

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

**Canada Iceland Foundation Inc.**

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*An organization funded by Canadians  
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to the preservation of their  
Cultural Heritage.*

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## Learn more about the **Snorri Program**

The Snorri Program gives young people in North America, from the age 18-23+, who have an Icelandic background, an opportunity to discover their roots in Iceland during a six-week summer program.

The program offers a two-week "cultural program" in Reykjavik and then a period of three weeks, where participants live and work in an area (preferably) near where the participants' ancestors emigrated.

There were thirteen very enthusiastic and intelligent young people who participated in this past summer's program, eleven of whom lived with their relatives during the work-period. Following their work experience period all enjoyed the fantastic natural beauty of Iceland in a week long adventure tour around the country, and left Iceland with good memories about the land of their ancestors.

If you or anyone you know is interested in applying for the program, the application form has to be filled out and sent before February 1, 2001.

Bestu kvedjur til allra,  
Asta Sol Kristjansdottir, Project Manager













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# The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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Cover: Svavar Gestsson & Guðrún Ágústsdóttir taken at Þorrablot 1999 in Winnipeg.

## THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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## On the Cover



*Svavar Gestsson & Guðrún Ágústadóttir taken at Þorrablot 1999 in Winnipeg.*

# Editorial

by Lorna Tergesen

Since the beginning of the year 2000, Iceland has accelerated its presence in America. The many celebrations taking place are monumental for such a small country. Truly there have been great events to celebrate - 1000 years since the first arrival of Icelanders in North America - 1000 years since accepting Christianity - 125 years since the settling of New Iceland. The presence of a consul general from Iceland in Canada, Svavar Gestsson and his wife Guðrun Ágúst-dóttir, has facilitated the exchange between the two countries. As well, the exuberance of Jon Hannibalsson and his wife, Bryndis Schram, as ambassadors in Washington, has also strengthened the bonds and highlighted Iceland's presence.

There have been opportunities for people all across America to witness and experience the Icelandic culture. Some events have been very high in profile: the visit of President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, the birthday party that was held for Snorri in Ottawa, the visit of Bishop Karl Sigurbjornsson and his wife Kristin Guðjonsdottir and the crossing of the Atlantic by the replica longship Vikingur, with its many stops on the eastern seaboard, so that thousands of people could see it. Smaller but just as rewarding events have been attended by so many Canadian and Americans of Icelandic descent and their friends. It will be a memorable year to look back on as far as accomplishments by the Icelandic community here in Canada too. Monuments were erected in Lockeport and "Markland" in Nova Scotia and Kinmount, in Ontario. The showcase event in Toronto - the Viking Gala was but one of many special parties that were held. The Betel Waterfront Centre in Gimli is completed and the "Valuing Icelandic Presence" campaign at the University of Manitoba is also well under way. An exhibition of valuable manuscripts from Iceland gave many a rare opportunity to ever see such treasures.

Another highlight was the announcement at Islandingadagurinn by Minister Lloyd Axworthy that Canada would at last have a consul general in Iceland. This was great news indeed.

Now the challenge is to keep this momentum moving forward. We must reach out to others who have not yet shown any interest in their cultural background. You can play a role. Please assist us in gifting subscriptions to the Icelandic Canadian Magazine to your family or friends. We are looking for new subscribers and need YOUR help.



Photo by Linda Collette Sigurdson

Lorna Tergesen at the opening of manuscript exhibition, University of Manitoba, October 20, 2000.

## Svavar Gestsson and Guðrún Ágústsdóttir

by Betty Jane Wylie

By this time everyone knows that Svavar Gestsson is the first Icelandic diplomatic representative posted in Canada holding the title Consul General of Iceland and Special Envoy for Millennium Affairs.

Based in Winnipeg since April 1, 1999, he and his wife, Guðrún Ágústsdóttir, might be taking up residence at the first ever Icelandic embassy in Ottawa next April but nothing is official yet. And diplomats never say a definitive (or discouraging) word until everything is official and formally announced!

These diplomatic dynamos have been busy since they arrived, officiating at nearly 200 events in this country celebrating the first European presence in the New World by Iceland a thousand years ago, the millennium of Christianity in Iceland and the 125th anniversary of the Icelandic settlement in

Gimli. Exciting things have been happening in all the provinces from L'anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland right across to British Columbia, all of it produced through the partnership of Icelanders and Canadians of Icelandic descent. The Leifur Eiríksson committee in Iceland and the Government of Iceland have joined forces with many Canadian committees and institutions, like Millennium 125, and all the Icelandic clubs in Canada, individuals as well as corporations.

The beginning of these celebrations was marked with a birthday party on April 6 in Ottawa when the Prime Minister of Iceland, David Oddsson, gave a statue on behalf of the Icelandic nation to the Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien. The statue depicts the first woman of European descent to give birth to a child on the American continent.



*Svavar Gestsson & Guðrún Ágústsdóttir in British Columbia*



*Neil Bardal, Svavar Gestsson, Skarphéðinn Steinarsson from the Prime Minister's office, Alti Ásmundsson from the Foreign Affairs office and David Gislason at the White Rock, Gimli.*

I went to that party. So did children from some of the schools in the Ottawa area. They sang "Happy Birthday" to little Snorri, and we all ate birthday cake. The impressive conclusion of all these celebrations find their fruition fittingly in Winnipeg/Gimli with the formal opening of two buildings partly funded with money from Iceland: one million dollars to the University of Manitoba!

Have you ever thought of exactly what it is a consul does, a real one? Not that Heather Ireland, Jon Jonsson and Neil Bardal, current honorary consuls, are not real or have not served the Western Icelandic community long and faithfully, but they have day jobs. What is it like to be a full-time Consul, a very specific one, in a country like Canada, where Nyja Island was long since assimilated into this hybrid nation. (Or was it?)

Well, for one thing, language is usually a major problem for consuls settling in a foreign country. Not so for our multilingual pair. Both Svavar and Guðrún speak and read English fluently, easily able to communicate with their constituents in Canada whose language is Icelandic - well, sort of Icelandic. (I myself can say hello, how are you, thank you and I have hiccups in Icelandic.) Those

Western Icelanders who do speak Icelandic, unless they have studied it at school, as the children of the first settlers were required to do, speak an Anglicized tongue with lots of English expressions and a rudimentary grammar. Still, our Consul doesn't experience a pressing necessity to learn, say, Portuguese or Finnish, and for that he may be grateful.

