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# Being a Representative of Lithuania Throughout the World

## Interview with Honorary Consul John Vytautas Prunskis, M.D., FIPP

By Karilė Vaitkutė



Prunskis family: Owen Vytautas Prunskis, Kristina Prunskis, Dr. Terri Dallas Prunskis, and Dr. John Vytautas Prunskis at the top of Ajax Mountain, Aspen, Colorado.

Let us start with the beginning of your family's life in the United States. You were born in Chicago, but your parents came to this country after World War II as Displaced Persons. Could you talk about that?

There is no question that I have to start with my paternal grandparents because they were both deported to Siberia. My grandfather was executed there and my grandmother was allowed by Kruschew to leave the Soviet Union in 1960 through an amazing effort of my uncle Monsignor Prunskis. He left Lithuania right after the first Soviet occupation. The Nazis and Soviet Communists agreed to partition Europe with Poland going to the Nazis and the Baltic countries going to the Soviets. Since at that time, he was not only a young priest but also the editor of a newspaper called "The 20th Century" ("Dvidešimtas Amžius"), he was warned that he was put on a list to be arrested by the Sovi-

ets. The night when he got that information he ran to escape capture. He was helped by an underground organization to get out. The final 500 meters a farmer helped him. The farmer pointed out that in about a hundred meters was the front with the Nazis, and he crossed that border not knowing what would happen to him and if he would be shot or not. Of course, he had no weapons. He was arrested by the Nazis and held for a while in a prison. He told the Nazis that his goal was to get to America to explain what was happening in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. Then they somehow allowed him to get out and he was successful in reaching America. My aunts and uncles and parents fled towards the end of World War II through Germany and then came to the United States. My father completed his medical studies in Lithuania. My mother was a medical student in Lithuania but completed her medical studies in Germany.



Where in Germany did they stay?

Bonn and Berlin. At the Friedrich Wilhelm University.

Do you recall your parents telling you about Lithuania when you were a small child?

At home, we were only allowed to speak Lithuanian. My English was relatively poor. It might still be poor (laughs). When I started kindergarten my English got better because, of course, everybody was speaking English there. Lithuania was an abstract concept to me when I was five or six years old. All we knew was that we had to speak Lithuanian at home, we had to go to a Lithuanian school on Saturdays, and we joined various organizations like Ateitininkai, Scouts, etc. My story is not unique. Many people of my age who settled in this country have similar stories.

Did your parents tell you about the fate of your grandfather when you were a child?

No. Because I don't think they knew. We only found out later. He was executed in 1942, and information was hard to come by during those times. Alternatively, if they knew I was not told about it. I don't really recall it being a topic of discussion. I wish that as a child I would have understood things as I understand them now. I would have spoken with my grandmother and asked her about all the trials and sufferings she went through which I can only imagine. That's one regret I have. But again, when you're twelve years old or fifteen years old, you don't think about these things.

How did you think of erecting a cross for your grandfather in Siberia?

I just felt it was something that had to be done. My friend Antanas Rasiulis who in the Lithuanian Parliament Commission represented the Lithuanians who were living in Russia and served with me in the Lithuanian Parliament, offered that he would help me when we started discussing the concept. One thing led to another. I contacted my sisters and my cousins asking if they would be interested in doing something like this. They agreed. Antanas lives in Krasnoyarsk. He was deported there as a young child with his parents. He then stayed there as some Lithuanians did. What's interesting is that he speaks Lithuanian still. So many children who were deported to Siberia together with their parents do not speak Lithuanian anymore but he does. He



