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Diary of a Refugee

ROŽĖ ŠUKYTĖ KRIAUČIŪNIENĖ

Handwritten in pencil, this diary, dating from February 16 to December 25, 1945, is an authentic account of a young woman's thoughts, feelings and experiences during her family's flight from Lithuania to Germany at the end of World War II. The author, Rožė Šukytė, an elementary school teacher in Gustonys, was married to Mykolas Kriaučiūnas, principal and teacher at the same school. The couple had three children: Elvyra, Romualdas and Vitalija, 11, 8, and 5 years of age. On the road, Mykolas was forcibly conscripted for work in German Army support units. Rožė was left with the children to fend on her own. He never returned.

After Rožė's death in 1985, the diary was discovered by her son Romualdas, who decided to make it public. While offering a unique insight into the life of one family, it also reflects the shared experience of an entire generation of Lithuanians abandoning their homes and heading westward just ahead of the advancing Soviet Army.

We are publishing Part I of the Diary abridged and newly translated by the editor.

February 16, 1945. Gotenhafen [*Gdynia, Poland*]

For so many years February 16 was a day of joy. The tricolor flag above our door reminded us of the birth of our independent Lithuania. Our country was our own, our homes, our plots of land, our fields and the forests.

Today is another Independence Day. But we cannot celebrate or enjoy our independence, cannot even sing our anthem. Lithuania is ruled by the Russian Bolsheviks – they have arrested, tortured and killed thousands of us. They are deporting them to Siberia, perhaps even my own brother and sister.

Their claws reach far, but they have not reached me. I fled, leaving everyone behind, my family, my friends. My home, my school.

For many years I taught my young students to love their country, to be good people. It was all for nothing. Our enemies emerged from out of nowhere and took control.

I left the land of my birth on July 21, 1944. I left with my family: my husband, Mykolas, and our children Elvyra, Romualdas, and Vitalija. On August 2, we crossed the Lithuanian- German border.

I looked one last time at Lithuanian homesteads and I felt a sharp pain in my heart. Tears filled my eyes. Was I leaving for good? No, this was temporary, just a few months, just for as long as it will take to drive the Bolsheviks out of our country. They cannot possibly stay here for long. Lithuanians cannot again be enslaved!

Our convoy was slowly moving away from our homeland. Many young men moved with us. When we reached Pagėgiai, which is under German rule, we were joined by German refugees, who were also fleeing, for the Red Army was already approaching Germany. Abandoned cattle wandered in the fields and bellowed, as if they too sensed the danger and felt sorry for their owners who had left them behind.

It was almost evening when we reached Pagėgiai. We did not dare look for shelter in a foreign country, or knock on foreign doors. We all stopped in a forested area. Some spent a restless night on their wagons, others on bales of straw. Our hearts were heavy; we all felt the need for Lithuanian hospitality. As soon as it dawned, we continued toward Tilsit [*Tilžė in Lithuanian, now Sovetsk, former East Prussia, now the Kaliningrad Region 37 of the Russian Federation*] and were

ordered to turn back. Everyone was filled with fear and anger. Are we being sent back to the Communists? Not allowed to stay here?

After several hours of agitation, we were told to move on, in the direction of Kuckerneese [*East Prussia; Lithuanian, Kaukėnai; now Yasnoye*]. A few long bridges and there it was. The town was severely damaged by bombs. Many houses were in ruins. Someone directed us toward a certain courtyard and the men were ordered to form a column and move to the barracks. [...]

We passed the town and stopped at a farmhouse where the farmer dispersed the group to other farms in the neighborhood. Our family was assigned to the Naujirs farm. We were given some space, together with Russians or Poles. It was scary to hear the Russian language again. We were running from them and here they were again. I cried and cried and did not leave our wagon. The following morning we were sent to another farm, the Damašas family. We were met by a haughty woman and immediately put to work. Little Alytė and Romukas were sent out to herd cows. For the first time in their lives they felt like prisoners. They were in a foreign country, had no friends to play with. They could not just have fun as they wished but had to do as they were told.

Mykolas was doing heavy manual work in the fields. He worked hard from morning till night under the command "*Schnell! Schnell!*".

The food here is different too. No familiar pancakes or dumplings! In the morning, black, unsweetened coffee and a slice of bread thinly smeared with something. Mykolas was not used to such daylong physical labor. And a foreigner too! It hurt me to hear him moan. These were not happy days.

