

Apple

REPORT TO THE CORPS

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EULOGY

In the fall of 1990, when Darius Kuolys (then Minister of Education in the newly re-established Republic of Lithuania) approached Jurate Krokyte Stirbiene and Vaiva Vebra Gust for their assistance. He envisioned that they would organize a few retired Lithuanian American educators to share their expertise with the teachers of Lithuania.

Little did he know what he was about to ignite. Jurate, experienced in the field of special education, immediately turned her attention to work in that area. Vaiva took on the administrative task of establishing a grassroots organization, which included Americans from the United States and Canada, not all of them of Lithuanian heritage. Some, indeed, were retired educators while many were still practicing professionals. The inspired name, A.P.P.L.E., the American Professional Partnership for Lithuanian Education, came from Vaiva's husband, Jim Gust. There was a lengthy equivalent name in Lithuanian, but it never caught on. Right from the beginning, the people of Lithuania did their best to pronounce A.P.P.L.E..

What exciting times those were, sitting around the dining room table in the Vebra-Gust home, brainstorming, strategizing, working for a cause. We worked out ways to do fundraising. We established a newsletter to get our message out to the wider public. Deep down we knew that our efforts were important; we could make a difference in the education of the children of Lithuania, and, therefore, in the future of the whole country.

Vaiva guided A.P.P.L.E. through the first eight years before assuming a position as Vice-minister of Education in Lithuania. Before she stepped down, Vaiva had the good sense to choose a capable successor, Emilija Sakadolskiene. In her turn, Emilija had the foresight to work out a process for insuring continued leadership for A.P.P.L.E. down to the present day with Barbara Henriques currently serving as president.

Over the years, 28,000 teachers in Lithuania have attended A.P.P.L.E. courses. That is about 47%, almost half, of the teachers in Lithuania. Through our efforts, fifty-nine teacher centers have been established throughout the country to sup-



Vaiva Radasta Vebra died at 9:15 pm, Saturday, December 13, 2008. She was just 54 years old.

port teachers all year long, not just when the A.P.P.L.E. summer seminars are running. A Lithuanian Scholars Fund was founded, and to date seventy-six teachers in Lithuania have been funded to develop projects at their schools and communities, related to A.P.P.L.E. Summer Seminars.

Those who have participated will readily tell you that being part of A.P.P.L.E. is a life-altering experience, and not just for the educators of Lithuania, but for all of us involved in organizing and presenting to our colleagues in Lithuania as well. We all have very special memories of A.P.P.L.E. to share. We have become a family.

Although she took on other tasks over the years, Vaiva never really left us. When she served in the ministry and later as advisor to President Adamkus, Vaiva always kept contact with A.P.P.L.E. and shared with us her vision of what was important for Lithuanian education. In fact, when Vaiva went into remission after her first bout with breast cancer, she assumed the role of A.P.P.L.E. president again and organized the 2005 summer seminars. As recently as this past August, Vaiva attended the officers meeting to lend her support for the work of A.P.P.L.E..

I will be honest with you. It wasn't always easy working with Vaiva. She was demanding. Those of us who worked closely with her understood that she was passionate; one might even say driven, when it came to working for educational reform in Lithuania. Now that Vaiva is no longer with us, the A.P.P.L.E. family is exchanging condolences. As people write about Vaiva, they are using words like inspiring and guiding light. Luminary and visionary. We know that in a very real way, Vaiva's guidance will always be with us.

The A.P.P.L.E. family mourns with the Vebra-Gust family, with Vaiva's husband Jim, and their wonderful children: Aras, Liepa, Lokys, and Sirvydas.

*Gita Kupcinskas
Massachusetts*

MEMORIES

I'll never forget the rainbow

It was the summer of 1993. It was the first time I worked with A.P.P.L.E.. I was in awe of the beauty of Lithuania's countryside. I was amazed at the goodness of the people. I admired the strength of the women I met. I loved the food.

And yet there was a horror that existed. As I heard the stories of the Soviet occupation from people who had lived it, I ached. For a woman who grew up in a small town in eastern North Carolina, this was something I had never experienced. I thought about childhood. While the women I met were living in Deportation Camps hearing sick babies cry, I was innocently sitting on the floor of my home playing with paper dolls. In Lithuania, I was very close to something I had never imagined existed.