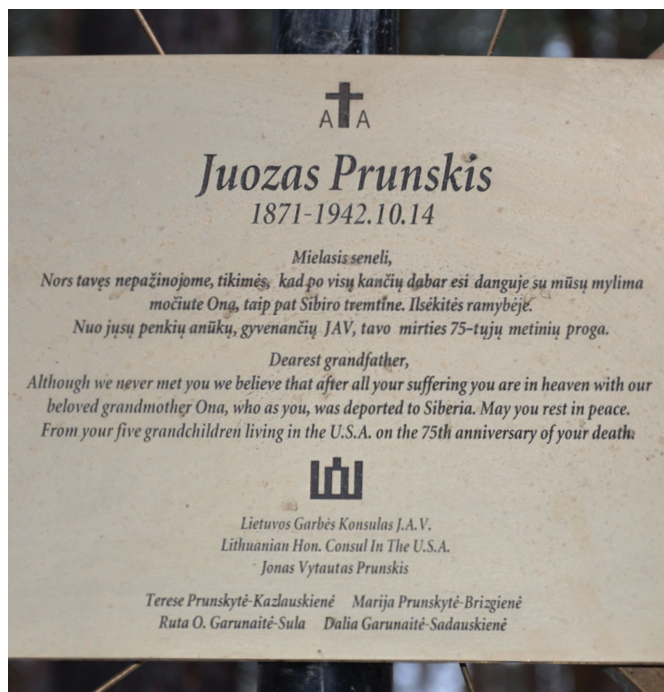
1934 in August, Žvilbučiai Utena, Lithuania. Prunskis family with Blessed Bishop Teofilus Matulionis. Ona (Prunskis) Garūnas (middle right next to little boy), Ona (Gineitis) Prunskis and Juozas Prunskis next to bishop (left and right), bishop in white in middle, Anelė above bishop, left of Ona Prunskienė are Vladas and Fr. Juozas with unknown man in between. Vladas was Dr. John Prunskis's father.

orchestrated the erection of the cross. It is a difficult twenty-hour trip to go to the location and back because the roads in Siberia are not great. There were some crosses already erected in that area but there hasn't been one erected there in many years. We felt it was the right thing to do. On the cross itself we wrote the message in Lithuanian and in English so that those who might not read Lithuanian might understand it as well. The cross/monument was erected 75 years to the day of my Grandfather's execution.



The cross erected by Juozas Prunskis's grandchildren in Siberia where Juozas Prunskis was executed. The cross was erected 75 years to the day of his execution.





Inscription on the cross erected in memory of Juozas Prunskis.



Documentation from Siberia. Cover page on Juozas Prunskis in Russian. It reads: "USSR. People's Commissariat of Home Affairs. Operations Cheka Department. Kraslag NKVD. KGB at the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR. File No. 2981. In Prosecution of Prunskis Juozas, son of Mikolas, article 58-4. Started April 24, 1942. Finished April 24, 1942."



Our grandmother Ona Gineitytė-Prunskienė escaped from Siberia to Communist Lithuania in 1958, then in March of 1960, through relentless efforts of Monsignor Joseph Prunskis, Kruschev released her to come to Chicago. She lived with her daughter Onytė and her husband Dr. Albinas Garūnas. Here lived her other daughter Anelė Prunskytė. First party/gathering in America. Sitting from left to right, Ona Prunskienė (mother), Fr. Dr. Juozas Prunskis, Jonas (Johnny) Prunskis, Jonas Prunskis, Dr. Albina Pundyte-Prunskienė. Standing –Marytė and Teresė Prunskis (deceased Dr. Vladas Prunskis's daughters), Anelė Prunskytė, Dr. Ona Prunskytė-Garūnas. In the back stands a boy, Dr. J. Rainys.

While you were growing up in Chicago and Lithuania was under the Soviets, did your parents express any belief that Lithuania would be free and independent again?

I think they all had that belief, however, I think that they recognized that it might not become a reality. As you know, the schools, the churches, the hospitals, the organizations were built so remarkably quickly because many of them had the realization that this might never happen or it would be a very long process.

You visited Lithuania when it was still under the Soviets.

Yes. Three times. In 1969, 1977, and 1979.

What are your most prominent reminiscences of those times?

In 1969, getting off the airplane in the Moscow Airport and instead of the usual signs that you see "Welcome to..." there were two rows of Soviet soldiers with Kalashnikov rifles that we had to walk through. That was pretty memorable for a twelve-year-old. I also remember that even though it was June I was wearing about four winter coats and shirts on my body that we were bringing to our relatives. It was difficult for people in Soviet-occupied Lithuania to obtain these things. We heard,



