



Vera Strazdins

December 17, 1923 - January 22, 2022

Vera Strazdins, born December 17, 1923, in Nitaure, Latvia, went to the Lord at her home in Wayne, Pennsylvania on January 22, 2022, with daughter Baiba by her side. Vera was in Hospice Care during the last two months of her life. Our family is grateful for the wonderful attention she received from the staff of Main Line Health Home Care and Hospice. Vera's daughters' families, grandchildren, and great grandchildren were blessed to have visits with their beloved Grandma Omi in the weeks prior to her passing. She was deeply cherished and will remain in their hearts forever.

Vera was predeceased by her parents Helena and Adolfs Gosts, her brother Konstantīnes Gosts, his wife Milda and daughter Diāna, her brother Anatols Gosts, his wife Lena and son Sven, and Vera's ex-husband Edward Strazdins. She leaves behind daughter Baiba Vasys and husband Algis, daughter Anne Schlenk and husband Robert, grandson Brendan Schlenk, granddaughter Andrea Lamb and husband Jeffery, great grandchildren Nikolas, Benjamin and Grace Lamb, grandson Kristian Woodall and wife Pamela, great grandchildren Lincoln, Aliah, Rhodes and Jade Woodall, her goddaughter, and cousin Inese Houlis and family, relatives in Latvia – grandniece Elīna Mālina and family, grandnephew Jānis Iesalnieks, and cousin Inta Malēja and family.

Not many people have a chance to share their life's story following their passing, but Vera was a wonderful writer and unknowingly had prepared the first chapter for posterity. Her story follows in three chapters. The first one was written by Vera herself and the last two chapters are written by her daughters.

CHAPTER ONE

This is Vera's story as written by her in 1996. The language is all her own, exactly as she wrote it many years before memory loss set in. Mother gave me the pages that she had both handwritten and then typed on her old electric typewriter. She told me that her daughters and grandchildren needed to know her history. What a wonderful gift that was and so wise of her to do it. I typed it up to save the document electronically. Baiba Vasys

My parents – Adolf, Oscar Gosts and Helena Proniewitz were married in Vilna, but moved to Crimea where my father worked for the Russian Czar, supervising grounds where the Czar went hunting. My parents had a very good life, but after revolution that crumbled. The Communists many times wanted to shoot my father, since then my mother developed heart disease. The life was very unstable, one day white Russians came begging for food, the next day Communists came threatening life. Finally, they decided to leave everything behind and move to Moscow. Since my father was Latvian, he asked for a permit to go to his native country, but for a year did not get the permit. He worked for the Communists without pay, lived with two boys in the small room, made cigarettes at home with tobacco from Crimea, that my mother sold in the black market and bought food for the day. Finally in one year they could leave Russia. On the way to Latvia, they traveled in closed wagons; many people got sick and died. It reminded me of the movie Dr. Zhivago.

After arriving in Latvia, he got a job with the government as a chief of Forestry region – Virsmezinis. I was born in Latvia, Dec. 17, 1923. I had a lonely childhood. My brothers were grown up and did not live with us. The house was isolated from others, way out in the country. Grammar school was more than a mile away. Imagine walking to school in the winter! Starting in the 5th grade I changed to the school in Riga. I lived in different places – first an internatskola for girls, next my mother and I rented a small apartment, then I lived with my oldest brother, and the last year of high school I lived with my aunt Velta's parents.

All these years I studied piano, practiced every day. These were very good years. Riga had everything – opera, theatre, concerts, and I had opportunity to have them all. We had dances in different high schools. With live bands, we danced on parquet floors, but only until 12 o'clock. We had very nice restaurants and night clubs that I was too young to attend. I remember one name was Alhambra, a Spanish name. My summers I spent with my parents in Nitaure, or on the Baltic seashore with my aunt Alīse, where they had summer homes. The sand was white and the water very clean; it was wonderful! In Nitaure we had a little river – Mergupe – where the water was ice cold, but I was swimming until September. There was also a lake about 3 miles away and I was riding my bike to go swim. I also rode my bike to have piano lessons once a week in Sigulda – about 25 kilometers. There my other aunt, Velta's mother, had a house where they spent their summers. My aunt often made pancakes or something else delicious, and in the late afternoon I headed back home.