After a month we were sent to the Penschuk farm. We got a small room with a bed and things seemed slightly better. We worked, ate, and consoled ourselves that it would not last long. Soon we would be back in our homeland.

On the morning of September 18, we were told that the Germans were conscripting Mykolas for three weeks to dig fortification trenches closer to the front lines. This was very upsetting. But we still hoped – it would not last long, just three weeks.

These first days of autumn seemed all alike. Mykolas was gone, Elvyra and Romualdas were out in the fields watching cows. I was alone all day with little Vitalija.

The war was coming closer. The Russians were attacking, a fierce battle was fought near Vilkaviškis [*a town in southern Lithuania*]. People were getting restless. My mind was splitting from conflicting thoughts. The family was separated, my husband was forced from us. Can I go on alone toward an unknown fate? How will he find me? How will I do this all by myself? In despair, I went to see a Lithuanian friend. Everyone there was getting the wagons ready, loading their belongings. […] Only Penschuk was staying on. What was I to do? How can I go on by myself? But stay here and face the Bolsheviks? No, no, a thousand times no! What was I to do? When it got dark, the children ran over to find out what was happening with the other Lithuanians, and they reported that everyone there was ready and would leave at 4 a.m.

I was totally unprepared for this. I don't know how to hitch up a horse to a wagon. My young nephew Zenonas agreed to come with us and help. But Penschuk kept saying I should wait. My head is filled with black thoughts. The kids are crying. […] They are begging me to leave with the others. I again went to Penschuk, asking for my wages and advice. I could hardly talk through my tears. He calmed me down and said that his other workers would also be leaving soon and I could go with them.

On October 5, we got up early and [...] were told to get the wagon ready, for we were all leaving at about 10 a.m. Suddenly, I felt calm and peaceful. I woke up the kids and we all got ready for the journey to the unknown. No Mykolas was there to prepare the wagon! At 10 a.m. all the horses were harnessed and four wagons were on their way, filled with people who had worked for Penschuk. The road was in very bad shape. Our little horse could barely pull its load and we soon fell behind. But on a better road, we caught up with Penschuk's group and stayed with them. After about thirty kilometers, we stopped at the Kektis farmstead and stayed for about ten days. We were still thinking that we would go back. But then we were told that families with children had to move on. Penschuk decided to return. He suggested that I return too, for how could I go on alone? And my husband might still show up there. My heart was torn again. I saw terrible scenarios before my mind's eye – Bolshevik gangs assaulting me, and my kids all alone in a foreign country. But the kids wanted to move on. Finally, I decided to go, to keep fleeing farther and farther, even if I had to do it by myself.

Early next morning, everyone was preparing to move on. Zenonas was coming with us. Again four wagons moved out of the farmyard. Penschuk turned back while our wagon and two others set off in the other direction.

Wagon after wagon caravanned down the bigger and smaller roads. Everyone was rushing toward an unknown destination, and I with them. My anxiety about Mykolas gave me no peace. Was he taken prisoner? Had he gone home? Or was he looking for us? We met many men returning from the front line, where they had been digging trenches and I was stopping and asking them. One of them actually knew that the men from Tilsit had been taken to Gumbinė [*East*

Prussia; now Gusev] or Insterburg [*East Prussia; now Chernyakhovsk*]. There was no hope that we would meet Mykolas here. Yet my eyes continued to scrutinize each one of them.

We had been traveling like this for two weeks. My fellow travelers were not very friendly. Some were openly angry that we were going with them and called us "*verrückte Litauer*," "crazy Lithuanians." I cried in my heart, for there was no one I could talk to. My little horse ate too many oats and got sick. In the morning he was hopping on three legs, and we could barely get him to leave the barn. A new problem! Someone told me he would not get well for at least a month. This meant I would become separated from my fellow travelers. They were not too friendly, but they were people I knew. We began to walk the horse, and he recovered somewhat and was again able to pull the wagon while we walked alongside. Little Vitalija tired quickly and someone gave her a ride in another wagon. After a while, the horse was moving more or less normally.