and rightfully so, that in the customs in Moscow they would sometimes take things and not let you bring everything you wanted and that you had no recourse. We brought very many suitcases. It was a very long process through customs. I remember my mother had to pay a lot of duty but they let most of the things we brought through. I remember landing in Vilnius and then seeing Gedimino pilis (Gediminas Castle) which is stuff that I only read about in Saturday Lithuanian school. I remember seeing the Cathedral which under the Soviets was not a cathedral but an art museum and that also really bothered me. But what bothered me more was St. Casimir's Church which was turned into an atheist museum. Also I remember that in 1969 we snuck out to where my grandparents' large farm was. It is called Žvilbučiai. One of the friends of my mom's from the time she was living in Lithuania had a friend who was in the Communist party. He accompanied us. "Accompanied", I think, is a two-edged sword. He was watching us but also in case something happened because we were traveling without a permit he might smooth the way. Žvilbučiai was a dvaras or a large farm estate of my grandparents. I had never seen it, I only heard about it, and I was the first Prunskis to be there since June 14th, 1941. I remember we stopped to ask for directions, and the person looked into the car and asked in Lithuanian "Ar čia gal yra Prunskių?" (Is there a Prunskis here?). He was a neighbor who remembered my family. We said "No" since we were traveling without a permit. That was an interesting moment. Seeing the actual farm houses was a memorable

moment. And then, of course, for a twelve-year-old fishing in a Lithuanian lake is a memorable moment. In Kaunas, it was interesting to see Lituanica, Darius and Girėnas plane. Previously I had only read about it and there it was. Seeing Čiurlionis' paintings, selling a stick of chewing gum for 50 kopeks and trading it for a knife, going to a market with a son of my mom's friend, my mom singing with her friends who did not have a chance to escape after World War II. So those are some of my memories as a twelve-year old in Lithuania..

In 1977 I was 20 years old. I remember spending time with my friends on the 4th of July in Red Square in Moscow. You didn't want to fly through Moscow but in those days you had to. It just



John and his mother, Dr. Albina Prunskis in Red Square in Moscow in June, 1969.



John Prunskis in Lithuania with relatives in 1977.

happened that we were in Moscow on the 4th of July. We stayed in the Red Square all night long. And each time they changed the guard by Lenin's tomb, I think it was every 30 minutes or so, we would walk up to the soldiers for some unknown reason and then 30 minutes later we would sit back down. To us, it was a form of resistance. When you're twenty you think of these things. We didn't get too disrespectful because we were being watched all night

In 1979 I went to Lithuania with my medical school classmate Steve Bunting. He was my best friend in medical school. He didn't have any Lithuanian heritage at all but he wanted to come with me to Lithuania. We went through Helsinki on a



train. Again, we were bringing tons of clothes and blue jeans, of course, as gifts to my relatives. They took virtually everything from us. I brought a dress for my niece. She was seven years old. It was a nice dress. I remember the customs official held the dress up and he said in English: "This is going to look good on my daughter". And he took it. That's how they were. They tried just to intimidate you. I remember the microphones, and being followed. You know, being twenty years old you try to make fun of it. For example, we were in the Rossia hotel. It no longer exists but at that time it was the biggest hotel in Moscow. The light wasn't working in our room. We were going out and we said to the walls with "ears": "Could you fix the light?" When we came back, the light is fixed. We also had a little cassette recorder playing rock and roll music. It must have been too close to the listening microphone so in came this woman who was a "monitor" on that floor and she told us "nyet", no, don't play that music. So we had to move our cassette player. And then I remember the day my American friend and I were leaving Vilnius via train. It was a specific day. I think Brezhnev was the Premier then and I remember he said that as of that day everyone whose parents were born in any place that was then the Soviet Union would automatically become a Soviet citizen. That described me. So we wanted to make sure we were leaving Lithuania the day before. Nothing happened. It was just to scare people. We missed our train, of course, so I started to think: "OK, so this might be my new home" but we got on another train that finally got out. We got to Berlin. In those days, we had to go through Checkpoint Charlie. We rented a car. I still remember the barbed wires with plowed fields between East Germany and West Germany very vividly. It was very emotional because I remember I was thinking about my family in Vilnius.

We went through the barbed wire, the German shepherd guard dogs, the East German soldiers with their machine guns, and finally made it to West Germany. Then I could sigh the sigh of relief.

At that point in time, were you thinking about ways to help Lithuania regain its freedom?