As for the Icelandic food here, though we are told it's in a state of arrested development, representing the tastes of our ancestors and not those of Icelanders today - witness the great vinarterta debate - it's not so different from that back home. We Western Icelanders don't eat rotted hakarl (shark), but we still love our skyr, and most festive occasions wouldn't be festive without rúllupylsa and pönnukökur. The world is smaller than it was and tastes are almost universal. Iceland is a modern, sophisticated, European country so there are few cultural surprises for the new ambassador.

In fact, the big surprise, according to Guðrún, was the "blooming cultural life of Winnipeg. It is more" she admits, "than is to be expected of a city this size." She and her husband enjoyed the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra so much they wanted to reciprocate,



*Fjola & Freyja, Kathy Arnason, Guðrún Ágústsdóttir and Snorri & Snaebjorn in Ottawa.*



*Svavar Gestsson, Gudrun Ágústsdóttir, Dalla Ólafsdóttir, Ólafur Ragnar Grimsson (President of Iceland), Adriana Benediktson, Stephen Benediktson, Ornólfur Thorsson (from the President's office), Ómar Ragnarsson a newspaper reporter. Photo taken at Lake Louise.*

and so the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra performed in the Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg on October 5 (supported by the City of Winnipeg and the Icelandic government). Other cultural treats have been taking place all over Canada: Icelandic choirs, puppet and play performances, and so on. Before I dwell any further on that and tell you about Svavar's suggestions for our organizations, let me return to a job description of an ambassador and the other essential quality he must have, besides a grasp of the language. That is a wife.

I had very close friends in the Canadian diplomatic service and in the course of my artistic travels I have been entertained and aided in other countries by Canadian embassies. I have seen close at hand the invaluable (unpaid) services an ambassador's wife renders and not only to her husband. In latter years, these services can no longer be taken for granted. I have heard of diplomatic wives whose husband's postings didn't appeal to them so they sat them out. ("You go

on to Bolivia, dear, I'll see you in three years.") I have seen the effect of a divorce on an embassy when the ambassador was forced to act as hostess. I have seen the sincere but lopsided effort a single woman ambassador contributes. And I've seen the incredibly selfless, creative support a dear friend of mine gave to her husband and her country over ten different postings in the course of his career. Make no mistake: teamwork is important to the consul and his wife. Svavar and Guðrún demonstrate that kind of teamwork. Even at the few events I have managed to attend, I have seen the two of them graciously and it seems effortlessly moving among the people, remembering names, making conversation, giving speeches, dispensing charm. Not only that, they give above and beyond the call of duty. This past summer they volunteered as instructors at the Icelandic Language and Cultural Camp (Camp Ames) and Guðrún worked to get donations of materials (maps, flags, books) from Iceland for the children attending the camp.

No one can speak of an Icelander without mentioning books. The most literate people in the world brought books with them to Nya Island and started a newspaper and a school within the first year of their settlement. The new Consul and his wife brought books, of course, but they have also been reading the works of Western Icelanders, Canadian writers who have been influenced by their Icelandic roots. Guðrún has been giving herself a little course, not only the work of our contemporaries. She says she's impressed with the writing of Laura Goodman Salverson, and of course, of our famous poets, Stephan G. Stephansson and Guttormur Guttormsson. She's been so busy, you wonder how she has found time to read.

Svavar is a career diplomat with a long history in Icelandic politics and international affairs. He was a member of the Icelandic Parliament for 21 years (1978-1999), serving as Minister of Commerce and Trade; Minister of Health; Minister of Social Affairs; Minister of Culture and Education. Before entering politics, he was Editor in Chief of the Reykjavik daily newspaper, Thjodvijiin from 1971 to 1978, published articles in most Icelandic papers, and a book, Perspectives (Sjónarrönd, 1995).

Guðrún, too, has maintained an active career. She is the Vice President of "Reykjavik, a Cultural City of Europe." Various European cities have been designated "Cultural City" since Melina Mercouri, a former Minister of Culture of Greece, suggested it. (Athens was the first city to receive the honour in 1985.) Until this year only one city per year has received the distinction; Reykjavik applied for the Cultural City title for the year 2000. Guðrún chaired the committee for the preparations, convinced that Reykjavik would be chosen.

"We had concentrated on the year 2000," she said, "as it has [such] historic significance."

Reykjavik was indeed chosen, but as one of nine cities because the year 2000 is such a milestone for so many people. The cities are Reykjavik, Bergen, Helsinki, Brussels, Cracow, Prague, Avignon, Bologna, and Santiago de Compostella. Each city has a theme: Reykjavik's is "Culture and Nature," highly appropriate for this elemental land of



Photo by Gail Einarson McCleery  
Svavar Gestsson and Gudrun Augúsdóttir taken at Gimli celebration, October 21, 2000.

fire and ice (all that geothermal energy!). The special events taking place this year comprise the largest cultural enterprise Iceland has ever undertaken, supported by its government and the city of Reykjavik itself in the amount of \$12,000,000 CDN, in addition to other contributions from institutions and individual citizens - not bad for a country with a population of fewer than 300,00 people!

So: language, grace, charm, energy, education, information and hard work, all necessary qualities to fit one for the Consulate. Add to that stamina, poise, and all the instincts of a good host. During the millennium year many Icelanders visited Canada, among them the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson - an official visit, invited by the Governor General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson. Then the Prime Minister of Iceland, Davíð Oddsson, dropped in, at the beginning and at the end of the celebrations. Halldor Ásgrímsson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, came to Ontario in the summer and unveiled a monument at Kinmount, an original sculpture by Guðrún Girgis, specially commissioned. Halldor Ásgrímsson brought with him a very special gift: 500 sets of the Icelandic Sagas to the Canadian nation, to be strategically placed in libraries across the country. (Wish mine was one of them!)