Near Neuhausen [*East Prussia; now Gurjevsk*] we met many soldiers. One of them recognized our Lithuanian harness and said "*Laba diena*." These few words in Lithuanian cheered me up. We started to talk and I found out that many of the soldiers were Lithuanians and that someone I knew, K. Mikšys, was among them. The soldier promised to tell Mikšys that I was here and that we would be stopping nearby for the night. After another quarter of a mile, the column of refugees stopped. German party members were checking everyone who wanted to spend the night there. They noticed the Lithuanian harness and ordered us to go back into the forest for the night. We turned off the road into a small clearing. From the remains of old campfires, we could tell that many others had also spent the night here. We stopped by some bushes. There was no one else, no other Lithuanian refugees. It was a cold autumn evening, and I was afraid that the night would be even colder. I lit a fire using green twigs and had to wait a very long time before the coffee was ready, smoke-smelling. After eating, we spread our bedding near a tree stump. My heart was so sad, so hurt. We were so alone among strangers, far away from our homeland, without friends or even acquaintances. Our fellow travelers barely smiled as they passed by, proud to be Germans and taken care of for the night. At long last, a Lithuanian came by and said that we should pretend to be of German descent. He then walked us back to the refugee sleeping quarters. I protested at first, but then I thought about the children and agreed. Zenonas decided to spend the night in the wagon, and the kids and I walked into the refugee barracks. We were met by a very friendly nurse who showed us a place to sleep. She came back later and brought some apples and candy for the children.

After a little while, through my sleep, I heard someone say "Good evening" in Lithuanian. I opened my eyes and saw Mikšys and Vladas Paliulionis standing before me. What a wonderful surprise! They were students from my village, Gustonys. My very own people showed up when my need was the greatest! They had much to tell. They said that refugees from Gustonys had passed this location just several days ago. But none of them had any news about Mykolas. They promised to ask everyone they would meet and to let me know. They gave me their addresses and the address of a Lithuanian organization in Berlin that was collecting the names of Lithuanian refugees. Many people were registering there. They promised to come back the next day.

Incoherent thoughts kept me awake all night. One moment we were back in our homeland, the next, I was facing a heartless German official. I kept thinking that now I will find Mykolas. It was not possible that I was fated to remain alone and so utterly miserable in a foreign land. It could not be that the children would never again see the father they love so dearly. No, such thoughts must be rooted out. The good Lord will not forsake us. I said a prayer and tried to sleep. When I awoke, I went back to our wagon and we quickly got ready to continue our journey. Mikšys came by again and brought some writing materials, a blanket, and a few other useful things. I promised to write […] and we wished each other good luck and set off again. Our horse was hard to rouse, ate little, and could barely move his legs. […] Our wagon could not keep up, and we fell behind. [...] But we were in a hilly region, and suddenly the horse started galloping down a steep slope so fast that I thought he would crash into a roadside post and kill us all. However, nothing bad happened, and we caught up with our "friends." Around noontime we reached Neukuhren [*East Prussia; now Pionersky*]. We found out that we would be staying there for a while.

Life was quite good for a week. We got good food and slept on piles of straw in a warm classroom. We were even able to buy shoes. We forgot that we were among strangers. The Germans took good care of their refugees, and they assumed that we were German. But I was running out of money. My German was poor and the party man I talked to took my identity card and said it was meant for Germans only. […] He called the authorities in Königsberg [*now Kaliningrad*] to ask what to do with us and was told to let us stay with the German refugees. Actually, he was quite polite with me and said that I should proceed to Zimmerbude [*East Prussia; now Svetly*], because he was expecting new refugees without horses.

Early in the morning of October 8 we left with the other refugees in the direction of Zimmerbude. We traveled all day. It was raining, and we were cold and hungry, but we hurried on. We reached our destination late in the evening, about 8 p.m.

We were expected and were served a tasty, warm soup. We again spent the night in a classroom on straw. The next morning they began to assign the refugees to local families. Our wagon was the last. I always ended up last. What could I do, I was a foreigner. I can't pick and choose where to stay, I shouldn't even be asking. After all, there are five of us, including Zenonas, so it would be hard to get a place. I finally mustered the courage and approached the person in charge. He asked me to show him my family. They all lined up quickly before him. When he saw Elvyra, he hesitated for a moment and walked away, but then returned and told us to come with him. It was cold and wet. He took Romualdas by the hand, and the two walked ahead of us. This was a sight that made me like him. It made no difference to him that we were

Lithuanians, we needed help. We came to a small house and he knocked at the door. Our potential landlady opened the door and showed us a large, airy, and relatively clean room. Next morning we carried our possessions into the house. Our landlady offered us coffee, she later served us dinner. By evening we had settled in and could rest.

