It does take a Knight's courage to attack this task from time to time. Yet, when the going gets tough, John Gozjack serves as teacher and as an inspiration. He once shared a personal story which will serve as a conclusion and as a beginning.

John served in Vietnam as a corpsman. He was at the real China Beach and other places as well. One night, after my wife, Eileen, had served us an outstanding Lithuanian meal, and after a glass or two he told me a story. It was dark that night as it always was over there for they controlled the night. But this night, Charlie had not been that lucky. There were several of their bodies arranged like so many spokes around the fire. The marines made caustic remarks about the young children that were playing around and with the dead. John halted the talk of his fellows by telling that he had played in such a setting years ago in Germany. At the end of the story, John looked at me and said, "George, I have survived two wars." Like John, I hope Lithuania will survive. As Jurgis Rudkus says "... and if you forget about it, too, if you sink back and rest on your oars, we shall lose..."⁶ March 11, 1990, Dievas ir Lietuvos!

It was with thoughts such as these in mind that in 1983 I established The Mary Cizauskas-Antonelli Memorial Award. It is presented annually by the Omicron Pi Chapter of Kappa Delta Pi to the student preparing to teach with the highest grade point average in four years at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Like Captain Marko Ramius,⁷ the half-Lithuanian submariner in Tom Clancy's *The Hunt for Red October*, I will not forget my Lithuanian heritage for there will always be an Iron Wolf and a Charging Knight even if at this time his name is George Anthony Antonelli.

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1 Editorial "Blood in the Baltics," *The News and Observer*, Raleigh, N.C., Wednesday, January 16, 1991. Similar editorials appeared in other newspapers: "A peace Laureat's Putsch," *The Wall Street Journal*, Monday, January 14, 1991; "Death in Lithuania," *The Washington Post*, Monday, January 14, 1991; "The New Old Face of Tyranny," *The New York Times*, Monday, January 14, 1991; and "A Brutal Mistake," *The Times of London*, Monday, January 14, 1991.

2 George A. Antonelli, "Courage in The Baltics," *The News and Observer*, Raleigh, N.C., Saturday, February 2, 1991.

3 Rolfe Neill, "The Teacher Riddle: First Make It Tougher To Be One," *The Charlotte Observer*, Charlotte, N.C., Sunday, April 24, 1983. After reading this article, Ms. Nijole Uzubalis of Chicago Illinois, sent me a copy of *The Gift of Vilnius: A Terrible Beauty is Born*. "... this album I am mailing you gives proof that this day and age still has heroes, especially there is a good 'crop' of them in Lithuania."

4 Sandra Marafat, "My Buried Lithuanian Past," *Illinois Times*, Springfield, Illinois, October 26-November 1, 1989.

5 Sylvia Watson, "Antonelli To Lead Secondary/Post Secondary Interest Session," *The North Carolina School Counselor Newsletter*, October 1990. page 22.

6 Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, New York: The New American Library Inc., 1905, page 340.

7 Tom Clancy, *The Hunt for Red October*. New York: Berkley Publishing, 1985. In short, Captain Marko Ramius gave the Red October to the United States of America or as Clancy writes on page 4: "Marko planned to wreak his own vengeance on the Soviet Union, perhaps, to satisfy the thousands of his countrymen who had died before he was born."