A week before that, Ásgrímsson was on hand to welcome the crew of the Viking Ship, Íslendingur to the coast of Canada. Björn Bjarnason, the Minister of Education and Culture, Valgerdur Sverrisdóttir, Minister of Industry and Trade, Sturla Böðvarsson,

Minister of Transport and Communication, Siv Friðleifsdóttir, Minister of the Environment and the Bishop of Iceland, Karl Sigurbjörnsson, also made visits to Canada during the millennium year. And Svavar and Guðrún were there to welcome them. It has been Svavar's main work to co-ordinate and organize these events through his office and with Guðrún to be the official greeters. That title, Special Envoy for the Millennium Affairs scarcely begins to describe the special events and tremendous activities that have taken place over the year.

It helps that the dynamic duo at the centre of all this activity are good friends as Svavar and Guðrún are. Who better to help us enter the new Millennium for Canada and Iceland?

More than just a smiling figurehead, however, Svavar has hopes and plans for the Western Icelandic community, which will include the entire American continent. Although at present there are strongholds of Icelandic culture in Canada, Svavar comments that we need at least one chapter (club) in each Canadian province, as well as in all the larger cities. He reports that right now there are two chapters in British Columbia, three in Alberta, and one for all of Saskatchewan. He says we need a chapter in Newfoundland, in Nova Scotia (Markland is getting strong), New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. The ICCT (Icelandic Canadian Club of Toronto) is very strong and doing good work, but Svavar would like to see a chapter in Ottawa as well. That accomplished, it will be necessary to connect the chapters so that they interact and co-operate with each other, and then - reach out to the chapters and associations in the United States.

You may be surprised by what you learn, and they may be too. I attended the Icelandic Celebration in Mountain, North Dakota last summer (1999) and was startled by the differences between that and Íslendingagaturinn in Gimli. Of course, Gimli's is the oldest, biggest celebration on the continent. Be that as it may, Svavar thinks we all need to co-operate and reorganize on a national scale. He reports that the Icelandic government has already responded to this need by hiring a special staff person to work at the Foreign Ministry on ties with North American organizations.

The peak of the year was at the Íslendingagaturinn in Gimli, when Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Canada, announced the establishment of a Canadian Embassy in Iceland.

"This is the most important recognition of our work in Canada on behalf of the Canadian nation," says Svavar Gestsson.

Who knows? We may settle once and for all whether or not vinarterta should be iced and whether it should have five or seven layers.

*With files from Logberg-Heimskringla: an article by Gunnar Isfeld, a letter by Guðrún Ágústsdóttir, a speech by Svavar Gestsson.*

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*Friðjón Friðriksson*

*Guðny Sigurðardóttir ca. 1880*

## Emigrants to North America

### Interview with Guðny Friðriksson on the occasion of her 90th Birthday

*by Ingibjorg Jonsson for the Logberg, 1946  
Translated by: Ninna Bjarnason Campbell*

In the fall of 1873, or 73 years ago, many people from various districts in northern Iceland assembled in Akureyri awaiting passage to North America. They had said farewell to their relatives, friends and home towns and were on their way to try their luck in the west. This was the first large group that left Iceland for America - around 160 persons.

#### Young newlyweds

Among these travelers was a newly married couple; they were married on July 10, the day before they left their birthplace Melrakkaslettu in the northern most part of Iceland. The groom displayed a gentlemanly demeanor, and indeed was chosen when he arrived in Akureyri to be one of the three leaders of the group.

The bride was very young, just 17 years old, slender with blue eyes and thick golden hair; and was smiling and gentle. This young refined couple was Friðjón Friðriksson and Guðny Sesselja Sigurðardóttir from Hardbak.

#### 90 years young

This couple was destined to play a leading role in the saga of the western Icelanders. As is well known, Friðjón Friðriksson played a prominent and substantial role in their community life, and was one of the major Icelandic entrepreneurs in the early settlement years, along with his good wife. It is many years since he passed away, but Fru Guðny celebrated her 90th birthday last October 29. On the occasion of having arrived at this stage of her long and remarkable life, I asked her to let me interview her for the woman's column in Logberg. Fru Gudny resides with Theodora Herman, a nurse, at 120 Lenore St. here in the city. (Winnipeg)

They greeted me cordially, and I thought it was especially noteworthy to see how this elderly pioneer woman wore her years well - she still has a youthful figure and is agile, smiling and cheerful. Her memory is excel-

lent and her thoughts are lucid.

"I have done nothing that is worth telling."

"Your life story is in many ways a story of the Icelandic settlement in the West" I said to Fru Guðny. "You could no doubt tell me of many eventful happenings."

"It is now possible to read of the settlement in the Saga of Western Icelanders by Þorsteinn Þ. Þorsteinsson. I have read it all, but that which I have read is correct and understandable. Yes, my husband and I were in the first group that came to New Iceland, but I am going to ask you not to write much about me, my dear. I don't think I have contributed or done anything remarkable in the lifetime - nothing that is worth telling. I was mostly working in the home, and did not have much time to occupy myself with outside activities."

Thus replied this modest and humble settler's wife, she, who in difficult pioneering years created a good and attractive home; raised fine children and was a tower of strength for her husband through the hardships in the arduous pioneer years. As always, it is a certainty that those who accomplish the most, make the least of it.

#### Searching for work

"Where did you set up your first home here on this continent?" I asked Fru Guðny.

"We did not buy a home right away when we came west - far from it!" she replied.

"The first necessity was to get a job. When we emigrants arrived in Toronto, the Group separated. My husband and I went with the group that continued on to Muskoka in Ontario. The other group went south to the United States. We did not stay long in Muskoka because there was not much work. Just when our money was running out, we received a letter from our Icelandic friends who went to Milwaukee, to the effect that



there was greater opportunity for work there than here in Ontario. We therefore set off south and traveled by ship to Milwaukee. We stayed in a hotel there that night, but in the morning when we had paid for our lodgings, we found we had just .15 cents left. Now we were in a predicament!

We did not know where the Icelanders lived, and we had nowhere to turn."

#### Woolen underwear

"Tell her how your husband happened to find the Icelanders" said Miss Herman.

