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**2014 September 13 (paper edition) "Grandson of a Famous Grandfather Taken to his Homeland by Basketball"**

2014 September 17 (web edition) The title has been changed to "P.Kazickas is more interested in needy children than in grandfather's wealth"

by Lina Motužytė

Lithuania, Family, God. This was the order of values in the family of an immigrant from Lithuania, Joseph Kazickas (1918-2014). "And basketball," – adds one of his grandsons, Peter Kazickas (age 21). This game that symbolizes Lithuania, connects the famous philanthropist's grandson who was born on the other side of the Atlantic ocean and visited our country for the third time, - to his grandparents homeland.

To do good, to help others and to share what you have – in the Kazickas family is as natural as to celebrate Christmas. The immigrant from Lithuania, businessman and philanthropist Joseph Kazickas instilled these values and love for Lithuania in his children and grandchildren who grew up in the U.S.

Peter Kazickas is following in his Grandfather's, who passed away this past July, footsteps. "I know you are away, doing Peter things: saving the world, helping kids and stuff, but come back home" – a message on one of the social networks made Peter smile during his visit to Lithuania. Soon he comforted his friend. He stayed in his grandfather's homeland for only three days.

"Grandparents Joseph and Alexandra are still a big part of me, just like Lithuania. Being here in their country, in their home, for me is like a dream come true. They have eleven grandchildren and we all are proud to have Lithuanian blood. We love Lithuania. We do not come here frequently but we'll probably do it more often, especially since we have such a house in Vilnius," –the young man looks around.

He is one of J.Kazickas's oldest son's triplets. Peter, Augustine and Sophie have an older sister Annalina. True, the Kazickas residence in the center of the capital is shimmering with luxury. Peter admits, if he came to live in Lithuania he would look for a different place. "The house is beautiful, but too big for me. I am only 21" – smiles the young man.

This is his third trip to Lithuania. For the first time, he came here in 2001 when his grandparents celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. The whole family took a trip across Lithuania back then. "Grandfather showed us where he grew up, we travelled to the Baltic sea, to Trakai. Much time passed since then. I was just a kid," - P.Kazickas remembers. Five years ago he came to Vilnius to learn the Lithuanian

language for a couple of months. Now at the end of August, he came just for a couple of days, to start a new Kazickas charity foundation project.

### **Basketball as a Social Tool**

J.Kazickas wanted his grandchildren to be proud of Lithuania, to know its history, to do something for it. He wanted his grandchildren to be involved in the family foundation's work. "Lithuania is my family's pride. Values in our family were sorted like this: Lithuania, Family, God. My grandparents loved this country more than anything. We are proud of our grandparents and of this family. The grandparents founded the Foundation in 2000, in order to give to Lithuania. They wanted us, their grandchildren, to get involved, but we were too young, " – says Peter Kazickas.

To the foundation that supports educational and health programs, Peter Kazickas came through basketball. Along with the biggest basketball school in Lithuania, Capital Basketball School, the Kazickas Family Foundation started a social responsibility project that is aimed at solving suicide, alcoholism and social separation between the healthy and the ones with disabilities.

"The project's purpose isn't to raise another Sabonis, Ilgauskas or Valanciunas. The purpose is to raise a healthy, self confident, life loving individual. We want children with mental disabilities to get involved. In Lithuania, there isn't much talk about them. " – Peter Kazickas explains. His grandfather taught his children and grandchildren to love and to share, and Peter is hoping to pass on these family values to children through the project.

My Grandfather used to say that we always had to give to others, He encouraged us to do volunteer work. One could work in Wall Street and trade stocks, earn a lot of money, but he always had to remember his responsibility as a citizen", - P.Kazickas was sharing his grandfather's thoughts.

Two summers in a row, Peter traveled to Zimbabwe to volunteer. The project in the South of Africa is similar to the one for Lithuania, though problems are different. "Thanks to basketball, we taught children to live, to protect themselves from AIDS, HIV, drugs, encouraged them to learn. Children who came knew that they were not going to learn just to play basketball, " - the young man explained.

Volunteering is going to be taught to the children who will participate in the project. Students who will be most socially responsible, who will be successful in academics, and be good basketball players will get an award; for example, a ticket to the "Lietuvos Rytas" basketball game. The Kazickas Charitable Foundation works with the NBA and NBA reps' visits to Lithuania or Lithuanian students trips to the NBA games in the U.S., are in the future plans.

### **Wants to Work With Children**

The young man who's been playing basketball since childhood, represents the Hamilton College basketball team. He has only a year in college basketball but is not thinking about a professional basketball career. Unless, by a miracle, he would be invited by one of the Lithuanian teams. "That would be unbelievable" – he smiles.

Peter is not going to part with basketball. After he is done with college he wants to train children. For that reason his work in Zimbabwe and in Lithuania was good practice. "I get along with kids very well. I love working with them. I hope they like being with me as well. The Zimbabwe experience had a huge impact on me. I understood how unbelievable a sport could be and what it could give to people, " – P.Kazickas said.

Although his grandfather was a golfer, he could talk to his grandson who adored basketball for hours. "He would e-mail me information on the Lithuanian national teams, on the Youth basketball teams. He knew that my brother and I were interested in basketball and encouraged us to be interested in Lithuanian basketball. He knew everything about it, " - remembered Peter.

