



STRENGTH OF THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT

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On April 29, 1943, Vladislovas Telksnys and fifteen other Kaunas intellectuals working in the press were deported by the Gestapo to Stutthof, one of the most brutal concentration camps in Nazi Germany, where they lived through a true "hell on earth."

Thanks to Danutė Marcinkevičienė, the daughter of Rima Šimonienė and Vladislovas Telksnys, the personal archive of this resistance member, memoirist and writer was handed over to Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum. On the occasion of commemorating the 80th anniversary of the deportation of Lithuanian intellectuals to Stutthof concentration camp, we are presenting to the public an interesting historical documentary material introducing Vladislovas Telksnys, a sensitive and deeply religious personality who unconditionally loved his homeland, Lithuania. The documentary material testifies to his active participation in the activities of the Catholic organisation "Ateitininkai" during the interwar period, his experiences in Stutthof concentration camp, and the persecution by the Soviet security during the first and second Soviet occupation.

Part III

Life Under a Foreign Surname

"Freedom... Freedom, dreamt in anguish and turned into reality... Sometimes it seems like a dream... <...> What a joy it is to be among my own people. <...>

Thousands of friends of fate were smouldered and are smouldering through the chimney, and I am free!... It seemed that the worst was in the past, and that another, brighter world was emerging. <...> Can you compare freedom with the nightmare of the past. What a joy it is to be among my own people ", wrote Vladislovas Telksnys, who, having miraculously survived the horrors of Stutthof concentration camp, felt incredibly happy to return to his homeland.

In life, sometimes you run into a disaster yourself, you rush to meet it, and a simple coincidence changes a person's fate dramatically. This is probably what happened to Vladislovas Telksnys. Invited by his comrade Povilas Malinauskas, he met with former ministers of the Lithuanian government formed in the early days of the war between the Soviet Union and Germany. Vladislovas spoke unsparingly about the difficult spiritual and emotional experiences he had suffered in Stutthof concentration camp, the brutal living conditions, the cruel and degrading treatment of prisoners by the Nazis and the killings in the gas chambers. The Gestapo found out about this conversation under unclear circumstances. Telksnys wrote that after two weeks of freedom, his house was searched. His wife informed him that armed Gestapo officers were looking for him. This unexpected news knocked Vladas out from under his feet. He recalled the thought-provoking speech made by the Gestapo when they released a group of press workers: "Remember that the Reich is powerful and that any anti-German action or speech will be severely punished. <...> I would suggest that you think things over seriously and do not provoke our kindness. The second time we meet, the speech will be short!" Then it became clear that his shooting was imminent and it was dangerous to stay in Kaunas.

Vladislovas Telksnys, with the help of his loyal friend Juozas Gražys, acquired a forged passport in the name of Vladislovas Lankaitis. When asked why Lankaitis, Telksnys replied: "I grew up in a village, I am a child of meadows; that is why I chose the surname Lankaitis." (*lanka* in Lithuanian means a *meadow*). The fictitious surname Lankaitis saved him from repeated arrest by the Gestapo and protected him from the eyes of the Soviet security for thirty-three years.

While the whole world was rejoicing that the war was finally over and Nazism had been defeated, the mood in Lithuania was somewhat different. As the Soviet army was approaching Lithuania, thousands of people, aware of the impending danger and fleeing the Soviet repression and terror they had experienced in 1941, set off on foot for the West, having packed their belongings into trucks or in horse-drawn carriages. It was a spontaneous and unplanned flight from their homes. The possibility of fleeing Lithuania did not rest easy for Vladas Telksnys: what to do? What will happen next? To flee where he was starved to death, bullied and tortured and miraculously escaped the crematorium fire, or to stay in Lithuania, where the Soviet security might open a case against him accusing him of anti-Soviet actions, and then he would go to the Soviet camps for sure... His relatives advised Vladas to flee, but as a true patriot of his native Lithuania, with his roots firmly planted in his homeland, he felt that he would not be able to break away from it. The fictitious surname provided him with confidence and inner peace.

Life in the post-Soviet war conditions brought the Lithuanian nation many great trials, hesitations, distractions and anxiety about tomorrow. The Soviet government, which had established itself in the villages, fiercely fought against the "bourgeois nationalists," whom the Lithuanians called "forest brothers," destroyed long-established Lithuanian traditions and customs and created an environment of accusations, betrayals and fear. When forced collectivisation began, overcrowded echelons of people moved to the East, to the far regions of the Soviet Union with a harsh climate. To the north and east, hard-working and skilful landowners were brought in cattle wagons, while the property they left behind was quickly and gratuitously taken by the Soviets.

From 1944 to 1977, it was not Vladislovas Telksnys, but Vladislovas Lankaitis who worked as a nurse in Saločiai, Sidabravas, Šakyna and Raudėnai. Those were the years of exile. Not in Siberia, not in a foreign land, but in his homeland. He had to be cautious and move from one village to another,

accompanied by tension and the fear that one day a security guard would come and say: "You are hiding, Telksnys, under a foreign name."