"That was quite funny," said Fru Guðny smiling. "He told me to wait at the hotel. He was going to walk around the town to see if he could get any information about them. He walked the streets for a long time, suddenly he noticed some laundry hanging on a clothesline of a house near by; he felt there was something familiar with this laundry; he saw some knitted woolen underwear hanging there! Yes!! There must be Icelanders there! He knocked on the door and he was right! There were several Icelanders there. A joyous reunion ensued! On the way south they had been in a railway accident and some had been slightly injured and were there under doctor's care. A short time later the doctor came."

Friðjon had learned English and could speak to him and told him of our circumstances. The doctor invited us to stay with him for the winter, but he could not pay us. We nevertheless accepted his offer. Friðjon



*The Fredrickson family, 1898, (rear): Auróra and her husband, Thomas H. Johnson, (front l-r): Kári, Guðný, Haraldur and Friðjón.*

worked for the doctor, and I helped his wife with the housework and benefited much from my stay there, for I learned the language and also the cooking methods used here.

#### First home

In the spring my husband got work in a store and the wages were good. Some time later we received a letter from his brother Arni in Toronto, saying that we should come there, because there was a good job opportunity for Friðjon there. When we arrived in Toronto we bought our first home and Arni lived with us. We did not, however, stay long in that place. After some months we moved to Kinmount. There my husband took over the store for Sigtryggur Jonasson. We left there in the fall of 1875 with a large group of Icelanders heading west to Manitoba with the intention of settling on the land there and establishing an Icelandic settlement on the shore of Lake Winnipeg."

"Didn't you find it tiring to be moving so often?"

"It did not bother me too much" replied Fru Guðny. "I was young and with my husband; wherever he was, that was my home."

#### Trials and tribulations

"Didn't the settlers have many difficulties the first years after you arrived in Gimli?"

"Yes, the people lived through terrible ordeals, but I will say this -" said Fru Guðny, and she emphasized her words-"they showed admirable courage in all the trials and tribulations, and were extremely helpful and shared each other's burdens. It was tragic not to have any milk for the blessed children the first winter; and many young children died. As the winter wore on, many people suffered greatly from scurvy because they had neither enough or fresh food."

"Was it not possible to use fish from the lake, and rabbits from the forest?" I asked.

"No, first of all the men didn't know how to fish through the ice, and secondly they had no equipment to do so. Many had an aversion to eating rabbits - they felt it was like eating cats. I soon began cooking these animals using the recipes I had

been given by the doctor's wife in Milwaukee. It was, in fact very good food."

#### Lord Dufferin

"You must have greeted Lord Dufferin when he visited Gimli in 1877?"

"No, unfortunately I could not; my first child, daughter Aurora, was a newborn. But I could see the reception from the window of our house. The podium was just a short distance away on the same street as the park in Gimli is now. Mr. Taylor's house was very close to ours."

The Friðriksson's home was the first house that was built in New Iceland; it was both a residence and a store. At this historic occasion Lord Dufferin delivered his famous speech, which is still cited in Western Icelandic documentaries. Fridjon Fridriksson translated the speech in Icelandic simultaneously as it was being delivered. Lord Dufferin said, among other things:

"Though you will become British subjects, you need not forget your own time-honoured customs or the picturesque annals of your forefathers. On the contrary, I trust you will continue to cherish for all time the heart stirring literature of your nation, and that from generation to generation your little ones will continue to learn in your ancient sagas that industry, energy, fortitude, perseverance and stubborn endurance have ever been the characteristics of the noble Icelandic race."

#### The Indians

"Were there not many Indians around Gimli when you first arrived there?" I asked

Fru Gudny.

"Yes, there were many." She replied.

"And they were not exactly overjoyed over our arrival because they felt they owned this land. We women were often afraid of them when our husbands were away. I remember I was frightened first when I saw these dark skinned men. I was alone in the store when a few Indians entered. My appearance was likely just as strange to them as theirs was to me. They showed great interest in my hair which was then blond. I became a little apprehensive when one came closer to me and poked at my glasses. He had most likely never seen glasses worn before. They never did me any harm, nor any of the women in the settlement. We quickly grew accustomed to these people and visited them occasionally in their tents. I remember I once went to visit an Indian lady who was pregnant.

When I arrived, she had already given birth. I remember how I felt sorry for her. She lay there alone in the corner of the tent without any necessities. She had already wrapped the baby according to their custom. She had put soft moss on a board on which the swaddled baby was placed and bound by laces made from animal skins. The mother and child seemed in good health, and she was unusually quick to get up, I thought. Many Indians made a good impression on us. I remember one especially whose name was Ramsay. We became acquainted with him when we moved to the Icelandic River. He and my husband became friends. It was there

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that we endured the sorrow of losing a little son. At the same time Ramsay lost a little daughter. He came to my husband and asked him to let him bury his little girl beside our son. We thought this was a beautiful idea. Another little girl died a short time later and was buried in the same place. These three children rest on the property of Sveinn Thorvaldsson. He had a fence built around this little graveyard---I thought that was a nice gesture."

#### Many homes

"You two established homes in more places than this?"

"Yes, we were six years in Gimli, moved from there to the Icelandic River where my husband opened a sawmill in partnership with Sigtryggur Jonasson. From there we moved to Selkirk, then to Glenboro, there my husband had a store for twenty years. I had a large and lovely home there; it came in handy that it was large because many school children were with me at that time.

In 1906 we moved to Winnipeg, and have remained here since."

#### Best birthday gift

When we reached this point of the interview, Miss Herman offered us coffee.

"Did many guests come here on your birthday?" I asked after we were seated at the table.

"There was nothing formal," said Miss Herman. "We advised relatives and friends that our friend would be celebrating her 90th birthday, and would be at home."

"Yes, there were many friends who came to wish me a happy birthday. I am sincerely thankful for their good will and friendship."

Said Fru Guðny.

"Tell Mrs. Jonsson about the best birthday present." Said Miss Herman smiling.

"A few days after my birthday, my daughter's son, Elswood Johnson phoned, and told me the good news that he was now an Afi - that his daughter Virginia had just given birth to a daughter. So now I am a great great grandmother." Said Fru Guðny smiling.