Each day as we walked to the school where we were teaching, we walked past some buildings which had been used for "Interrogation." It was explained that this was not the simple questioning which is done humanely in the US. This interrogation involved torture. Many people died in that building. During the two weeks I was in the city, that building haunted me. I could not think of anything else. There were times when I felt death all around me. I could not shake the feeling or my thoughts. Sometimes I walked slowly in respect for those who had died, while at other times, I crossed the street because the thoughts were too intense. As we walked daily in the constant rain, it even seemed more dreary.

Then it happened. One day at noon after an A.P.P.L.E. staff meeting. We walked out of the building. ALL of us stopped and stood in silence. There was a rainbow which covered the entire sky from one side of the city square to the other. No one uttered a word but we knew that our thoughts were the same. The rainbow was saying to those of us who had fallen in love with Lithuania and her people "There is hope. Lithuania will survive." And we knew that, somehow, we were a part of making that happen. Someone took a picture. We walked away, still in silence.

I never forgot the rainbow.

One summer a few years later, I decided that Vaiva must have a copy of the picture. I had the photo enlarged and mounted into a beautiful picture two feet wide. That summer in Panevezys during an A.P.P.L.E. conference, I presented this to Vaiva. I told the crowd about the rainbow and the meaning behind it. I explained that I had grown to believe that it was Vaiva's rainbow. Because of her dream, A.P.P.L.E. was touching the lives of the children of the next generation. They were the future of Lithuania. They were the "hope."

It was not until quite a while later that someone told me that Vaiva translates to mean *rainbow*. What irony.

Yes — Vaiva and rainbows go together.

*Myra Goodwin
North Carolina*

A Glimpse of a Girl

I still remember the first times I met Vaiva. The very first was when you dragged her to a trust conference. What a somber, serious young woman she seemed. Awfully bright, but hardly the life of the party. The second "first time" was when you brought her to see our new office space in Connecticut. I heard lilting laughter behind me and turned around. The serious young woman had vanished, replaced by a dark-haired beauty with shining eyes, twirling to smile up at her husband as they shared a private amusement.

I knew then I had been granted a glimpse of the girl you married, and the memory stuck.

Jim Macdonald



Descendants of Vaiva's father still living in Vilnius

She was one of Lithuania's brightest stars here on earth. Now she is in the Heavens watching the sparks she has transferred to her children and the children who benefited from her educational programs she was involved in.

Jonas Pleckaitis

I would like to extend my deepest condolences to Vaiva's family. I had the privilege to work with Vaiva in A.P.P.L.E. and on the Lithuanian-American Community Executive Board. She was always steering the ship with determination and gentle force whichever way it leaned from different currents, winds.... It was uplifting to work with her.... Her passion for the task at hand was an inspiration to those of us who worked with her. May she rest in peace....

*Giedre Stankunas
Connecticut*

MEMORIES

Vaiva

Although Vaiva and A.P.P.L.E. had a major impact on our lives, I was not going to write about the past years because so much has already been said with much more eloquence than I could manage. However, a note in a Christmas card from Ilona Laucius got me thinking. She wrote, "Vaiva brought us together and it enriched our lives."

Vaiva did, indeed, bring together so many individuals with diverse backgrounds that it could not help but enrich our lives. People whose lives would never have intertwined if it had not been for Vaiva and Jurate Krokys and their mutual determination to do something for and about Lithuanian education once the Soviet Union fell apart.

Vaiva could be adamant at times, so the following story shared by her husband, Jim Gust, may not be entirely a myth. The organization needed a name and Jim was banished to the attic until he came up with something acceptable and clever. What could have been more clever than the acronym, A.P.P.L.E. for American Professional Partnership for Lithuanian Education?

That same adamant and determined personality influenced the educational path of an entire nation. It brought prestige to the ranks of educators at all levels in Lithuania. She was a most remarkable woman.

*Walter & Jane Serbent
Connecticut*



The first A.P.P.L.E.-sponsored summer courses happened in 1991. That was the year Russian tanks were unleashed against Lithuanians holding hands at the television tower. Reflecting on the successes and failures of that year, Vaiva wrote:

With the creation of A.P.P.L.E., we've stepped out onto a tightrope. Sometimes everything that came before seems like a different life entirely. As a Lithuanian-American, I always felt lucky to have a strong sense of community and purpose. Yet everything is topsy-turvy now. No longer must a feeling of obligation animate our decisions. Lithuania is free, and so are we. The choice of involvement, of commitment, is personal in a new sense. If we freely undertake creative work with and for Lithuania, then our choices must have consequences on two continents

Vaiva accomplished so many things during her remarkable but abbreviated life. But her most important gift to us was this: through the example of her life, and through the obligations she imposed, she made each of us be the very best that we could be.