My father had lots of gardens, that he loved to take care of, and I helped him. He had two big strawberry patches, raspberries, blackberries, red Johann berries, tomatoes, and all kinds of vegetables. He also grew cantaloupes by the river in the warm sand. Around the house we had lots of different summer flowers that I took care of. I was the "weeder" and the "waterer". We had to carry water from the river by hand!

For many years my father did not want to establish a real home, buy furniture, he said the Communists will come and take everything away. Of course, with years that threat diminished, but in 1939, 1940 it happened again. I remember in 1940, June 14, my father and mother suddenly came to Riga. I was living with my oldest brother Konstantīnes and attending the high school. My father said that one of his employees called him and warned about mass deportations that night, and to leave his home. So, we all left Riga and departed to the Baltic seashore where my aunt Alīse and her husband had summer cottages. We stayed there about a week until the Russians were

leaving and German forces coming in. That night, June 14th there were mass arrests and deportations. Families were separated and sent to Siberia. My parents were very lucky to have the warning. So, we lived through the war years as best as we could. We always had enough food, thanks to the black market, but in the stores, there was a shortage of goods, because the occupants – Russians and Germans cleaned us out.

I met my husband Eduard at the country dance in the summer. He was good looking, honest and I trusted him completely. He was very philosophical about life, and he believed and trusted in God. We both loved music. He played the violin. I played the piano. We attended concerts and theatre and opera. He was as hard-working person, worked nights and went to the university days. He had endless energy. He rode 80 kilometers on a bike to see me. We got married December 19, 1943. It was a cold December day, and we were married in the country church of Nitaure, Latvia. I even had a bouquet of lilacs that our friends brought from Riga. My godmother and aunt donated her wedding dress that was altered for me, since we were not able to buy in the store.

In September of 1944 my life started to slip away. Rumors were that all young men will be drafted, and Russians were coming back. My father suggested that my mother and I leave the country, while we can – via ship to Danzig. Many people were able to go to Sweden, but we were not so lucky. Many fishing boats disappeared in the Baltic Sea due to the weather or Russian submarines.

Eduard was still working, but rumors were right and in two weeks he was drafted into the army. We were separated and while I and my mother were drifting from town to city - we could not get a permit to stay. Finally, my father found us, and we stayed in a small village. This was in Germany. I saw my husband a couple of times in Germany, but when the Russians advanced, we had to leave and always went toward the West where we knew that the Allies were coming.

Miraculously Eduard found us in Neustadt, Germany, not far from Lubeck. He

followed a card that I wrote, and it was displayed on a bulletin board in the Lubeck refugee camp. Meanwhile my father was very sick with anemia. He had the opportunity to go to Denmark where my brother Anatols was. Since my father needed good food and care, we told him to go. My mother and I stayed in Germany, because my husband Eduard had been drafted into the army and after the war, I might not see him again.

We were so lucky after the war to be alive, to have food and shelter as displaced persons (refugees) and that we found each other! Fleeing from Russians and sitting on the train and having attacks by Russian planes, I sometimes thought I would never see him again. While in the DP camps Eduard was not sitting idly by; he was attending Baltic University in Hamburg but soon discovered that he had to change the school to have his degree. So, we packed up whatever we had (not much) and left for the American Zone. – Darmstadt.

We didn't have much. When we were leaving Latvia, you really don't know what to take, if everybody said it will be for a short time only. My mother Helena did not go without pillows and warm clothes She took a down pillow for each of us -- Baiba still has her pillow.

Back to Germany, since we could not get a permit to cross the border, we paid for a wagon and crossed in this way. On a crossing nobody checked or opened the wagon. So, we and a barrel of herring crossed the zone and later Eduard sold the herring and made money. So, the next three years we lived in Darmstadt in houses that during the war were occupied by the German soldiers. Baiba was born in Neustadt on Aug. 10, 1945.

Ed went to school and graduated just before we left for America. We received a certain number of cigarettes for each person every month, but none of us smoked. We sold the cigarettes and paid for Ed's university costs and supplementary food. There was lots of fruit and I remember how Baiba loved cherries, but she did not spit out the pits. She was 2 years old, but she survived!

Ed graduated just before we were able to depart for the U.S.A. A friend of my

family gave us an affidavit for us to be allowed to immigrate to the United States. He was not a prosperous man, single, but he was kind enough to take responsibility for us.