"Don't you think that is a good birthday present?"

Friðjon and Guðny Friðriksson had five children; two boys died young, but three survived. Their oldest child Aurora is a widow of Tomas J. Johnson, former Minister of Justice in Manitoba, and lives in the United States. Kari lives in Toronto and Haraldur here in the city.

#### "Sunpatch on the Moor"

Rev. Friðrik Bergman wrote an article about Friðjon Friðriksson in the 1908 Almanak. He mentions Fru Guðny and says among other things:

"The home of this couple has been an exemplary home in the opinion of all those western Icelanders that know them. This couple has demonstrated many desirable qualities including tact and neatness, and their home has always been like a "sunpatch on the moor."

There is still a "sunpatch on the moor" where Fru Guðny is. I thank her for the pleasant interview and wish her a happy birthday.

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# Guðriður Þorbjarnardóttir - A Woman of Destiny

by Kristiana Magnusson Clark



Statue of Guðriður Þorbjarnardóttir sculptured by Asmundur Sveinsson.

She was a beautiful and gracious woman of the Viking age, a courageous and brave explorer who was assuredly the most traveled woman of her time and centuries later. She was the first Christian to visit both Rome and America. This remarkable woman was Guðriður Þorbjarnardóttir, who carved a distinguished name for herself in the Annals of History.

Guðriður Þorbjarnardóttir was born in the early 980's A.D. to Þorbjörn Vífilsson and his wife Hallveig Einarsdóttir of Laugarbrekka. Þorbjörn was a proud and respected man, a godi who valued the esteem with which he was regarded by his retainers, friends and neighbours. His generosity was evidenced by the annual fall feasts to which he invited all his friends and neighbours.

Guðriður grew up at Laugarbrekka but spent much time at the home of her foster parents Ormur and Halldis, both of whom she loved dearly. One day when Guðriður was at Amarstapi, the home of her foster parents, a handsome and prosperous young trader by the name of Einar Þorgeirsson came to visit his friends, Ormur and Halldis. When he saw Guðriður, who had grown into a beautiful young girl, he asked Ormur for her hand in marriage. Ormur told him that she was Þorbjörn Vífilsson's daughter and permission to marry her must come from Þorbjörn. This permission was never granted.

There had been a strong bond of friendship between Þorbjörn and Eirik the Red for some time before Eirik was banished from Iceland. When Eirik the Red left Iceland in 986 A.D. with a flotilla of twenty-five ships of colonists bound for Greenland, he had promised Þorbjörn land if he should decide to move to Greenland.

More than a decade after Eirik The Red left Iceland Þorbjörn held a special spring feast to which he invited his friends and

neighbours. As he presented gifts to each of his guests he told them that he would be disposing of his property and buying a ship to sail to Greenland and settle there for the rest of his life. Thirty people decided to move with him to Greenland, among them his wife and daughter, as well as Ormur and Halldis.

As the ship set off for Greenland the favourable wind soon died down and they lost their direction. Their ship became shrouded in fog. This was followed by storm weather that drove them off course. Sickness and malnutrition decimated their numbers by half. During that terrible journey Ormur and Halldis died at sea, much to Guðriður's great sorrow. Finally, at the start of winter they reached Herjólfssness, the southernmost tip of Greenland. This was a port of entry for ships arriving from Iceland and Europe, and had been named after Bjami Herjólfsson's father, who had settled there. At this port of entry Þorbjörn, Hallveig and Guðriður, as well as the remaining crew members, were welcomed into the home of a prosperous farmer named Thorkell and neighbouring farms. They were invited to spend the winter there as further travel into Greenland would be impossible until the following spring.

During the winter at Herjólfssness a prophetess (mystical maiden, seeress) named Þorbjörg arrived at Thorkell's home. She had been invited to come and foretell the future of individuals and the community, which at that time was in dire straits with sickness and food shortage. A prophetess was very highly regarded and was treated royally wherever she went.

In order for Þorbjörg to prophesy she needed someone in the group to sing the Varðlokur or spirit chant. No one in the group that had gathered at Thorkell's home knew the words or how to chant it except for Guðriður who had learned it from Halldis. At first

Guðriður was loath to chant the Varðlokur as she and her parents were Christian. However, after Thorkell requested that she chant the Varðlokur she agreed to do so.

The women in the group formed a circle around the elevated seat on which Þorbjörg sat. Guðriður recited the Varðlokur (spirit chant) in beautiful tones for which Þorbjörg was so thankful that she proceeded to prophesy as follows.

*Now many things are very clear to me which formerly were unknown to me, as to others. I wish to advise you Thorkell, that this food shortage will remain only this winter, and when spring comes conditions will improve. The sickness so prevalent now with us will, also, leave us shortly. And you Guðriður, you shall receive your reward at once for your help, for your future is now clear to me. You will be married here in Greenland, the best match possible, yet it may be of short duration for your future lies in Iceland, where your descendants will make great and good contributions, and branches of your family will be more illustrious than I have the power to see and describe. Thus part with us, my daughter, with health and happiness.*

The following spring Þorbjörn, Hallveig, Guðriður and their crew sailed up the Greenland coast, along innumerable fjords, until they entered Eirik's fjorð where Eirik's home Brattahlið, was located up on a small slope. Eirik welcomed Þorbjörn with joy and invited his household to spend the winter at Brattahlið, while his crew would be lodged at neighbouring farms. During their stay at Brattahlið, Guðriður heard stories of Bjarni Herjólfsson's sightings of land to the west of Greenland. These stories may have kindled a spark in her heart of visions of brave Vikings exploring that unknown land.

True to his promise of many years ago, Eirik gave Þorbjörn land at Stokkanes, on the far side of the fjord. Þorbjörn built a good home there and Guðriður settled into life in Greenland, where she had the friendship of Eirik's wife Þjóðhild, as well as Eirik's two younger sons, Þorvaldur and Þorsteinn. When Leifur, the eldest son, returned from a visit in Norway with King Olaf Tryggvason he brought priests with him to spread Christianity in Greenland. Þjóðhild, Eirik's

wife and their three sons embraced the Christian faith but Eirik refused to give up his gods. He continued to worship at his own temple at Brattahlið. However, he donated land so that Þjóðhild could have a church built for all who embraced the Christian faith. This church became known as Þjóðhildar Church.