Telksnys wrote emotionally and in detail about his life of tension and turmoil during the first post-war years in his memoirs, *33 Years with a Different Surname*: "A car comes and you tremble, thinking that it might take you away... The horrible word "deport" shocked the whole Lithuania. <...> The cars are buzzing, crammed with the unfortunate. They are accompanied by armed NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) soldiers <...>. Everyone was trembling like an aspen leaf, fearing and waiting for the blast of the rifle butt to shake his door and say: "Skoro atkryvai! ("Open quickly)." <...> The rest - living in fear and uncertainty - increasingly sought "peace" by raising their glasses of "beer", which was stronger and stronger every time."

It was a difficult time, as people had to survive in the crossfire between anti-Soviet partisans and Soviet repressive security structures, where ordinary villagers had to struggle for their livelihoods, choosing sides in clashes between insiders, with some people supporting the Soviet government and others patronising the partisans opposing it. "Some leave, others come," was the conditions of Vladas, the nurse in the village clinic, known to many as "daktariukas," "the little doctor," because he was called upon to help "both <...>. That eternal knocking on the door... Then we even stopped locking the door, let them come and go as they please..." He had to find the right words with everyone and, above all, not to give away his true identity.

Vladislovas, who actively participated in the activities of the Ateitis organisation in inter-war Lithuania and endured the severe blows of fate during the first years of the Soviet occupation and the occupation of Hitler's Germany, remained firm in his conviction that God leads us out of any situation if only we obediently follow His guidance. The Spirit of God strengthens faith, gives endurance and strength to never give up, calls us to love and inspires us with hope that " He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak from Himself, ; he will speak only what he hears, and he will

tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13-15). "Every Sunday I go to church (with my wife Danutė). We ignore the warnings and the threats. The church is full of people <...>. It seems that only faith gives people patience in suffering and persecution."

In addition to his direct work in the clinic, his second job was at the House of Culture, where he found retreat, refreshment and joy. A fighter with a rebellious soul and the one who could not tolerate negligence, Vladislovas did not intend to remain a passive and indifferent observer of the damaging effects of the Soviet occupation on the countryside and the rampant drunkenness. He began to think: "How can we save the people who were falling into the abyss of drunkenness?" A pen became Vldas's weapon: "In my spare evenings, I write until midnight what I see, what I feel sad about. And against that monster, alcohol, the 5-part drama "Be Damned" was written." Later on, the plays "The Judgement is Coming", "My Anuprėlis", "Alcohol is not our brother" were created. Vladislovas's plays were characterised by a light humour and publicised the vices of the Soviet village: alcoholism, plundering, lack of culture, indifference or negligence at work.

On the cultural front, he worked together with his wife Danutė Banionytė, the sister of actor Donatas Banionis, an enthusiastic helper, author of unique ideas, performer of the main roles and make-up artist. Together with the actors, she designed and built the scenery, taking the props needed for the performances from the everyday home environment. The actors had more trouble with clothes as they had to make their own clothes for the play or borrow them from neighbours. They used to rehearse in unsuitable rooms with a kerosene lamp because electricity in Raudėnai was not available until a decade later. The Raudėnai amateur theatre visited cultural houses in nearby and distant settlements and even reached cities such as Šiauliai, Vilnius and Klaipėda. At the end of the performance, the folk performers were not let off the stage for a long time by stormy applause, which turned into an ovation - "Hurray, Raudėnai!" Watching the performance, the audience recognised the drunken neighbour, the wife would recognise her husband and even themselves.

Probably, after the performance, more than one of them thought about it, felt ashamed and decided to turn to a straighter path. "Žaldokynė" by Borisas Dauguvietis directed by Vladas took the second place in the Lithuanian competition of amateur art groups. Raudėnai residents were proud of the theatre's achievements and the director, saying that Panevėžys had a famous theatre director, Miltinis, and Raudėnai has Vladas Lankaitis.

The ethnographic ensemble "Subatvakaris Raudėnuose", created by Vladas and Danutė, promoted the traditions and customs of Lithuanian national weddings and festivals. In 1976, "Subatvakaris Raudėnuose" performed at Vilnius State Philharmonic. The concert was broadcasted on television, thus opening the treasure chest of priceless spiritual values of the old inhabitants of Raudėnai region to all Lithuania. While writing scripts, Vladislovas used to travel to the older generation of the local inhabitants in his spare time in order to collect and record various ancient Lithuanian rituals, customs, oral art and traditions, highlighting their symbolic significance. The performances of the ethnographic ensemble and the drama theatre in Lithuanian villages, small towns and cities promoted Raudėnai region, revived historical memory, raised the national spirit and strengthened the sense of community. During the darkest decades of communist rule, Danutė and Vladas Telksniai preserved and cherished what had always been dear to Lithuanian nature, what Lithuania had been creating for centuries for the treasures of its people's culture. The continuity, inheritance and dissemination of traditional Lithuanian values strengthened the personal identity of the individual and built a bridge to the restoration of Lithuania's independence.