We arrived in Newark, NJ. It was a Polish neighborhood. The air was not clean, and Baiba's clothes were black from the dust in a few hours when she went out to play. Ed worked in Du Pont cleaning giant tanks. In our neighborhood we met a kind Jewish man, who spoke Russian and had lived in Riga, Latvia, for some time. He had a dry-cleaning store, and he was very friendly to us. One day he closed his store and drove Ed to American Cyanamid plant in NJ. That day changed our life! Ed filled out an application and in November he got a job in Stamford, CT. as a chemist. He went on to be American Cyanamid's Senior Research Scientist in Pulp and Paper Chemistry. Later he was known internationally for his patents, research, and many publications.

We lived in Stamford for many years. In 1954 we became naturalized American citizens. We loved our new country! We were so fortunate to be in America. Our children grew up, but that part you know yourselves. My greatest regret -- that I did not achieve more when I was 40 -- finish college and have a future. It was very important to be independent. You must reach always for more, even if you fail, you pick yourself up and continue. I am so proud of my daughters that they succeeded what I did not. Vera Strazdins

CHAPTER TWO

Our family lived in Stamford for many years, first in rented apartments and then eventually in a house of our own. Daughter Anne was born in 1953. We all attended St. John's Swedish Lutheran Church because it was similar to the Latvian Lutheran church. Mother's parents, one brother and his family also came to America to be near us. Pastor Johnson from our church sponsored Vera's father when it was time for him to come to the U.S. from Sweden. Our grandparents lived with us and helped care for Baiba and Annie, while Mother worked. Our grandmother only spoke Russian, so the whole family was

multilingual speaking Russian, Latvian and English.

During the early years in Stamford, Vera worked many jobs to help our family save up money for our own house on Todd Lane. After buying the house in a new development, our father finished off the second floor so that our grandparents would have space as well. We remember our grandmother baking and cooking, and our grandfather tending a small vegetable garden in our yard.

Like that of many wives and mothers, Vera's life centered entirely on her family. She was the mainstay in the background that kept everything at home running smoothly, while her husband was achieving fame in his line of work. She was an amazing cook, a meticulous housekeeper, and the most loving mother two girls could ever have. She went on camping trips and outdoor excursions with our dad and us, overcoming her own fears when our boat was being swamped by water as we made our way to remote islands on the lakes of Maine. Annie and I are sure that probably she would have loved a vacation in some safer spot or even a chance to stay in a nice hotel. But she never complained. So often women do not get the kudos that they should for their contributions, because they go unnoticed. In many ways their contributions may not attract attention, yet they are equally as important as those of their spouses to a family's existence. Her family was everything to her and her children benefited from the love of both parents.

In 1971 Vera and Ed bought their next home in Fairfield, Connecticut. By that time daughter Baiba was married with a family of her own, and daughter Anne was studying at Southern Connecticut State College in New Haven, CT. Vera worked for Union Trust Company as an accountant in the loan department. She was a very talented lady and had an amazing head for numbers. Later Union Trust became known as Wells Fargo.

In 1979 Vera and Ed divorced, and Vera returned to live in Stamford. Despite the divorce, Vera and Ed remained friends and supported each other throughout the years. In 1993 Vera moved to Heritage Village in Southbury CT to be close to daughter Anne, son -in-law Robert and grandson Brendan

Schlenk. There she cared for her little grandson after school and enjoyed time with Anne's family. Living in Heritage Village was a beautiful episode in her life. It was formerly part of the Victor Borges Estate and had picturesque walking paths, swimming pools, gardens, and lovely vistas. She made close friends there and was part of three bridge groups, which met faithfully several times a week for years. Mother was a master bridge player! She took continuing courses on improving her bridge skills, wrote meticulous notes, and put into practice everything that she studied. No one could hold a candle to her bridge skills.

When Anne and Robert moved to The Villages in central Florida, Vera relocated as well. In 2006 She moved into her delightful villa, which had a water view. She loved watching the herons and ducks from her Lanai. She was able to be near her youngest daughter Anne's family and enjoy the mild weather of Florida, as opposed to the harsh winters of Connecticut. Walking every day and swimming in the pools kept her strong. She spent the hotter months of summer visiting with her daughter Baiba at the Jersey Shore.