We rose quite early in our new home. It was Sunday. Our landlady was a minister's wife. Her husband was reported missing, and so she often had to perform his duties. Today she had to conduct the service at the Lutheran church because the ordained clergyman was not there. She gave me a large hymnal, and we all walked to church. The church was small and not full. People prayed or sang hymns together. My landlady gave a nice sermon about the sad times that had befallen mankind, about families torn apart by the war, children who lost their fathers and even their mothers. She spoke about the refugees and expressed her sympathy for them. I could not help myself and started to cry, as did the Germans. But I had suffered so much more. I had lost my homeland and in a foreign land I lost my husband. Where could I find consolation? Who could I turn to? In her sermon, my landlady reminded us that everything is in God's hands, that we must ask Him for help. Yes, God knows what happened to us. God alone can help. In my thoughts I begged God to help us in our dark hour and if we are deserving not forsake our dear husband and father. Not forsake the kids. I spent almost every Sunday in that Lutheran church, for only there could I find peace and consolation.

The days dragged, one like the other. We didn't have to work, but I helped our landlady with the housework and the darning. It would be worse with nothing to do. My worries gave me no peace of mind. I had spent our last cent. What now? We had to buy food, and I had no income. I waited for two weeks for Mikšys to reply, and then I wrote to V. Paliulionis, and later to Lukoševičius. […] I was sure I would get a job eventually and pay the money back. Then came a postal order from Mikšys for fifty Reichsmarks. To accept this money was strange and sad, but it was comforting to know that I was not forgotten in my time of trouble and that he helped me. Several days later I received a letter from Paliulionis. He wrote that the money was from both of them. He wrote about our fellow Gustonians in the refugee camp of Dirschau [now Tczew, Poland]. There was no news of my husband. I felt so let down again. Here was the long-awaited letter and nothing about Mykolas. Still, it was good not to feel so completely deserted. Gradually, I began to correspond with several people I had known back home, always asking about Mykolas. How I waited for their letters! It was such a treat to read a letter in Lithuanian. Mikšys also sent me a Lithuanian newspaper, listing many places where Lithuanian refugees were staying. I wrote to some of these too. There was also a Lithuanian organization in Berlin. The replies arrived – all negative. I often dreamed of Mykolas, and he always looked sad and grave.

March 18, 1945. Pietenfeld [Germany]

It is Sunday. People do not have to work today and are walking into the fields in groups to enjoy the first signs of spring. It is evident that winter will not be returning. The violets are just like the violets at home. As I look at them, I think of home. The violets are blooming there too, and perhaps my brother and my sisters are looking at them, or is it those cruel Bolshevik henchmen? They destroyed so many of our brave men and women and yet they too may be enjoying this beauty. I was wandering through these Bavarian fields, alone. The rolling forested hills covered with blossoms kept reminding me of Inkūnai back home. It would be nice if I could forget this miserable life of a refugee. Or if Mykolas were with me. Or if I at least knew where he is. But now – what was I to do all alone? I believe God will not abandon me, for we have fared quite well until now. The children have not gone hungry, they did not have to live through real terrors of the war. This is such a quiet part of Germany. The town is not too close and is not too big. The bombers pass it by. May God grant that we will soon see the end of the war.

I ended up here unexpectedly from Gotenhafen while on my way to Braunau in Austria, where I expected to meet my brother-in-law Šukys. […] The journey was very long and difficult. There were crowds of travelers at each station, and it was very hard to get a train. I had a lot of baggage and no one to carry it. We would always be last, and often there was no more room. From Stolp [*now Słupsk, Poland*] to Stettin [*now Szczecin, Poland*] 45 we traveled on a military train. We almost froze sitting on rusty train wheels in the rain. Only in Köslin [Koszalin, Poland] were we able to transfer to a small, enclosed hut-like compartment where at least the rain no longer fell on our heads. We passed Stettin, Berlin and Leipzig. The train station at Leipzig had been bombed and we had to get off at a smaller station nearby. For the first time we slept on a bare floor. We met some Lithuanian refugees here. […] They knew Šukys's new address. He had already relocated to Pomerania. […] I was at a loss of what to do. I had no idea for which destination to buy my tickets, so I simply asked for tickets farther south and we found ourselves on our way to Würzburg. There was a map in the train which I studied, and at the next station I confidently asked for tickets to Nürnberg. When the train approached a town with a bombedout train station, we had to get off and carry our baggage for a mile or so to the next station. […] At Treuchtlingen we saw a devastating sight, bomb crater after bomb crater. Many houses were in ruins, bodies lying in the rubble. The bombardment had happened a week ago and many of the dead were not yet buried. For us it was harder here than anywhere else. We had to walk for about two and a half miles carrying our belongings. […] It had snowed recently and we were so thirsty that we ate the fresh snow like delicious candy.