I would have to say that it wasn't so much having a specific timetable or date or even a thought that one day Lithuania would be free but a continuation of mine and other people's activities, being active in Lithuanian activities and participating in protests for Lithuania's freedom whenever possible. But I have to say I was skeptical about the concept "Lithuania will be free". It did not mean that it stopped us from doing what we felt was all we could do at the time.

And then 1990 came.

It was amazing! Prior to 1990, 1970 was the first time Lithuania was ever mentioned in the newspapers because of the Simas Kudirka incident. If you go back to 1960s, there was a big story in the American newspapers when my grandmother came. It was a big deal. It wasn't until 1990 that I remember Lithuania being on the TV again! It was so amazing! I used to see the Soviet Lithuanian flag with hammer and sickle on the top of Gedimino pilis. And then, to see the independent Lithuanian flag, to see Lithuanians on American TV -- ABC, NBC, CBS! It was amazing! And people would ask me at work: "Wait, aren't you Lithuanian? What's going on over there?"



Dr. John Prunskis (center), the Chairman of the World Lithuanian Community Commission in the Lithuanian Parliament, 2014.



You are an American doctor, you live an American life. How did you decide to be involved so heavily in Lithuanian affairs?

It just started to grow. It had to start with my parents, with me visiting Lithuania three times. It also had to start with my wife Terri who is not Lithuanian. Before we got married I said: "We have to talk about something. I know you're not Lithuanian but it is really important to me for my kids to speak Lithuanian." And her answer was the best answer in the world. She said: "It's really important to me too." So that was easy, that was it. It grew slowly. Just like my activity in Lithuanian affairs and with the Lithuanian Parliament/World Lithuanian Community Commission. I never dreamed of running. I remember in the first session that I had with the Lithuanian American Community meeting in Denver where I was elected as the representative to Parliament, three people surrounding me saying "We want you to run for the Lithuanian Parliament World Lithuanian Commission. I didn't even know what that was. I just knew that there were ten candidates. I asked "Why?" and they said: "We know you would be good." And that is how it started. It was initially with zero knowledge of the Commission but I am thankful that they trusted me and I am really thankful that they pushed me to do that. I also have to thank my mom, who among other things, founded Lithuanian Orphan Care. She was tireless in her efforts to make a better life for Lithuanian orphans.

What were the most important things that were achieved during your term on the Lithuanian Parliament/World Lithuanian Community Commission?

Dual citizenship is one of the most important issues. I am a dual citizen by law, however, I absolutely understand how difficult it must be for someone who was born in Lithuania and then to lose their Lithuanian citizenship when taking a new country's citizenship. So even though it did not affect me personally, I and our team did all we could, our team did all it could to make sure we would steer this whole concept away from danger and hopefully towards a good result which was that anyone who prove they or their ancestors were citizens of Lithuania between the two world wars when Lithuania was independent, would have a right to dual citizenship. I am no longer active in the Commission and one of my regrets is that right now the new Commission was unable, unwilling or not aware of the danger of not stopping or advising the Parliament to not send the citizenship



Lithuanian ski group in Heavenly Valley, California with Honorary Consul Dr. John Prunskis.

issue to Lithuania's Supreme Court because this is now almost an insurmountable hurdle. But more important than that, I see that this citizenship referendum may be tearing the country apart. It's going to be torn not only by the internal forces but external forces from non-friendly countries that are going to take advantage and try to draw a wedge amongst Lithuanians. That is what hurts me. So that is one thing. Stopping the Parliament literally days, sometimes hours before a vote would be happening, I and two or three other people went to the President of Parliament explaining to him why we feel so strongly that they should not send this citizenship vote to a referendum. Now, unfortunately the Parliament allowed the Supreme Court to rule that the only way for the citizenship issue to be resolved is through referendum which has virtually insurmountable criteria in order to succeed.

My Parliamentary initiatives that were successful sometimes took up to seven years. It was initiated in our commission that Lithuania must meet its NATO obligation of 2% of its GDP going to its defense. We were the first ones to bring that officially to the Parliament. At that time the Conservatives were in power. They didn't really want to deal with it. Then the Social Democrats were in power. They wanted to deal with it a little bit more. As the momentum grew, we brought it up five times. Two times when I was just a member and three times when I was the chairman. We just would not let it go. You have to understand, the members of the Parliament would be saying: "You keep bringing the same thing back". Well, we would not be bringing it back if you would change it and if it wasn't so important.