Dedicated to their work, Vladislovas and Danutė achieved that Raudėnai personal health care institution would become a model not only in Šiauliai region, but also in Lithuania under the supervision of the Ministry of Health of that time. Who can count the number of kilometres that Vladislovas walked in the rain and cold to visit babies and children, to vaccinate them and monitor their development. Neither working hours nor days off were thought about: "I have a lot of work to do, I can barely get around. Sometimes there is no time

to eat in peace. There are some patients in the clinic, while others are calling me to come to their home; so, I rush from one carriage to another one."

Life in Raudėnai continued, the tension subsided and thoughts of moving elsewhere disappeared: "I fell in love with these people; they have replaced the real brothers and sisters that I had to forget. Their misery and suffering became my misery, and I wanted to help them as much as I could."

It was an early morning in July, 1974, when the telephone in the clinic rang, and was an unexpected twist of fate that fundamentally changed the rhythm of Vladislovas' stable life. When he picked up the phone, he heard a commanding voice: "This is Interrogator Paulauskas of Šiauliai Security Committee. Please come to the Security Office in Šiauliai tomorrow."

Thirty-three years of secrecy was revealed. Telksnys, who confessed to changing his name, was closely monitored for three years, and his sisters were also interrogated. After a long investigation, and interviewing many people known and unknown to Vladas, the Soviet security left him in peace. In the late Soviet era, as mass repressions subsided, amnesties were granted for the change of name and for the anti-Soviet resistance in 1940. This also affected Vladas. The threads of Vladislovas's life, which had been intertwined in a Gordian knot, were finally untied. In 1977, Vladislovas received an order to withdraw his passport under the name of Telksnys and leave Raudėnai.

V. Telksnys and his wife Danutė returned to Kaunas. They settled in Vilijampolė, Vidurinės Street 13-1. The flat was located in the same house where the President of Lithuania, Aleksandras Stulginskis, and his wife, Ona, had lived after returning from exile in 1958-1960. "Apparently, it was God's will that I should return to my city, Kaunas. It was only then that I felt I was living again..." - Vladislovas wrote in his memoirs.

The path of Vladislovas Telksnys's life, full of challenges, seemed to have turned back the wheel of time and to have blown away the dust of oblivion

from the wounds that were difficult to heal... After many years, he had to visit the places where inhuman suffering, pain and humiliation were experienced.



Raudėnai clinic, where Vladislovas Telksnys worked as a nurse and a head of the clinic from 1952 to 1977. Raudėnai, Šiauliai district, 1965. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



Health check-up of Raimondas, the future film, television and theatre director, the son of actor Donatas Banionis, with Vladislovas Telksnys. Raudėnai, Šiauliai District, 1966. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



"Who can count how many kilometres V. Telksnys walked visiting babies and children..."
Raudėnai, Šiauliai District, 1967. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



Vladislovas Telksnys used various means of communication to visit young patients. Raudėnai, Šiauliai District, 1967. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



Head of the pharmacy Danutė Telksnienė. Raudėnai, Šiauliai District, 1967. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



The decorative sculpture "Mother and Child", erected in the yard of the clinic under the care of Vladislovas Telksnys, was in harmony with the well-groomed surroundings and gave a symbolic meaning to the medical institution. Raudėnai, Šiauliai District, 1967. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



From left to right: Danutė Telksnienė, her brother actor Donatas Banionis with his wife Ona and Vladislovas Telksnys. Raudėnai, Šiauliai District, 1966. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



Digging potatoes. On the right, Danutė Telksnytė (Marcinkevičienė). Raudėnai, Šiauliai District, 1965. Collections of Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum (KDFM 36391)



"Žaldokynė" by Borisas Dauguvietis directed by Vladislovas Telksnys took second place in the republican competition of amateur drama groups. V. Telksnys played the role of Sapiega (above, on the left); D. Telksnienė next to him. Raudėnai, Šiauliai District, 1969. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



The play directed by Vladislovas Telksnys based on Julia Žemaitė's short story "Apsiriko" took the second place in Šiauliai Region competition of amateur drama theatres. Raudėnai, Šiauliai District, 1967. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



Danutė Telksnienė's ethnographic ensemble "Subatvakaris Raudėnuose" dances "Klumpakojis" at the Vilnius State Philharmonic Hall. The concert was broadcasted for the whole Lithuania. Vilnius, 1976. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė



Service certificate No 1158 of 1 February 1980 issued by the Ministry of Health of the Lithuanian SSR to Vladislavas Telksnys with the surname Lankaitis. Jonava, 1980. From the personal archive of Danutė Marcinkevičienė