

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 24, No.2 - Summer 1978

Editor of this issue: J.A.Račkauskas

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 1978 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



Rūta Burokas, SUCH IS LIFE. New York: Vantage Press, 1976, 61 p. \$4.95.

Personal accounts of the lives and experiences of ethnic Americans are always rewarding in the insights that they provide concerning the nuances of living in and adjusting to an alien environment. These accounts are especially welcome in the case of Baltic immigrants and their descendants, owing to the paucity of information available, especially in English, regarding their experiences in dealing with the American scene. The work of the author writing under the pen name of "Rūta Burokas," therefore, should find a ready audience among those interested in the Lithuanian-American individual and his or her coming to grips with daily life in an unfamiliar setting.

Rūta Burokas was the American-born offspring of hardworking, industrious Lithuanian farmers who, like so many of their countrymen, found an opportunity in the new land to acquire land and property denied them in Europe. The author's father worked in the mills of Massachusetts until he managed to gain sufficient capital for a down payment on a farm. He continued from time to time to mingle farm work with factory labor until the farm was on its feet. Like so many of their immigrant colleagues, the Lithuanian-American farmers had a thing or two to teach American-born cultivators of the land, especially in regard to the intensity of effort placed into the project to realize a maximum potential from the land.

Burokas and the other members of the Lithuanian-American community were resented by the American community in western Massachusetts. Lithuanian-Americans were lumped together under the epithet "Polander," a term of contempt which indicated considerable misunderstanding of Eastern European ethnic alignment. The Lithuanian-Americans clung closely to their customs and to their language and with few exceptions married within their ethnic group even into the second and third generations. In those days, generations ago, the offspring of immigrants spoke their parent's language at home even if their schooling was entirely English in nature. As a matter of fact, the attainment of Lithuanian independence in 1918 generated an upsurge of ethnic sentiment among Lithuanian-Americans, with a renewed emphasis on speaking a purified form of the national language and a concentration on making certain that immigrant children were named after such Lithuanian heroes as Vytautas, Algirdas and the heroine Biruté.

The author married a first-generation Lithuanian-American and much of her narrative deals with their life together bereft of children and the consequent impact on their lives of this situation. A good deal of her short book concentrates on the author's ventures into various religious and philosophical areas and other topics of varying interest, but still much of interest concerning Lithuanian-American life is presented. Rūta Burokas simply written, often poignant work provides interesting reading as an account of a way of life that has largely disappeared from the scene.

Norman Lederer
Washtenaw Community College