In the evening, another train arrived, which went to Eichstätt. […] We have been traveling all week now without a break and without proper meals. I was really worried about little Vitalija. She had turned very pale in just one week. […] I was deep in thought when the train began to slow down and I heard them announce Eichstätt. Immediately, I began to wake everyone. I quickly moved our things outside the door of the compartment while Zenonas began to throw and carry them off the train. Suddenly, the train began to move. We were still on the train, except Zenonas, who was outside with our things. We got off at the next stop, but there was no waiting room there. A kind station attendant allowed us to stay in his

office overnight. We spread our coats and for the first time in eight days lay down in relative comfort. It was like sleeping in the finest bed. In the morning, we took the train back […] to Eichstätt and our long and complicated journey came to a good end.

We got off at Eichstätt and began looking for the nearest N.S.V. [German National Socialist People's Charity] location. But it was Sunday, and everything was closed. Only after dinnertime did we find someone to take us to the overnight quarters for refugees.

It is beautiful here. The city is surrounded by hills and forests. There are many Catholic churches. There are even services in the Lithuanian language. I decided to attend, but an air raid alarm was sounded and we spent two hours in a basement instead. Lithuanians had gathered for this occasion from various localities but there was no one I knew. Even so, it was good to chat with them. There is a Lithuanian seminary here, and many Lithuanian refugees live in the neighboring villages. In the evening, Rev. Tulaba, who teaches at the seminary, and Rev. Grauslys, came to our sleeping quarters looking for me. Someone had told them that we have nothing to eat. Father Grauslys brought us bread and promised to let me know as soon as he found a place to stay.

Those last difficult days of travel took a toll on my health. I don't feel well. I can hardly take a few steps. […] A few days later, I went to the N.S.V. and asked to be sent to Pietenfeld, where Father Grauslys was assigned. They said it was overcrowded there, but they did give me a permit to go. Next day, which was March 8, we left at 8:30 a.m., once again lugging our belongings to the train station. We were just one stop away and, after a few minutes got off in the middle of a forest. No houses, no streets. It was really scary. But then we noticed a road leading into the forest. We left Romualdas and Vitalija behind with the things, and Elvyra and I set off to find Pietenfeld. The road led uphill, and it was hard to keep climbing with no end in sight.[…] It was wet, a lot of fresh snow that was rapidly melting. Then at last we spotted a church steeple rising among the hills. After a few more steps we could see the entire town encircled by hills and forests.

The village itself was not a great sight. The houses were of brick or concrete, with roofs made from uneven split rocks, and looked really odd. It didn't take long to find Father Grauslys. He seemed quite surprised to see me. It was really very difficult to find a place. We immediately set out, but no one wanted to take us in. And the children were still alone in the forest, hungry and cold and perhaps scared. So Elvyra went back, and I stayed waiting for some news. At long last, the town's mayor agreed to take us in temporarily. But how to bring our stuff? […] I hoped that perhaps someone would give the kids a ride. But they were exactly where I had left them. […] This time Romualdas and Vitalija walked back with me, and Elvyra stayed behind alone with the luggage. [...] The kids got some warm milk and bread and then we set off again. This time we had a cart on wheels. […] Finally, all of our possessions were in the mayor's entrance hall and we could get some rest in a warm kitchen. Next day, the mayor tried to find a place for us, but couldn't. The same during the next few days. He suggested we go back to Eichstätt and be sent to some other place. I just could not face starting all over again and implored him to let us stay a bit longer, even the tiniest room would do. And he did find one, but the homeowners did not want us. I begged them myself and assured them that we would not cause any trouble and the kids were well-behaved. So they relented. The kids were overjoyed when I told them and immediately started to carry our stuff inside, so our new landlords would not change their minds.

