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## Jonas Vasys-Vasiliauskas, *Nebesugrįš j vienkiemį gandrai;*

*Autentiškas pasakojimas apie Pavirvyčio Vasiliauskus* (Kaunas, Aušra Press, 1996),  
302 pp. with illustrations and genealogical tables. No price listed.

These memoirs are an extraordinary narrative of prolonged and barbaric suffering endured by the prolific Vasiliauskas family of the Pavirvytis farmstead in the Luokė homestead in the County of Telšiai. The author, a retired engineer of the Boston suburb of Dedham, Massachusetts, was the first of twelve children born to his father and second wife. (His father already has seven children by his first wife who died.)

The witness of Vasys' phenomenal memory intertwines with his sisters' extensive written italicized reminiscences that he salvaged over the years. As a result, one encounters a richness of detail about all aspects of the saga that spans nearly eight decades with the birth of Jonas himself in 1918. He fully describes his rearing, family ties, and schooling through young adulthood. The testimony then takes on an obvious ominous tone as it continues into the 1940s, with the year-long Soviet occupation, the three-year German sequel, and the Soviet return in 1944.

At this stage of events, the Lithuanian populace was torn apart, forced to decide on fleeing or staying, with obvious severe risks in either choice. Along with about 50,000 countrymen, (c. 30,000 reached the United States, and some 20,000 - Canada) Jonas left his homeland, meandering through Vienna and other Austrian cities until he reached the American zone in Germany. Along the perilous way, he and his companions devised novel ways of recognizing fellow Lithuanians, e.g., whistling a familiar folk song to draw attention. With the use of maps, Jonas somehow managed to find useful escape routes, all the while improvising food and clothing. Eventually he reached the American zone in Germany. Because of his engineering skills and linguistic ability, he proved quite useful to the U.S. officials. His resultant favorable position paved the way for him to reach New York as early as February 18, 1947, ahead of most of the DPs who eventually came. In New England he found temporary haven with a sister in Brockton, Massachusetts. His resourcefulness led him from one job to another, until he landed a substantial position with a prestigious engineering firm. While attending a wedding in Canada, he met his future wife, Bronė. Back in the Boston area, he settled down, rearing a family of three sons.

The memoirs, nevertheless, might more accurately be viewed as the tale of two mothers: the homeland itself, and the deeply courageous mother of Jonas. Much of the story revolves around the struggle for the Lithuania in the latter half of the 1940s that enveloped six of the freedom-fighter Vasiliauskas sons. Soviet suspicion about their membership in the underground prompted constant surveillance, interrogation, detention, imprisonment and torture of the remaining relatives, including the mother and sisters. The first son, Danielius, was betrayed and killed on September 8, 1947, as was his brother, Boleslovas within days on September 17. Then two years later on September 29, 1949, another betrayal led to the slaughter of Antanas, Blaziejus, Justinas, and Vytautas - all typically in the prime of life.

How the mother could shoulder the bereavement of all six is beyond human comprehension. Unless one believes in the power of God's grace, for a mother's heart to bear such profound sorrow is incomprehensible. The memoirs go on to tell of family efforts to locate the graves and eventually to erect a memorial stone at the family cemetery.

In 1988 Jonas Vasys joined an excursion for a return to Lithuania after an absence of forty-four years. He immediately recognized his bed-ridden 92-year-old mother who had survived her Calvary. Only another three years later did she finally breathe her last. The rest of Vasys' journey was a predictable nostalgic glimpse of places from his youth, along with tearful reunions and poignant cemetery visits.

The monograph in a printing of 2,000 copies is in simple format with no chapter headings or index. The intended readership is the younger generation of Lithuanians who had no experience of the frightful 1940s - an effort to open their eyes to recent history. The few copies that have reached the United States deserve a place of honor on the shelves of our archives.