*Jim Gust
Connecticut*

Linguistic talents and multi-faceted skills

It is my impression that one of the principal reasons Vaiva was so successful in first establishing and subsequently nursing A.P.P.L.E. into such a transformative addition to Lithuania's educational orchard was her ability to maximize the growth of the organization with her uniquely creative verbal skills in both relevant languages: Lithuanian and English. While most of us, who came of age in North America, adopted the 1940's Lithuanian idiom that our parents had brought with their post-war immigration and still felt comfortable with 50 years later, Vaiva demonstrated an instant ability to enlarge her vocabulary almost overnight, post-1990 - by injecting all the linguistic innovations and latest idioms we had been cut off from until Lithuania regained its independence. As a result, she succeeded in identifying with "them" and gained instant trust "over there." Whatever she recommended was given undivided attention and usually resulted in enthusiastic acceptance.

Those of us who have known her within the A.P.P.L.E. framework over the years on this side of the ocean have had numerous occasions to hear her express herself in her seamless, effortless English. As a result of her well-honed bi-lingual skills, Vaiva was selected as translator for President Bush during his official visit to Lithuania.

Ultimately, Vaiva became a high-profile contributor to Lithuania's role in the international forum. But for us she always stood, above all, as the emblematic founder of A.P.P.L.E. throughout its past 18 years. Whatever else she took on as her career responsibilities, she always reserved a special niche in her attention reserves for her very first post-independence project: A.P.P.L.E. Therefore, it is fitting to express our appreciation in both languages: Dekojame Tau, Vaiva. We are forever grateful, Vaiva.

*Irena Ross
Toronto, Canada*



While Vaiva translates for President Bush during his 2008 visit to Vilnius, she and Jim enjoy some free time together.

EULOGY

Tradition dictates that three of one's closest friends give the final eulogies at one's gravesite before burial.

These are the words of Dainius Numgaudis of Vilnius, Vaiva's colleague at the Ministry and very good friend.

It's very hard to find words for such a moment - precise, simple, thoughtful ones, as rich and illustrative as you always found. All those close to you have spent the past three weeks together with you. I think you've felt that; you must have. It was a time of painful thoughts and bright memories. It was like a film full of bright colors: just like you.

We, all of your pals, have always taken stock of ourselves as individuals over and over again: what we are proud of, what we would rather forget, and what we would still like to argue about just a bit.

There is one thing nobody could argue about: the past decade of education reform is difficult to imagine without you, your personality, your ideas, and your ideals: as you used to say, you saw an emergent, strong, transparent Lithuania sitting in the palm of God's hand.

You surpassed most of us, your insight, endurance, tremendous willpower, stubbornness, maximization, informality, deep thought, and sometimes very unexpected, very down-to-earth perspective on a complex problem.

Last night I found a quotation from John Lennon in one of your speeches: "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." We're glad that you were so busy with all your plans, Vaiva; we're glad that you wove Jim, Aras, Liepa, Lokys, Sirvydas and the rest of us into those plans.

Once you told me about a time when your father took you to the ocean and pointed far off and said, "There's Lithuania." Straining to see up on your tiptoes you said, "Where? Where?" Your father said, "Right there, can't you see?" I guess that's why you always had a different perception of Lithuania, and sometimes one more clear than our own.

Thank you for that, and farewell.

These are the words of Romas Sakadolskis of Vilnius, a fellow Lithuanian-American and a long-time close friend.

Farewell to Vaiva

We do not choose our parents, nor the time or place of our birth here on earth. We arrive without any understanding, and we depart against our will. Between those two points is the short human timeframe of life—with a plethora of choices.

Vaiva Radasta Vėbraitė was born and spent more of her life in America—a country full of freedom. Immigrants choose new identities there, if they wish. And their offspring don't even have to choose: the indigenous becomes built in.

That's why Vaiva's path has been so remarkable. She wasn't just a Lithuanian by heritage: she chose to be Lithuanian. She is a representative of the émigré generation that made a deliberate decision about its national community and country.

Your parents will help make that decision, as will your friends and comrades-in-arms—Vaiva's did help her—but in the end each person must choose for himself, independently, making up his own mind. Such a decision cannot be based merely on sentiment, tradition, and emotion. It must be a considered—intelligently and willfully—resolution.

Such a person was Vaiva; in her own words, she was born in her fatherland: the Diaspora-Lithuania. She herself chose to change the lives of her family and many others to the very roots, working to her final, deep breath for Lithuania.

