

## Brothers of the Forest

In 1944 a disaster struck Lithuania. After suffering 3 years of Nazi occupation, Lithuania was occupied by the Red Army for the second time. In 1940 we accepted the SSSR ultimatum to allow Soviet troops into our borders and we were seen as cowardly. It was called a tragedy of the Lithuanian army. This time we put up a fight.

In the summer of 1944 the first partisans started to fight back against the occupation. It wasn't a fair fight. There wasn't much glory to it either. The partisans weren't organized, well equipped and, at first, they didn't work together. But one thing united and kept them fighting. The love for their country, the love for Lithuania. The fighting went on for twelve years. The men believed that with the help of western countries Lithuania could regain its independence.

My grandfather Juozas Petraška was a partisan. He went into hiding in 1944 and joined the partisans in 1945. After some battles, he was appointed leader of his group. When my dad used to ask my grandfather about how he stood up to the cold, he would often say: "During the four years I spent in the forest, I never got sick, not even a common cold". He was a good friend of Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, the partisan that our school is named after. In 1949 the bunker, in which my grandfather was staying, was betrayed and found by the soviets. After days of investigation and interrogation he was locked up in jail and at the end of the year exiled to Siberia. Being betrayed wasn't abnormal during that time but it showed how you couldn't trust anyone. He met my grandmother in Siberia and my dad and aunt were born there. They all returned from exile in 1970. As soon as Lithuania regained its independence, my grandfather started working on some projects. His goal was to write down as many memories about his life as a partisan, rebuild the bunker he was captured in and to help the people of Lithuania to never forget the sacrifice of those poor men, who spent years under harsh conditions. And his work was not in vain. How do I know all of this information? Well, recently my class and I decided to go to a field trip to a nearby partisan bunker. I was asked to find more information about it. And when I looked up the names of the men, who stayed in the bunker, to my surprise, I found the name of my grandfather. After that experience, I found out that my grandfather had written an autobiography. It wasn't a long book but it was one of the most interesting books of my life. I realized how quickly we can forget the past. It is vital for us to teach our kids about our past and about the sacrifice the people of our country made.

In the walls and attics of abandoned homes lay hidden pictures of men: dressed in the uniforms of the Lithuanian army, holding guns and bullets. But the most sorrowful things were the empty, ransacked farms. During the fights, twenty thousand partisans died, one hundred thousand people were arrested. Let's do what we can and hope that their sacrifice will not be forgotten.

Vilius Petraška II a

Supervisor: Ramunė Petrosian, English teacher