

## Partisans' glory and honor as I see it

My generation was born and raised in free and independent Lithuania. They are young people who have not experienced the cold of sleepless, vigilant winter nights, which percolated into partisans' bones, lying on the ground for hours, waiting for or hiding from the enemy. Teenagers haven't experienced that sweet sense of freedom after having suffered what the fighters have experienced. I love Lithuania, I feel the duty to cherish the homeland history, language and customs. Dzūkai are famous for being one of the first who started bringing together military compounds of freedom fighters. High Lithuanian army officers, teachers and others were bringing together and centralizing the resistance movement. Dzūkians were the first to mention freedom fighters by the name of partisans. The memory of the heroes is not completely forgotten, it is still being captured in various events and burns in our hearts.

On March 4th Alytus Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas Gymnasium was celebrating the school day, during which the 98th General Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas birth anniversary was mentioned. For weeks we had been rehearsing poetic musical composition, "I am with you," prepared by the Lithuanian language teacher Rita Ališauskienė, so I was looking forward to this day - after all, I will publicly deliver a speech to commemorate the heroes who died. Everything happened at the memorial to remember the dead fighters for Lithuanian freedom. There gathered many distinguished guests: Alytus Mayor Vytautas Grigaravičius, Varena District Mayor Algis Kašėta, Majors Inga Jancevičienė, Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas fellow, Juozas Jakavonis-Tiger, and others. „It is marvelous to see such well-known and important people coming to these commemoration celebrations“, I thought to myself. As the musical composition starts, my schoolmate, standing near me, pronounces his first words, everyone is listening, but I'm still full of thoughts „people for whom the memorials are designated, lived in such a way that their names are mentioned so far. Can there be a greater honor than to be a symbol of their nation's freedom and memory? To be honored every year, even in gymnasium named in favour of one of them“, such perception leads to an even greater pride in Lithuanian freedom fighters.

Honoring the fighters with a moment of silence, as strange mood took me, I started thinking... The former partisans Juozas Jakavonis-Tiger and Jonas Arbačiauskas stand before me. They look like those magnificent antique statues that symbolize the past glory and mighty deeds, power and strength. These heroes, who went out into the woods, were not afraid to die. Seeing as occupants are spiritually and physically destroying the nation, as their hearts were burning with patriotism, partisans took up arms and went to confront the brutal occupation regime, were not afraid of seeing violated human bodies in the street, leaving wives, students, parents, friends, refused to live an ordinary civilian life, knowing that they cannot return, they agreed to make sacrifices for the sake of their

country. This is love for Lithuania and Dzukija land, it is the realization that you are occupied and the attempts to break free from the chains that had been dropped on you. Just like a bird, which is locked in a cage - the desire for freedom still will not disappear. Looking into the already elderly aged partisan's eyes, you can still catch the sharpness, the light of freedom. This is like the eyes which reflect everything from that time. Therefore, these people are living reminders of what freedom is.

Having paid tribute to the memory of the fighters near the symbolic graves we came back to our high school, in which other events meant to honor the partisans took place. We sang the Lithuanian anthem. After some time, Vanagas fellow Juozas Jakavonis-Tiger shared his memories. He spoke of the NKVD ambushes, partisan resistance, interrogation suffering and how he conducted an important task appointed by the commander of the partisans. Having painted these events in my imagination, I realized how difficult it had been under these conditions. Starving and suffering cold, atrocities and sleepless nights, hiding from the enemy and fighting against it. In 1946 on December 8th day Juozas Jakavonis ended his fight, he was arrested in his native village and interrogated using brutal methods in KGB basements and headquarters. In 1959 Tiger returned from Siberian exile to Lithuania, where no one waited with open arms, but Juozas endured it, as well. At the age of the restoration of independence he was reborn too, Jakavonis actively participated in the activities of the Movement of Sąjūdis. They overcame so much, did not live in good conditions, but never complained and remain as strong as steel. I realized that no one can break a spirit of a human who believes in his ideals.

So after the show I realized that the history of the nation's heroes cannot be buried. It is alive and is just beginning to blossom in many different colors, resurrects to new life and for glorious remembrance. All the participants were delighted, enthusiastic pride grew in all of them, the need for freedom and what price we paid for it was pointed out. Although we do not have much information, but I am proud that my mother's uncle was a partisan, because of that I appreciate the sacrifices of these fighters even more. After all, the greatest and noblest dedication you can have is for your own people, your nation.

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