Bjarni Herjólfsson, who had first sighted land west of Greenland, settled at Herjólfssness. One year he went to Norway and spent some time there. When he returned Leifur Eiriksson became very interested in exploring this new land. He bought Bjarni's ship and gathered together a crew of thirty five men. They traveled west from Greenland and discovered and named Helluland, Markland and south from there a bountiful place which he named Vinland. They spent the winter at Vinland, then returned to Greenland, their ship laden with wood, vines and grapes. Because of these discoveries Leifur became known as Leif the Lucky.

When Leifur's younger brothers heard about Vinland and the bountiful supply of wood and food there, they too longed to go to Vinland. Þorvaldur, who was an explorer at heart, decided he wanted to go and make further explorations in this new land. He sailed on Leifur's ship into numerous fjords on further discoveries. However he was killed by a skrœling's (natives of the area) arrow and this brave young Viking was buried in Vinland, at a place they named Krossanes.

Þorsteinn Eiriksson was considered to be the most promising young man in Greenland at the time. He was charmed by Guðriður's beauty and grace and asked Þorbjörn for her hand in marriage. This was granted for Guðriður was drawn to this young Viking's spirit and courage. The wedding took place at Brattahlið and the young couple settled at Lýsufjörður in the southern part of the Western Settlement in Greenland. When Þorsteinn was told of Þorvaldur's sad and untimely death he was determined to sail to Vinland, to bring back his brother's body for burial in consecrated ground in Þjóðhildar's Churchyard. It is possible that he, too, desired to distinguish himself, as his older brothers had, by further exploration of Vinland.

Þorsteinn was accompanied on this Vinland voyage by a crew of twenty five men,

as well as by Guðriður, who had encouraged him in his desire to sail to Vinland. This voyage however, was beset with tragedy. Their ship was tossed about by storms, sometimes shrouded in fog through which the ship was becalmed or else lost all sense of direction. They wandered far off course. Finally, with winter approaching, they landed at Lýsufjörð in Greenland. Þorsteinn was able to provide lodging for the crew. Then illness befell them, from which Þorsteinn and many of his crew died. Guðriður survived this tragedy and arrangements were made to have the bodies buried at Þjóðhildar's churchyard. As Guðriður's father, Þorbjörn had died, she was invited to live at Brattahlið with the Eiriksson family.

One day in late summer, after these events had taken place, two ships sailed into Eiriksfiörð. The captain of one of these ships was a wealthy, high-born trader by the name of Þorfinnur Karsefni, from Þórðarhofði in Skagafjörður, Iceland. He was of a noble lineage, a man renowned for his courage and accomplishments.

Þorfinnur Karlsefni, his co-pilots and crew members spent that winter at Brattahlið, where Þorfinnur and Guðriður met and fell in love. They were married at Brattahlið with Eirik The Red's blessing. During the winter there was a great deal of talk about Vinland, its bounty and the need to explore it further. Þorfinnur was encouraged by his friends and crew members, as well as by Guðriður, to plan an expedition to Vinland. As a result three ships were prepared for a journey of settlement, with Þorfinnur in charge of the expedition. One hundred and forty men, as well as Guðriður accompanied Þorfinnur. Their cargo included all kinds of livestock as this would be a journey of settlement in a new land.

The three ships sailed past Helluland and Markland, south into a fjord which they called Straumfjord (fjord of streams), which is believed to be the present site of L'Anse Aux Meadows in Vinland. They spent their first winter at this location, but were ill prepared for the winter as they had not put in a sufficient supply of food due to time spent on fur-

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ther explorations.

The following summer the expedition sailed south and settled at a place they named Hop. This site had a bountiful supply of game and fish so they built huts and settled in for a permanent stay. They met the skraeling (natives) at this location and began to trade with them. During this time Guðriður gave birth to Snorri, the first white child born in America. The following summer trouble erupted between the Viking settlers and the skrælings, which eventually resulted in bloodshed and death. After these events Þorfinnur Karlsefni decided they would move as they did not want to live in constant fear of more battles.

Þorfinnur's expedition sailed back to Straumfjord where they spent their third winter in America. The following spring they sailed back to Greenland, richly laden with wood, vines, and valuable fur pelts. They had given up all hope of settlement in Vinland and spent the winter at Brattahlíð. Whether or not there was another expedition to Vinland is controversial as there are variations in The Saga of the Greenlanders and Eirik's Saga. Because the Vinland expeditions were so intertwined with Guðriður's life story these controversial saga entries will be included here.

In Eirik's Saga, Freydis, Eirik's illegitimate daughter, and her husband Þorvarður accompanied Þorfinnur's expedition to Vinland. In this saga Freydis displays her bravery as she faces the skræling, exposing her bosom and placing a sword there. At this sight the skrælings, superstitious, ran off and departed from the field of battle.

In the Saga of the Greenlanders Freydis

and Þorvarður led an expedition to Vinland, along with a ship from Iceland. An agreement was made that each ship would have a crew of thirty men. Freydis, ever crafty, smuggled five extra men aboard her ship. This expedition ended in tragedy in Vinland when Freydis created a situation where her husband Þorvarður was goaded into leading their men into an ambush on the sleeping Icelanders, who were all killed. As the Greenlanders set sail for home, richly laden with goods, Freydis is quoted as admonishing her crew:

"I shall have slain any man who tells about what was done here. We will say that they remained here when we sailed away."

When the terrible truth eventually came out Freydis was shunned for the rest of her life.

After Þorfinnur and Guðriður had returned from Vinland they spent the winter at Brattahlíð. The following summer they sailed to Norway, Guðriður's fifth voyage over the sea. They spent the winter in Norway, where they were hospitably received by all and Þorfinnur was able to trade goods very successfully.