CHAPTER THREE

In 2012 for health reasons, Vera came to live with her oldest daughter, Baiba, and son-in-law Algis Vasys at their home in Wayne, PA. Baiba was retiring from her work as an educator, and Vera knew that she would never be alone, having loving care and support in her final years. At that time, she was 88 years old and memory loss was setting in.

Moving up north to Pennsylvania also brought the bonus of being able to see her older grandchildren, Andrea Lamb and Kristian Woodall and their children, Vera's greatgrandchildren, on a regular basis. She enjoyed trips to the Finger Lakes to visit them, having made the last visit up north, in July of 2021. And, of course, they made many trips down to see her. Holidays and special occasions were always shared with family. Vera adored her grandchildren and great grandchildren and they adored her! In every way she supported all her loved ones. She always wanted to know who was studying in school, which grade, which college, what courses they were taking and how could she help

them. Vera was also able to visit with her ex-husband Ed, who lived with granddaughter Andrea's family for the final six years of his life before he passed at the age of 102. They had a warm relationship right to the end and supported one another.

In Pennsylvania, Vera became a regular member of the Wayne Senior Center. Along with her dear newfound friend Julia Boyle, she attended exercise classes, played cards, and participated in special events and luncheons at the Center. Card playing was an activity that she enjoyed with family and friends. Watch out! Vera always had the surprise ace up her sleeve. While bridge was no longer in the cards during her final years, Rummy 500 became the game of choice.

Mother also loved the outdoors! We would go for walks in Valley Forge Park whenever the weather permitted. In early years at Valley Forge Park, she walked with her cane but later needed a walker. We took her friends Julia and Beatrice for picnics to the park. Both Bea and Julia have predeceased Vera, but "The Three Musketeers" are probably enjoying their reunion in heaven right now! I wonder if they are playing bridge with post-it notes to remind them which suit is trump?

Even when she was dependent on having a portable oxygen concentrator in her red rollator, (bequeathed to her by Julia) Vera made the effort to walk at Washington's Headquarters, or at the Visitor Center. During the summers she walked at the Lighthouse Park in Barnegat Light. She was always an outdoors girl, telling us how she trudged with her father through the woods and fields of Latvia, finding all the best berries and mushrooms.

A wonderful addition to Vera's life was joining the congregation of St. John's Evangelical Latvian Lutheran Church, in Newtown Square PA. The church community gave her a connection to her Latvian roots and provided a sense of continuity in her life. Her love of God and belief in the promise of everlasting life through Jesus Christ sustained her always. Her mother was Russian Orthodox and as a youngster Vera went both to the Lutheran church and the

Russian Orthodox church. While memory loss and heart disease took its painful toll on Vera's mind and body, the support and love of the Latvian congregation was a comfort to her and her family in these final years.

Our mother, Vera Strazdins, lived an extraordinary life with courage and deep faith in God. Her life wasn't easy, and she had many challenges to overcome. She taught us through her example to be honorable, hardworking people who trusted the Lord. She was modest and unassuming; she never asked for anything, yet gave so much of herself to children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. How can we ever thank you Mamiņa for the love you poured out on us? How can we ever thank you for the patience and wisdom with which you raised us, and for the sacrifices that you made for us?

Until We Meet Again

We think about you always

We talk about you still

You have never been forgotten

And you never will.

We hold you close within our hearts

And there you will remain

To walk and guide us through our lives

Until we meet again.

Rest in peace our Precious Mamiņa

Your loving daughters Baiba and Anne

A memorial service celebrating Vera's life will be held at the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. John in Newtown Square, PA on Saturday, May 21, 11:00 a.m. Interment of her urn will be in a private ceremony at the Latvian Memorial Park and Cemetery in Elka Park, NY on Memorial Day weekend 2022.

In lieu of flowers memorial donations may be made to the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. John P.O. Box 469 Newtown Square, PA 19073
Street address for GPS directions: 301 N. Newtown Street Road, Newtown

Square, PA 19073.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

MAY 21. 11:00 AM (ET)

Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. John
301 N. Newtown Street Road
Newtown Square, PA 19073

Tribute Wall

BA

“ 10 files added to the album Vera's Life



Baiba - February 08, 2022 at 07:35 PM

BA

“ 3 files added to the album Vera's Life



Baiba - February 08, 2022 at 11:37 AM