The writer Marius Katiliškis called the pain of losing one's land "To those who left: do not return." Vaiva didn't expatriate, but rather repatriated: she understood that the Diaspora-Lithuania wouldn't last forever without Lithuania itself. Lithuania is one. Now she lies here for an eternal rest. Rest in peace, Vaiva. Woman of Lithuania.



President Adamkus

Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus expressed his condolences to the family, loved ones, and all who knew Vaiva Vėbraitė.



“Lithuania, together with the World Lithuanian Community, has lost a noble and genuine individual in Vaiva Vėbraitė. Born far from Lithuania, Vaiva’s life confirmed her love for the land of her parents,” said the Lithuanian President. “Her path in life was lit by the spirit of patriotism and Lithuania. Still raising her beautiful family, she was one of the first to arrive in a re-emerging, free Lithuania. Vaiva came on a mission of professional-pedagogical assistance; she never left.”



Vaiva’s name—with its knowledge, incredible patience, and enthusiasm—is firmly attached to early educational reform. As faithful to principle as always, in her role as presidential adviser, she was particularly concerned in the past few years with the quality of education in the humanities, the spread of new ideas and education on patriotism and citizenship, and the battle against negative phenomena in Lithuania’s schools.

“Vaiva has left, but her initiatives and work remain in all of our schools and through the knowledge their students have acquired. Those who knew her will remember a great person, one who stretched time to be a loving mother and wife, to help others, to improve herself, and still managed to work



ceaselessly for Lithuania,” said President Valdas Adamkus.



“Lithuania, together with the World Lithuanian Community, has lost a noble and genuine individual in Vaiva Vebraite”

President Valdas Adamkus

MEMORIES

My Memories of Vaiva Radasta Vebra

It was with great sadness that I learned of Vaiva's death from the December 2008 A.P.P.L.E. newsletter. I first met Vaiva on July 4, 1997 (my first day in Lithuania), while being briefed on the structure of Lithuanian agricultural education by representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture in the Teachers' Professional Development Center in Vilnius. Vaiva, then Executive Director of A.P.P.L.E., served as interpreter for this briefing and one that followed in the Ministry of Education later that afternoon. I was impressed with her soft-spoken grace and ease with government officials, teachers, and everyone involved with the A.P.P.L.E. seminars. Equally impressive, was her knowledge of, and interest in, the agricultural sector of Lithuania, as well as in Lithuania's schools and the challenges facing teacher education. I felt honored to have been selected in both 1997 and 1999 to assist in the A.P.P.L.E. in-service seminars under the direction of such a competent and inspiring leader as Vaiva Vebraite. She was truly a gifted and multi-talented liaison between Lithuanians and Americans. I was fortunate to have been able to return to Lithuania in March of 1998 and October of 2000 with Dr. O. Donald Meaders to assist in planning A.P.P.L.E. agricultural education strand in-service seminars for the following summers. We always looked forward to meeting with Vaiva during those planning assignments to obtain her perspective and suggestions. During this period, she served as Lithuania's Vice-Minister of Education in the Ministry of Education and Science. Now retired, I often reflect fondly on my four assignments in Lithuania and on the very capable and dedicated professionals with whom I worked. When I think of A.P.P.L.E., the first person who comes to mind is Vaiva Radasta Vebra, its founder and leader whose vision, kindness, and friendship was treasured by so many of us. Vaiva's passing is a tremendous loss for A.P.P.L.E., but her spirit and shared vision will continue to inspire the many who are still working on behalf of this wonderful organization.

William L. Thuemmel
Florida



Vaiva in the garden

Steadfast and Diligent

Vaiva is someone we will grieve, but my living with an Irishman makes it necessary to join that grief with joy in her life. Joy because Vaiva as much as anyone we will ever know personally had a magnificent dream, a dream that most people would have thought impossible to have happen. Vaiva lived to see her impossible dream fulfilled in such a far-reaching way.

Vaiva took her dream to help Lithuania regain its rightful place in the world. She worked steadfastly and diligently using all her many powers to make it happen. She picked several people to be her strong allies, and while many of us know only a handful of that group, it was obvious that she picked true doers and shakers. She realized that the best approach would be to reach the children and that was through their schools, their teachers. Someone coined that wonderful name with its wonderful initials: A.P.P.L.E. and the dream began to unfold.

A.P.P.L.E. gathered strength through the years and some of us, with no Lithuanian birthright but through meeting others who do, joined the group. It was apparent that Vaiva had it right, that she did it right and all we had to do was keep the program as active as it could be. The numbers of others who have benefited from her dream will never be counted, and many will never know how or why their lives were so touched.