Guðriður's sixth voyage over the sea was to the land of her birth, Iceland. As their ship sailed into the harbour of Skagafjörð in Northern Iceland we can envision Guðriður's trepidation at the thought of meeting her husband's family for the first time. They were of noble birth and had prestige and status in Iceland. Her husband's sterling character and accomplishments were also well known in the homeland. She hoped that her own integrity and strength of character would help her overcome feelings of inadequacy amongst them. Of this particular period of time Eirik's Saga states that they went back to Þorfinnur's home at Reynines, whereas the Saga of the Greenlanders states that Þorfinnur bought a farm at Glumbær, gave up sailing and lived there the rest of his life.

After Þorfinnur's death Guðriður lived with her son Snorri Þorfinnson at Glumbær. When he married she turned over the management of the farm to him. Now as she looked back on her life, which had several times touched the stars of glory, she had witnessed the changes that Christianity had brought about. The old Viking ways of warfare were dying, along with the belief in the

old, fierce gods. She felt a strong and compelling Christian commitment to her God. She remembered Þórbjörg's prophecy of long ago and decided that she had another voyage to undertake---a pilgrimage to Rome, to seek absolution of her sins. This would be a journey over sea once again and then a long trek overland, but Guðriður felt both spiritually and physically fit to undertake such a venture.

By the time Guðriður returned from her pilgrimage to Rome her son Snorri had built a church at Glumbær. She became a nun and lived the rest of her life as an anchoress, in service to her God. Her descendants became people of stature in Iceland with illustrious positions of power and humanity. Over Þorfinnur Karlsefni and Guðriður's descendants shone a luminous light as foretold by the prophetess Þórbjörg, "*And branches of your family will be more illustrious than I have the power to see and describe.*"

Guðriður Þorbjardóttir was a beautiful and courageous woman of the Viking Age. She was an explorer at heart and encouraged and traveled with her husbands on voyages of exploration. She gave birth to the first white child in America. She would have been the most traveled woman of her time for she sailed the Northern Seas eight times, in addition to her long trek across Europe to Rome. Her life story is intertwined with the Vinland explorations. Her gracious demeanor and outstanding personality shone through her

endeavours.

#### Footnote

As part of the Millennium Celebrations a beautiful bronze statue of Guðriður and Snorri was unveiled in Ottawa on April 12, 2000. This gift from Iceland was brought over by Eimskip. At the presentation ceremony five hundred children, who had been educated in the historical significance of the occasion were present. The unveiling was very meaningful to all.

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# Snorri Program

by Colleen Wilson

I felt an instant connection to Iceland, having heard about it all my life. Just over one hundred years ago, my great-grandmother and great-grandfather immigrated to Canada. None of the language, and very few cultural practices were passed on in our family, but a pride in the fact we were Icelandic was encouraged.

Stepping off the plane at Keflavik Airport, I had no real knowledge of what the six week Snorri Program would entail. I knew only the basics, that nineteen other people ranging in age from seventeen to twenty-eight, would also be experiencing Iceland through the same program. I also knew that week number one

would be spent exploring Reykjavik: the four weeks following would be spent living and working in the part of Iceland where our forefathers originally lived. The last week would be an adventure tour where we would experience the highlights of Iceland first hand.

The excitement of the first week lay in its newness. We toured Reykjavik and had time to adjust to a culture that in many ways was different from our own. One of the main differences was the lack of violent crime, even on Friday and Saturday nights when the level of alcohol consumption soared.

During the week, we attended a sort of school where we learned more about



Snorri group with Icelandic President in August 1999.

Back row, left to right: Margaret Petursdottir (Snorri organizer), Aquila Samson, Adam Thorsteinson, Kristian Sigurdson, Andrea Christianson, Stephen Benediktson, Steven Mills, Thor Magnusson, Dale Bjornsson, Leah Allen, Runa Vollman, Lisa Erickson, Tanya Hiebert, Johanna Brierley, Colleen Wilson.

Front row, left to right: Nathan Bjornson Odinn (organizer), Katherine MacFadden, Matthew Haye, Tricia Thorson, Krista Sigurdson. Missing: Heather Roed.

Icelandic history and tried, however unsuccessfully, to learn the Icelandic language. I picked up the odd word here and there, but the majority of the language eluded me. I settled for being able to say "godan daginn" and "goda nott." As time wore on, I gradually picked up a little more of the language but my Canadian accent and constant mispronunciations never failed to make the Icelanders smile. At the end of the first week, we were told where we were going and what jobs we were expected to do. I was headed for Isafjordur to stay with fourth cousins whom I had written to since I was about ten years-old. I'd be working in the Isafjordur hospital. As things turned out though, I spent only two and one half weeks working there. Thorvaldur and Salvar, (my hosts), were both involved in Scouts and Scout Jamboree was being held just outside Reykjavik during the time that I was to be staying with them. I went along with their group. It was quite an experience! I had never camped before, but it was all worth it. There were over five thousand people from all over the world. There were so many activities. I went mudsliding, exploring caves at 3:30 a.m., mountain hiking, dancing at the "Cafe" that had been set up, but most importantly I met such wonderful, special people. Some have become good friends. In September, I went to Norway to visit family and friends that I met while camping.

After camping, all the scouts from Isafjordur headed back and I settled in with Helga, Kristjan, Porolfur, and Salvor. I spent the next two weeks getting to know them better and finding out that they were fun-loving and caring people. They were very eager to show me the amazing sights of the West Fjords. We made it up to Adalvik, a two hour trek from Isafjordur by boat, to see the remains of the farm where my great-grandmother had lived.

Working in the hospital was also a good experience. For the first part, I was downstairs washing dishes, which doesn't sound terribly exciting, but it was great because of the people I worked with. I also spent a week working with the older patients, which was incredibly different from anything I had ever done before. Communication was difficult but not a real problem as there was always a nurse



Snorri participants at Leif Erickson statue in Reykjavik.

around to translate.

The last week, all the members of the Snorri Program met up and began the Adventure Tour. It was wild. We were able to go river rafting, horseback riding, hiking and sightseeing to such places as Dettifoss, and Geysir, the location for Njalís Saga. It was really amazing to see the country in such a way.

The Snorri program was a wonderful way to become connected to Iceland and my past. It was an opportunity I am very glad I didn't miss.