### **Fans in Lithuania are Special**

Which team did he support when last week, Lithuania played against U.S. in the World men's basketball championship in Spain?

"I supported Lithuania. I love American basketball, I like NBA games, the USA team is very strong, but Lithuanian basketball has more fight, especially once you know its history. I am American. I grew up in the U.S., I grew up here, but my blood is mostly Lithuanian. I am proud of it. The Lithuanian flag is hanging in my room. Lithuanian flags are on all of our cars. It's a small country that achieved so much in basketball. I am so proud when Lithuania wins over the U.S. in anything."- said P. Kazickas.

During his visit that lasted only a couple of days, the young man saw one more dream come true. He went to Kaunas "Zalgiris" arena where the Lithuanian National team played a friendly game against Slovenia. "It was amazing, the best game I have ever been to, the most emotional one, having in mind that the Lithuanians didn't play their best but won. Still amazing. The ambiance and support was better than I've seen in the U.S. All the fans were jumping up with such passion and were united in chanting "Lithuania". I have never seen anything like it," - he smiled.

### **Grandfather liked golf**

"Peter, you like basketball but what will happen once you are 50?" – the young man remembers his grandfather's words with a smile. In the Bahamas where his grandfather had a house, he loved playing golf and wanted his grandchildren to like it too. "It was the only thing he pressured us about. He would say: "Look at me, I am

90 and I am still playing golf.” He would explain to us that on the golf course one can meet people, make business deals, and have fun.”” - remembers Peter.

### **J.Kazickas had a special bond with his grandchildren**

“He could affect other people’s lives without them realizing it. It would take you only a few minutes to spend with him and you would realize how special he was. He would spend time talking with me about how to live, how to treat people. For all good things that I have done in life or will do, I am thankful to my grandfather. He always made other people feel special. It didn’t matter who one was, a director of a big company, a housekeeper or a waiter. It didn’t matter. Once he met a person he never forgot about him or her. He would remember details about that person’s family, children. He remembered details about my friends whom he met just once. He made people feel special. If I could choose whom to be, I would be like him. I try to live like him. My Grandfather was an unbelievable man, ” - J.Kazickas was being remembered by his grandson.

### **There are no bad ideas**

Love for Lithuania is not the only legacy left by the philanthropist and businessman J.Kazickas to his grandchildren. “Once he said to me: A good man is a happy man. It’s the key. Everyone wants to be happy, that’s why one has to do good. It’s simple and great advice. Maybe my grandfather didn’t even understand how much it would affect me. He valued people. He never forgot their names. He never considered anyone to be lower than him. He was very humble and loving. He valued life. My grandfather taught me to be humble, kind, not to think that I am better than others, to be an optimist. I am trying to be at least a little bit like him,” - Peter said.

J.Kazickas did not encourage his children to follow in his footsteps and to be businessmen. The Kazickas family members who were reaching any goals were being encouraged and given advice.

That’s how he raised his children and how they raised theirs. Our parents never opposed our ideas no matter how crazy they were. They only advised us how to make them happen. There are no bad ideas. There is nothing that you couldn’t achieve” – assured P.Kazickas..

One time my friend from Algeria and I came up with this idea of connecting the two biggest towns in Algeria with a bus line, hundreds of kilometers, an eight hour ride. We needed to find a 50 passenger bus. I told about this idea to my grandfather. He gave me a phone number of his friend in Lithuania who had an automobile business. We contacted the person, started calculating the cost of taking the bus to Africa. Finally we got back to our classes. Maybe my grandfather thought it was a good idea or maybe he just wanted to encourage us to pursue something,” - remembers Peter.

He knew that his family would support his basketball project in Lithuania as well.

“I will send them pictures about my work because they are interested in it. Everyone in the family: aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, cousins – everyone feels the family’s support. I am very fortunate that we always support each other,” - P.Kazickas smiles.

### **The businessman never distanced himself from his homeland**

The Kazickas family left Lithuania at the end of the war in 1944. They left Germany three years later for the U.S. J.Kazickas graduated from Yale University with a Ph.D, became a successful businessman, but has never distanced himself from his homeland.

Once Lithuania regained its independence he created the first mobile phone company “Omnitel.” His purpose was an independent Lithuania. Once it regained its independence he did all he could to get the newest technologies to it so the country wouldn’t be dependent on the technologies of Russia. He was very proud of the telecommunication’s company, because finally the Russians were not able to listen to the phone calls of the Lithuanians. “ – told P.Kazickas.

All the knowledge about Lithuania, the grandson received from his grandfather, who told his grandchildren about its history, fights for independence and encouraged his grandchildren to be interested in all of it.

“Although my grandparents left Lithuania, they never forgot about it. They tried to come back every year. They had businesses there. In Lithuania, they were busy with charitable work. They cared about education, health care, the state of technology,” - he remembers.

Even at 96, J.Kazickas had a very bright mind, was interested in the news from Lithuania and the world events.

“He would often ask me what I thought about world events. He spoke to me before the talks of President of Russia Vladimir Putin and the President of U.S. Barack Obama on Ukraine. He asked my opinion on how this would affect Lithuania, Ukraine, Russia and the World. He was very smart. He always followed the news.” – P.Kazickas remembered.

English translation by Neila Baumilienė, 2014. 09.17.