Would it be possible to get a Lithuanian artist to design small apple sculptures (I think of the iron sculptures we saw after our dinner on a farm some summers ago) and they could be planted on A.P.P.L.E. sites with a small plaque, "To Honor Vaiva"?

To Vaiva's family, my sympathy.

Blanche Woolls
California

Vaiva in the
California
Redwoods



Vaiva was bigger than life! Like a bright comet in the sky, she appeared, made a tremendous impact and now...she's gone from our sight. Her spirit, strength, vision, and dedication inspired everyone whose life she has touched. We'll never be the same for having known her. What a wonderful and supportive husband and children she had. We thank you all for sharing Vaiva with us. Be strong and remember—her life has changed, but not ended.

Ritone and Theodore Rudaitis
Illinois

MEMORIES

But it was Vaiva, with her tenacity and patriotism, who ensured that we would never forget our roots, and kept the spirit of our culture alive. In my heart, she will forever be the symbol of Lithuania and I thank her for her unwavering commitment.

Lina (Puslyte) Perrotti



A family of dancers

The A.P.P.L.E. family is in shock. But Vaiva is still leading us, as she always did, into deep reflective thought. She made so many things possible for so many people on this earth., and I am grateful to have been one of those people. Vaiva, we loved you in the midst of the intense summer programs and we love you now. I pray for peace and comfort for your family.

*Katie Hoyle
North Carolina*



Three generations

The following story was told to me by a friend of mine and a dear friend of A.P.P.L.E., Julius Veblaitis. He asked me to retell it for use in the special edition of our newsletter dedicated to Vaiva.

Being one of the founding members of the organization to become known as A.P.P.L.E., Julius remembers the night that a group of Lithuanian émigrés met at his house to exchange ideas on how to best support the emerging Lithuanian education system.

He recalls how they met around his dining room table one evening in early in 1991 at Vaiva's invitation and that of Darius Kuolys, who would become the first Minister of Education in the new government of a free and independent Lithuania. The meeting focused on how to organize an effective program that would support the changes they knew were needed and identify what resources were available to implement that program as soon as possible.

He remembers some of the others who attended that historic meeting as Susan Anderson, Rimantas Bitenas, Jurate Krokys and Joe Karmuza.

*Ed Topar
New Jersey*



Matriarchs of A.P.P.L.E. in Neringa 2004

Dear Vaiva, dear Friend,
Thank you for the wealth of days and nights filled with poetry and precious work. Thank you for bringing Jim into our circle, whose humor and world view brought joy even in the most serious and sad moments. Thank you for the kids Aras, Lokys, Liepa and Sirvydas who, even without our engineering, became our children's Rasa, Gintautas, and Gaja's best friends. Rest in peace,

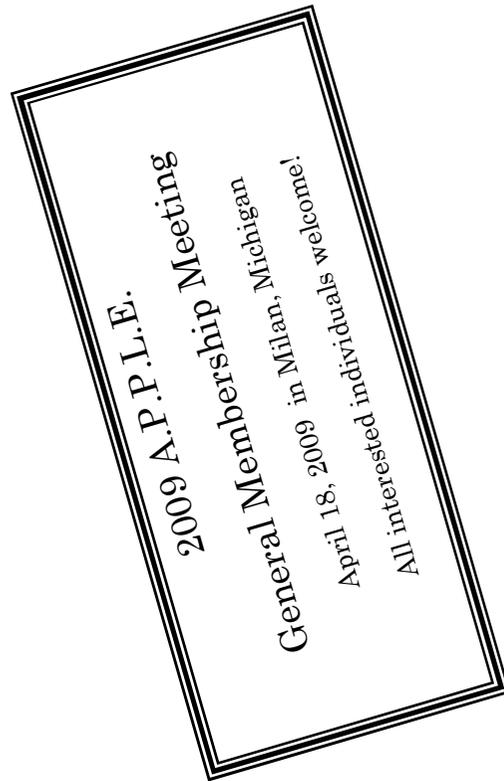
*Jurate Krokys
Philadelphia*

A number of these reflections were originally posted on the web site <http://myvaiva.blogspot.com/>

**American Professional Partnership
for Lithuanian Education**

Post Office Box 179017

San Diego, CA 92177



**YES! I would like to join in your efforts
toward educational reform in Lithuania.**

I would like to make a contribution:

In Memory of Vaiva Vebraitė _____

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