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ANCHORAGE, Alaska (KTUU) - At a sleepy southside home in Anchorage, a group of literary fans gathered to hear a reading from author Laima Vince.

Though she's published many books of her own, this particular reading was not from the catalog of works that she herself has penned, instead the reading was from the book, "The Unlocked Diary: The Diary and Poems of Matilda Olkinaite."

The collection is translated from Lithuanian by Vince but comes from the mind of Olkinaite — a young poet who was killed in 1941.

"I just felt like if I had written my first collection of poems and now I am being led out to the forest to be executed I would want it to be my last wish that somehow my poems would survive and be published. So that was what motivated me was just that I felt it was Matilda's last wish," Vince said.

According to Vince, Olkinaite was a child prodigy who [spoke five languages](#), was first published at 9 years old and continued to write until she was killed by occupying Nazi forces in a forest outside of her village.

Olkinaite was Jewish and during World War II, the Holocaust wiped out around 90% of all Jews in Lithuania according to the [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum](#).

"When we bring the lost talents of the Holocaust back to life through readings such as today we are giving people a voice who had that voice taken away from them through antisemitism, through racism, through intolerance, so I think it's important. I think it's important to give a voice to the voiceless," said Vince.

While Vince is American by birth, her family has deep Lithuanian roots. A long family history ties her to the country, which is why, as Vince explained, in 1988, she attended university in the region.

At the time, Lithuania was still part of the Soviet Union, but the stress of the decades-long Cold War was taking its toll. Lithuania was just one of the former nation states with a strong independence movement.

With a firm understanding of both English and Lithuanian, as well as a writing focus, Vince — via her professors at the time — became a translator for the growing

independence party. She said it is a skill that would eventually aid her in a number of projects, including the translation of Olkinaite's poetry.

The reason for Vince's visit to Alaska was a melancholy one. Her uncle Ray Simutis, who opened Ray's Waterfront restaurant in Seward, passed away this year.

Vince made the trip up for a memorial but took the time to stop in Anchorage for this reading at the behest of Svaja Vansauskas Worthington, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Lithuania.

"I feel like Matilda's poetry needs to be more widely known, to me she's a little bit like the Anne Frank of Lithuania, young, gifted, beautiful, who's life tragically ended when she was very young," Vansauskas Worthington said.

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