It was a tiny room in the attic. There were two beds, a stove and a grill for cooking. It was all we needed. It was wonderful to have this room all to ourselves. […] Our landlady is very kind. She empathized with our situation […], would bring us soup, or a small pancake, or a quart of milk. These are simple folk, sincere and generous. They are also very devout. There is a small church here and Mass is held every day. It was the same in Lithuania. People here pray together after a meal and then again in the evening. Everyone goes to church, young and old, even little kids.

I think of the farmers in East Prussia. What a difference between them and these Bavarians. Here people work hard, and farmhands eat with the family at the same table. They have pity for the poor and care. Our landlady is kind even though I don't work for her, so unlike the haughty woman for whom we all had to do hard work. She never gave any milk to little Vitalija, and here we get a little of everything without having to pay. It is even acceptable to beg. Refugees make the rounds begging for bread or potatoes. My Elvyra and Romualdas also decided to try, but they didn't do too well, perhaps because they were not from the city. It was so touching that my Romukas had the courage to go to strangers and ask for bread! Who would have thought a year ago that we would not have enough bread! Or did my heart have a premonition? Back home I always tried to help those in need and gave as much as I could. Now my own hands are stretched out. And it feels good that people do not turn me away but show concern even to a foreigner. God will reward them.

March 29, 1945

Today is Easter Thursday. One can see that Easter is close. Everyone is cleaning, organizing, baking cakes and cookies. And I, and perhaps others like me, sit quietly because I have nothing to do. Last year I was also running around, cleaning, doing my chores, preparing Easter dishes. Who lives in my house now? Who runs up and down the same stairs awaiting Easter? Or is it an atheist, and Easter means nothing to him? Who would know, who could tell me something about my lost homeland? How is my mother, my little brother Jonukas? It always pained me when Mykolas scolded him, sometimes justly and sometimes not. Perhaps he has been laid to rest already in his native land and is at peace? Or is he in good health and worrying about me, my fate? Grieving the loss of his sister whom he had loved more than anyone else, who always took care of him? Who knows if we shall ever meet again on this earth? Will there be anyone else to tell my

troubles to? Dear God, please let me return to my homeland, to see my brother and my sisters. And help me to find out the whereabouts of my husband. I am so alone here among strangers. It is so sad, so lonely.

March 30, 1945

Good Friday is a holiday here, but I did my chores, washed clothes, and baked a cake. My landlady baked twelve cakes!

A group of Lithuanian refugees arrived here from Eichstätt looking for their friend Gasiūnas. They knew nothing about Mykolas. They said that British forces were advancing rapidly and they were waiting for them, for the British were said not to harm Lithuanians.

I would like so much to spend a month or two in peace and quiet. I am tired of these wartime dangers, the constant fear. And who knows what the new armies will be like? At least today we have enough bread, and I don't need much more. All I want is for the war to end soon. Then we might find our daddy and return to our beloved homeland.

April 1, 1945

I awoke early on Easter morning. I had nice dreams – I saw Mykolas and other Gustonians and soldiers and many Lithuanians. This was the first time that I dreamed of Mykolas returning, after eight months. We exchanged greetings and kissed and tears of joy flowed down our cheeks. He did not look too bad, only his hair had thinned. I asked him where he had been these past months, and he said that he was tending sheep in Pietenfeld and was doing quite well. […] A barking dog cut the dream off. I was angry at the dog and so sorry that the dream was unfinished.

Was Mykolas really somewhere close by and also unhappy and worrying about us? Being all alone he must be sadder than me. I have the kids to talk to and share my feelings with and time passes quicker. Why has God punished him so by separating him from his family which he loved so much, and which loved him? Yes, there had been many times when he was mean to me. He was upset about this or that and would say things that hurt me, or didn't even trust me. He called me stingy, disorganized, even messy. I don't think I am like that at all. I am always ready to help someone in need or a neighbor in trouble. Yes, I did try to economize, and I took good care of things, my own and others'. He didn't know what I was like deep inside, perhaps didn't want to know. He never understood me, he never comforted me, though I do believe that he loved me. It pains me to think that so many days of my youth were unhappy. Yet I am not angry with him and long for him to come back. Perhaps this separation has changed him, and together we can create a new and better life.