The second success was changing Labor Code. When you look at many things you think they have always been like they are now. Regarding the Labor Code, we brought it back time



after time because in our discussions with businesses both, in Lithuanian and outside Lithuania, we realized that investors like Lithuanian workers, they like Lithuania but the bureaucracy, and the rules were stifling their investments in the country and they would go to other countries to set up and grow their businesses. Lithuanians, as we know, emigrate because there is better opportunity in other countries. So reform of the Labor Code was something that we brought to the Parliament as necessary for Lithuania's survival.

A third success during my chairmanship was that after identifying that Lithuania was the third highest consumer in the world of alcohol per capita we caused the issues surrounding alcohol to change. The alcohol industry (beer and spirits) have a strong political influence because of financial support to politicians. It was an uphill battle but we assembled a team of physicians, clergy, social workers who were passionate about this issue and we started the process of identifying what we could do to help this issue. It is remarkable that in January of 2018 all these three projects hit. In January of 2018 advertising of alcohol is banned on any media: internet, billboard, newspaper, television. So those are probably the biggest three successes.

You are also Lithuania's Honorary Consul in Aspen, Colorado. Is that connected to your being the Chairman of the World Lithuanian Committee?

It is a separate thing. As a matter of fact, when I was running for re-election in the Parliament Commission I also became the Honorary Consul. There were people who were whispering: How can he be both, a diplomat and an elected official? I understand that people are people, politics is politics, and election opponents will say certain things. There was a discussion with Ambassador Žygimantas Pavilionis. We have a home in Aspen. One of the requirements of being an Honorary Consul is that you have to have a home in the area you will serve. We are there frequently. Aspen, as you know, is a center where politicians, actors, artists, CEOs, businessmen, and leaders come from all over the world all year long. It is this wonderful goulash of people who do interesting things. We were the first diplomatic mission to be approved in Aspen. At that time, Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State. I don't know Hillary but there were people who knew me and Hillary, and they told Hillary that I was the right guy, this was the right place, this was the right time, and she signed off on it. I am thankful to her for that.



Vilnius University Medical School and Chicago Medical School representatives. From left, Ben Juri, Drs. Terri Dallas and John Prunskis, Dr. Vaiva Hendrixson, Drs. Herena and James Record, Mr. and Dr. Vaidya.



And the rest of it was a pretty straightforward process: you go through a background check, then the senior Senator of Colorado approved my appointment.

What are the main activities of the Honorary Consulate in Aspen?

The main activities are to continue to elevate the awareness about the name of Lithuania, answer any questions about business opportunities in Lithuania and just being a representative of Lithuania, not only in Aspen but throughout the world. Obviously, since I am the highest ranking EU official in Aspen, if anybody loses their EU passport in Aspen, I can give them a letter of transit but that has never occurred. And then, of course, every year I have a Lithuanian independence celebration where I would have a guest of honor. I have been fortunate that in the past years the Lithuanian ambassadors have come, this year the Consul General in Chicago will come. We invite local community leaders, politicians, business leaders, and members of the Lithuanian community in Colorado to attend. The Colorado Lithuanians always bring a šakotis (traditional cake of celebration), the children dance and sing, and we have a good time. It seems that you don't have to be in Aspen to perform as an Honorary Consul of Lithuania. Wherever you go and to whom-ever, you speak, Lithuania is always on the tip of your tongue.

Please tell us how did it happen that Vilnius University Medical School and Chicago Medical School signed a treaty of cooperation.

