

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Benedict Zemaitis

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Immigrant Stories* Oral History project

Interview # IM-A-L-2010-030

Benedict Zemaitis, a Lithuanian immigrant to the United States via Bremen, Germany in August 1949, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Immigrant Stories* Oral History project.

Interview dates & locations: June 22, 2010; July 15, 2010

Date: June 22, 2010                      Location: Zemaitis home, Springfield, Illinois

Date: July 15, 2010                      Location: Zemaitis home

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Carol Esarey, ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: Susan Burke, ALPL volunteer

Edited by: Jan Culp, ALPL volunteer

Total Pages: 68 pgs      Total Time: 1:27 + 1:59 / 1.45 + 1.98 = 3.43 hrs

Session 1: Benedict discusses his childhood in Lithuania and war years in Germany

Session 2: Benedict & Vita's emigration to the U.S., marriage & life as immigrants

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on Nov 18, 2010.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in  
Springfield, Illinois.

© 2010 Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

# Abstract

## Benedict Zemaitis, *Immigrant Stories*, IM-A-L-2010-030

**Biographical Information, Overview of Interview:** Benedict Zemaitis was born on March 13, 1933 in Vilkaviskis, Lithuania. His late wife, Vita Zubkus Zemaitis was born on July 12, 1936, also in Lithuania. Both are first generation Lithuanian immigrants to the United States. Benedict relates and describes his and Vita's family experiences as the Soviet Army invaded Lithuania in 1940 and the families risked deportation to Siberian concentration camps. Benedict's family left Lithuania and spent the early 1940s in Wurzburg, Germany where his mother was able to obtain work as an assistant to a German dentist. Benedict describes life in a war zone, surviving on the run between the German and Soviet armies and later, Allied fire bombing raids. The city of Wurzburg was destroyed in March 16, 1945 in an Allied air raid. The family escaped and ended up living in a displaced person's camp in Eichstatt, Bavaria from 1945 to 1949.

The family immigrated to the United States in 1949, settling in Chicago. Benedict met Vita Zubkus, a fellow Lithuanian immigrant, at a sporting event in the Lithuanian community in Chicago. The couple married in 1956. Vita and her family had immigrated to the United States in 1948. In 1956 Benedict began his compulsory service in the U.S. Army, serving with the 101st Airborne Division. Following that, the couple lived in a Lithuanian neighborhood of Chicago, raised a child and pursued careers and interests. Both were excellent athletes. Benedict's career and work eventually brought the couple to Springfield, Illinois, where Benedict worked as chief internal auditor for the Illinois Department of Revenue for 30 years. He also served as an adjunct professor at SSU/UIS (Sangamon State University/University of Illinois, Springfield) MBA program for ten years, developing and teaching three new courses, Internal Auditing, Operational Auditing, and Managing the Internal Audit Function. He achieved the professional designations of CPA (certified public accountant) and CIA (certified internal auditor). Following retirement, Benedict was licensed to practice as a CPA for the Illinois Department of Revenue.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** WWII Soviet invasion of Lithuania; occupation of Lithuania by Soviets and fear of deportation; German occupation of Lithuania; life as refugee in wartime Germany; bombing of Wurzburg, Germany; seeking political asylum to the U.S. from in post-war Germany; immigration to the United States; life as an immigrant in the United States.

**Note to the Reader:** Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

## **COPYRIGHT**

**The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.**

**“Fair use” criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955**