April 4, 1945

Every day we hear the sound of artillery. Every day larger and larger flocks of birds of steel fly overhead and frighten the peaceful inhabitants and destroy their homes. Ingolstadt [about 15 miles from Eichstätt] has been burning all day today. Who knows, British bombs may fall on our village tomorrow, or the day after? Maybe it will end my longing for my husband, and I will never see my homeland again. More than one Lithuanian will perhaps find eternal rest here in Bavaria.

April 8, 1945

The foreign armies keep advancing. Once again we will face another army, a new government. Even here there may be battles and some of us will not survive them. The shadow of death looms larger. The three of us never had an opportunity to go to confession in Germany. There is a Lithuanian priest in Eichstätt, and today we decided to go there for confession. We took the train and arrived quite early. Lithuanian Mass was at 9 a.m. It was very cold. Today was also the children's First Holy Communion. They were all in white and lined up near the altar holding tall candles. The bishop said Mass, gave a sermon, and distributed Holy Communion. From the young hearts of the children rose a beautiful hymn to our Lord Jesus Christ. Many years ago I too was a young child. I too was waiting to receive Jesus into my heart for the first time. Today, I am getting ready to receive Jesus for the first time in a foreign land. It was exactly the same as a year ago.

Many people gathered, the priest came out to celebrate Mass. When the students from the Lithuanian seminary began to sing the Lithuanian hymn "Let Us Fall on Our Knees," I felt like being back home, among my own. But not for long. As soon as I left the church, I again saw faces of strangers and heard a foreign language.

April 14, 1945

It is already spring here. In Lithuania, it does not get this warm before the end of May. Here, the fields are already green and the grass is quite tall. It's warm and beautiful. But the droning of the bombers overhead does not let us enjoy the beauty of spring. All eyes look with fear at those ghosts in the blue skies.

Today the "birds" paid a visit to our village. They strafed people traveling on the road and working in the fields. We all ran into the barn. My landlords were very scared, asked God to help them, cried. I was calm at first but then I too was shaking in fear. The planes came closer and Elvyra and Romualdas were still in school. Then there was a lull and the kids came running and together we took cover in the barn. People were rushing home from the fields with their oxen and said that several oxen and horses had been hit. One man was dead, one cart was burning. How much did it take for us to die? And remain in this foreign land forever?

Each day the front is coming closer. Each day we face the possibility of a more terrible fate. Will we escape the gunfire? Will we face starvation? Anxious thoughts kept returning, at night I had terrible nightmares.

Last night, I dreamed that Mykolas had returned and was angry with me. His angry words in the past are still fresh in my mind and it is not surprising that he would scold me in my dreams for nothing. I cried and cried. When I woke up, I had cried so much that my heart was hurting. For a long time, my head was filled with memories of our life together and of all those hours I had spent crying. And now fate had separated us. Perhaps temporarily, perhaps forever.

The storms of war will subside. Lithuania's sons and daughters will return to their beloved homeland and raise it from the ruins once again. I think we will survive somehow and will be together again and have a good life based on the principle of loving God and loving our neighbor.

April 25, 1945

We hear the artillery fire all night long. The street droned with the sounds of engines. There was not much sleep. In the morning the sounds of gunfire came closer. German troops in our village were retreating. Villagers waited uneasily for the arrival of the foreign forces.

We too had gathered our bundles and waited for the unknown. People were saying that many villages were burning. It is certain that we will meet our new rulers today. Some Lithuanian refugees came to me and asked me to make small identity badges with our national colors. But I had no green. I finally found the right yarn and crocheted small badges for them and for us. Bombshells were exploding very close. Villagers pick up their valued possessions and run for shelter in cellars. Who knows where it is best to hide? Which house would be spared? My landlords ran to a neighbor's basement. We were going to go there too in a little while. We began to eat, but bombshells exploded almost on top of us. We wanted to go out but were stopped by another explosion very close by. Little Vitalija was crying. When the noise stopped, we ran to the basement. There were many people there already. We found a corner farther away from the Germans and waited, perhaps for death, perhaps for better days. It was 12:30 p.m. The gunfire was so intense that it seemed as if our village had turned into hell. Everybody was saying the rosary, praying . I too in my heart called upon the Blessed Virgin Mary to help and protect us. [...] The hellish noise lasted about an hour or so. Finally, there was silence. The bolder ones went outside to take a look and reported that the church and several houses were damaged and there was fire in the village. The fire was farther away and we were still safe. Then shots rang out again and sounded even more frightening. The terrified people were crying "Hail Mary," and the children screamed. Then the gunfire ended. We went outside and saw new fires, this time very close by. The men ran off trying to extinguish the flames, but new gunshots sent us all back to the basement. The third round of gunfire lasted longer. We all thought that the bombshells would hit us and maybe start a fire. I imagined all sorts of terrible things. Were we meant to die in the ruins of this house? Little Vitutė didn't stop shouting "I'm scared!" I comforted her, but I too was scared. Once more we heard the sound of planes overhead, but this was followed not by the sound of exploding bombs but by approaching tanks. The men soon reported that American tanks were on the road.