I am a Clinical Professor at the Chicago Medical School. We have physician residents who rotate through our pain clinics, the Illinois Pain Institute, and every year there is an annual faculty appreciation dinner because it's a volunteer effort on our part, we don't get paid. I had an occasion of meeting the Dean, Dr. James Record, the head of the whole school. We somehow connected on a personal level, I wanted to know more about him, and I spoke a little bit about Lithuania. And by the way, frequently when I wear a suit, I wear my Knight's Cross on the lapel. President Grybauskaitė knighted me several years ago. I wear it because sometimes it prompts questions. People would ask what my Knight's Cross represents, and then I would just start talking about Lithuania. So I asked Dean Record if he would be interested in creating a formal relationship with Vilnius University Medical School. And he said: yes, absolutely. He said that right now they had a formal relationship with a university in Austria and they were actually looking to expand. Then I called my contact at Vilnius University, Dr. Vaiva Hendrixson, and asked if Vilnius University would be interested. They said: yes, absolutely. There were a few Skype conversations between the schools where I was involved and then they continued on their own. And so now, starting this year, medical students from Vilnius and medical students from Chicago will be officially able

to get accreditation for their studies, and then also professors, and the way the agreement is written, also general research together if that opportunity presents itself.

American students will not have to learn Lithuanian in order to go and study at the University of Vilnius, will they?

Why not? Right now there are about four hundred foreign students from all over the world who study medicine at the Vilnius University in English. They are also learning Lithuanian. I was sent a videotape of their efforts and how they start to speak simple phrases in Lithuanian, for example: "I want to order a pizza", "I want to order this or that"... I think it would be helpful to them to learn some Lithuanian.

Let us talk about your medical specialty – interventional pain treatment. You started with one pain clinic in Illinois and now you have eight clinics. How did this happen?


I met Terri who later became my wife when she was recruited to be the Chairman of the University of Chicago Pain Program. When I went out to practice we were not married yet. I was practicing as an anesthesiologist and in the evening I would have patients come see me for pain problems and I would perform procedures for back pain, etc. I got so busy that it was just physically impossible to do both. So I spoke with my wife and asked her if she would be willing to do something that has never been done before. And of course, she was already pregnant with our first child which is perhaps the worst time to start a business. But we did it. Imagine, 25 years ago physicians and the public really did not have an idea what we do but it was growing and growing. One of the things that we never did was widely prescribe opiate narcotic pain medications. Now it is a big epidemic in the United States and that is why now I am in discussions with certain people in Washington about how we might be able to fix some of these problems.

You are among the Top Doctors in the nation as selected by the Castle Connolly Medical Ltd. You have been selected the best doctor in your field for eight years by your colleagues. Please tell about that.

It is an anonymous vote that happens every second year and I am very fortunate and feel blessed that my colleagues voted for me eight times.


Nowadays some doctors don't seem to have a lot of time for patients. They seem to be busy with filling out forms or on computers while they are talking to their patients. When a doctor leaves after fifteen minutes with a patient, sometimes the patient is not even sure if the doctor heard him or was even listening to him attentively.





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Newspaper clipping from New York Times.

What makes a good doctor?

What makes a good doctor is both, internal and also external. Compassion, knowledge, and medical skills are key. There are forces that help or prevent someone from being the best doctor he could be for his patients. Let's go back to the narcotic issue for a second. It is much easier for a doctor to write a narcotic for someone who has pain than dig deep into what is causing the pain. In 2007, I introduced legislation in the State of Illinois to monitor if a patient is getting narcotics from more than one doctor. It took about four years for the legislation to pass. One thing I learned in politics is that you have to be patient. You can be passionate but you have to be patient and not take things personally. Finally, in 2011 it became a law. There is now, as a result of this legislation, a data bank where a physician or a pharmacist can look up if a patient is getting narcotics from multiple physicians. It is interesting because it is one of the last laws that Governor Blagojevich (you know Governor Blagojevich, don't you? He is in prison but in Illinois, every second Governor goes to prison, you know that right? It's a fifty/fifty chance.) So anyways, it is one of the last things he signed before he went to prison and it's a good thing. In regards to what makes a good doctor, I think it is listening to your patients, ordering appropriate testing, and having a strong skill set. The typing or the electronic medical record issue, in my opinion, in most specialties, is hurting that relationship. Electronic medical records is now a multi-billion dollar industry with huge lobbying in Washington. As you said, some doctors have lost the ability to communicate with patients. Even my own doctor is typing all the time I see him, and I don't know what he is typing. We are now in midst of an extremely active discussion in the medical community to get rid of those electronic medical records. In our practice, we have gotten rid of the electronic record. We speak into a recorder in front of a patient and the patient can hear everything that goes on his record. Hospitals get a huge financial incentive to use electronic medical records which in my opinion is making health care worse.