We ran outside hoping and afraid to hope that our ordeal had ended. Soon the first army jeep turned into the village. People waved white scarves and ran to meet them. The American soldiers climbed out smiling and stepped forward hesitantly. They must have been met with bullets elsewhere. No one in our village tried to resist. Many more military vehicles arrived. The soldiers looked very good, well-off. They were snacking on expensive cookies, chocolate, oranges. They did not scatter scavenging for food like German soldiers. Our house was immediately commandeered by soldiers. They left one room for our landlords and us.

May 3, 1945

A week has gone by and the storms of war have moved on. Life seems somewhat more peaceful. The airplanes overhead do not seem so scary. But there isn't much to be happy about. Actually, things are rather bad at the moment. No one is issuing food ration cards. There is no government. Our food supplies are dwindling, and there is very little bread left. Who knows what is ahead.

I am again dreaming of Mykolas. There is hope again of finding him. The mail will start coming again. Perhaps the Red Cross will assist me. As long as he is not in the Soviet Zone. […] It is terrible to think that we could remain in a foreign county forever. What will the future be like for our children? They would end up serving foreigners. How could I all by myself provide for their education, even if they learned the language? But I still believe in a brighter future.

May 4, 1945

It was announced today that the war ended yesterday. We should all be overjoyed, but the Germans lost, and they are sad. I too have nothing to rejoice about. My homeland is still occupied by the Bolsheviks and going back would be a dreadful mistake. And I am still alone. I don't know if I will ever find Mykolas. If he is alive, we could all be happy. How I wish I could tell him about our troubles, have him comfort me. I am sad, uneasy. I have no close friends, not even an acquaintance, whom I could trust, or ask for advice. My only hope is my faith in God.

May 17, 1945

[…] Oh, how I want to return to my own people.

Today all Polish and Russian refugees were taken away. People say they will be returning to their homelands. They look happy, in high spirits. Most of them have spent less than a year here as compulsory laborers for the Germans. Although I did not have to work and passed my time in relative ease, I am not at ease. I was also asked if I wanted to return home, but what else but refuse? The thought of facing the Russians is terrifying. They would arrest me on the spot and send me to Siberia. Better to stay here with all my longing for my country, and for my sisters, and my little brother. If only Mykolas were here! This foreign land would not seem so dreary. It is actually really beautiful here. He could write long poems about the lovely hills and forests of Bavaria. But only God knows where he is. Is it meant for us to see each other again, or am I to remain alone forever?

May 20, 1945

This Pentecost morning reminded me of my wedding. It was fourteen years ago […] There have been many happy hours and some quite bitter. I can still see myself all in white and next to me Mykolas, dressed in black. And today I don't know where he is. On that long-ago day he was not dearer to me or more loved than he is now. That's why I am so sad, so filled with grief every time I think of it. But I must believe that we will be together again. Then two hearts that have missed each other so terribly will be again full of joy as on that Pentecost Sunday in 1931.

May 21, 1945

Yesterday was our wedding anniversary. The days of my youth sped by like the wind. Just as quickly passed the days of our life together. Now I am standing at an abbyss and I wonder what will happen next.

Today, all the Lithuanian refugees in Pietenfeld were taken to Eichstätt. We were lodged in a schoolhouse, which now holds several dozen of us. I barely know any of them, although we are of the same nationality. There are about twenty in each classroom. The mood is not very happy. Everyone is worried about the future. Most of them are with their families and bear the hardship of a refugee existence together. Some are in situations like mine. Where will they take us? Where will we continue our fight to survive? This uncertainty torments every Lithuanian. But it's worse for me, without a husband, my children without a father.