You are also involved in stem cell research.

There are many types of stem cells. We are doing something that is called autologous stem cell research which means the stem cells are coming from the patient and go back to the same adult patient. So it is not controversial. We don't see anybody who is under 14 years old. It is an approved research study. The group that we are affiliated with has now deployed stem cells in over seven thousand patients. We are injecting stem cells directly into joints. If it is an internal organ where we cannot safely inject, for example, the lungs, the heart, the intestines or the brain, we deploy them intravenously. We are offering stem cell therapy for joints, gastrointestinal problems, heart and lung problems, post concussion therapy, eye problems and more.



And what does that do for a patient's disease, his condition, his body?

A stem cell by design has not differentiated into anything. Mother Nature designed stem cells to turn into whatever tissue they are near. We have these stem cells in our body in several places. They congregate near fat because the fat is very rich in nutrients. They also are in bone marrow because it is rich in nutrients. If we harvest those stem cells, purify and concentrate them and deploy them in the body where the body is not used to seeing them, stem cells by design will go to wherever there is inflammation to repair and replace the tissue. So for example if someone has a knee problem or a hip problem and we deploy it, it will cause the cartilage to grow again, it will turn into cartilage or it will stimulate what is left of the cartilage to start growing. It's not a magic medicine. Up to 70 % of patients will get a good benefit, 30% will not. It takes up to nine months to see a result. These are cells. They have to divide, divide, divide. We tell patients that they have to be patient and wait up to nine months. But it might help for many medical conditions, including head trauma, heart trouble, lung, intestinal problems, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease. We are using stem cell therapy for many medical conditions.

What is your advice for the young generation of Lithuanians and Lithuanian Americans as far as the relationship with Lithuania?

My advice might not be for everyone but it was important for me. Since we do not live in Lithuania, and marriages between Lithuanians and non-Lithuanians occur, and marriages between Lithuanians who have different viewpoints occur. I believe, it is important that their children speak, read and write Lithuanian, I think that discussion needs to be had long before the wedding date. For the first five years of my married life, my wife had no idea what I was saying to my children because it was a hundred percent in Lithuanian. So that was a difficult thing for her, however, she supported it. And as far as whether the fire or the love for Lithuania occurs I would probably think that it would come from the parents because they are the most important people in a child's life.

What would be your advice to Lithuanian citizens all over the world who want to help the image of Lithuania in the world arena?

It is not surprising that a small country of three million people who had been basically imprisoned by the Soviet Union would be affected by that imprisonment. But that was 25 years ago. I do recognize when I speak to people that some of them have a small country mentality. I understand it but I think it is something they don't need to do. You raised a question of the painful past of Jews. World War II is a painful past for Jewish people. It



Dr. Terri Dallas Prunskis and Dr. John Prunskis, founders of Illinois Pain Institute, at the Inauguration of Donald Trump in 2017.

is also a painful period for non-Jewish people. We can't ignore the past, we can't forget it. I try to encourage my relations with the Litvak community. When a Jewish person tells me that his or her grandparents were from Russia I always correct them saying that the czar did not allow Jewish people to live in Russia proper. I tell them they are probably Litvak "Lithuanian". Some get interested in Lithuania then. I explain my grandparents' story and how my grandparents were in boxcars and how my grandfather was executed. There was a lot of suffering on all sides during and after World War II. I might suggest to connect directly the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, Parliament, Genocide Study Center, Vilnius and Kaunas Universities, Ministry of Culture among other institutions and visit them yourself to get a better appreciation of some of the depth and resources they offer.

As far as being a small country, let's talk about Singapore. It has also been under Communist influence, it also has China breathing down its neck but they evolved from it in 25 years. Obviously, there are differences in politics but something has to be learned from Singapore. And I am not the only one who is saying that. Being small does not mean that we have to have an inferiority complex. Singapore went from a third world country to a world powerhouse. Lithuania can also do that, however, it will take much needed political resolve by the Lithuanian Parliament. As Chairman of the Lithuanian Parliament/World Lithuanian Committee I caused resolution to pass stating that Parliament should support legislation to have the friendliest climate for business investment in the EU. The Lithuanian Parliament has not yet fully acted on our resolutions but it needs to.