*From Voice of the Christ Child, 1891.*

## Frescoed with Angels Christmas - 1907

by G. Bertha Johnson

reprinted from the *Icelandic Canadian Winter 1969, Volume 28 #2*

In the valley, between the Duck and Porcupine hills, the log cabin huddled, rough-hewn and clay-plastered, sheltered by poplar and willow. The December drifts piled high against the zig-zag pole fences, and against the low barns that sheltered the stock where a double sleigh with its empty hayrack waited.

In the early morning it was cold--biting cold, that twentieth day of December, in the year 1907. The smoke from the tin stovepipe billowed in the thick white clouds: inside the cabin was warm, though the single window-panes were frosted with mystic patterns of white ice.

"I can't spare the time nor the oxen for a trip to town. There are three loads of hay to get for the stock," Daniel said.

He was a big man, gray and whiskered: and no longer young. Hard work and struggle had lined his face, and set his mouth in a firm line.

"If swamp fever hadn't killed our horses," Maria sighed.

"No use regretting. We can't change fate," the man responded. "Perhaps Einar is going to town and the boy can go with him. I'll inquire today when I drive by with the hay load."

"It wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for the little one. The others understand, but she's only five. She still believes in Santa Claus."

"Better that belief be shaken than her faith in the Holy Child. Tell her the Christmas story, and her imagination will fresco the heavens with angels." Daniel smiled.

Already the man was pulling on his long sheepskin coat, and turning down the squirrel-skin earmuffs of his cap.

"We can't starve the stock," he added decisively, letting in a chill gust of winter as he left the cabin.

"We haven't much to trade for groceries,"

Maria said. "Four dozen eggs, ten pounds of butter, and I just finished knitting two pairs of lumberjack mitts. Here is the list, Jon. If we should have a bit still coming, buy some Christmas mixtures."

"I have my weasel pelt," the boy said. Then suddenly feeling very manly, he added, "We'll have a wonderful Christmas."

Jon was twelve. Snuggled down in the hay of the sleigh-ox with a buffalo robe tucked over his threadbare winter garments he looked very small.

Einar gave the reins a jerk, and they were away, the runners crunching over the snow, and the bells jingling, as the Indian ponies, Molly and Maud, trotted down the lane.

John waved to little Gudda who stood pressing her nose against a clear spot in the window-pane to watch them go.

The miles sped by through bush; then came the meadows, where the horses floundered in drifts, and the wind had no pity.

"I'll buy some little nails, a coloured candle, and something for little Gudda," the boy planned in his buffalo shelter.

"Maybe the storekeeper will put our groceries in a big wooden box--then I can make a sleigh."

Little Gudda sat on the bed hugging her knees and gazing up at the coloured picture on the freshly whitewashed log wall. It had come in the mail when Einar and Jon returned from town. She had watched in excited expectation while Sigga unwrapped it.

"Twenty-five Royal Crown Soap coupons," Sigga said grandly. "And worth every coupon! I'll make a cardboard frame, wrapped in blue and pink tissue paper, and we'll hang it above our cot, little Gudda."

"It's called 'St. Cecelia'- See the angels dropping rosebuds on the organ she is playing."

Little Gudda did a summersault on the cot and then sat hugging her knees again.

"Angels," little Gudda whispered softly to herself. "Like mama said, coming from heaven."

She skipped into the kitchen where mama was frying doughnuts in an old cast-iron skillet.

"Will it soon be Christmas?" little Gudda asked, her nose dangerously near the hot grease in the skillet as she watched the dough puffing up and turning a golden brown, first on one side and then on the other.

"Sit here, my love," mama said, settling little Gudda up on the big covered barrel in the corner.

"Will it soon be Christmas?" Gudda insisted again. Then she fell silent in expectation. Mama was going to teach her a poem, or tell her a story.

"Tonight is Christmas Eve," mama began. "Once long, long ago, angels came down from heaven to tell the shepherds that a Child was born"

The chores were done: the kerosene lamp was lit: and upon a shelf above the precious books two tallow candles and a red one burned, each in its own metal candlestick, pushing the shadows of the room deeper into the corners so that it looked bright and cozy.

Everyone put on their best. Sigga had brought yards of material when she came home from waiting tables at The Valley Hotel. She had sewed skirts, and aprons, and dresses. Her black skirt swirled in pleats to her toes and her white waist had tucks and lace insertions. Her pompadour was higher than usual and dropped coquettishly down over one eye.

In her red wool stockings and blue cotton print dress, with her blonde hair in neat pig-tails, Gudda felt equally grand, as befitted one to whom Christmas was coming.

Outside sleighbells jingled.

"It's Otto and Kristjan," father said. "I'll go stable their horses. Light the lantern Sigga."

Two young giants in buffalo coats entered. They held their cold hands over the glowing heater.

"It's a treat to have guests," mama said. "What's the news of the folks in Thunder Hill?"

"I saw your brother yesterday," Kristjan replied, taking the warm coffee she offered.

"How is he and his family?"

There was much talking, and then a few hands of cards. Later, the table was set, and when everyone was seated, mama said, "Gudda, my love, go and put a stick in the kitchen stove. I was so busy I forgot."

It took only a minute, but when Gudda skipped back to her place, she found a linen alphabet book, a bordered handkerchief with dancing elephants and a box of candy beside her plate.

"Santa came a little early," mama explained, and everyone laughed, including little Gudda who was almost too excited to drink her milk and eat the piece of marble cake with its marvel of icing and coconut.

She turned the pages of her book lovingly, watched the candle lights, and listened to the chorus that began softly with mama's humming and concluded with the carol, "Silent night, holy night--"

Little Gudda nodded sleepily. She felt herself floating on the wings of the northern lights until she settled into a warm rosy cloud. And the fabric of her dreams was frescoed with angels.

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When submitting articles for consideration by the editorial staff of the Icelandic Canadian, please follow these guidelines.

Contributions should be typewritten, double-spaced, and with ample margins. Pages should be numbered, with the author's name in the right top corner of each page. The author's full name and address must appear in the left top corner of the first page. Matter to appear in italics must be underlined.

Notes should be kept to a minimum. Whenever possible the material should be incorporated into the text instead, if necessary in parentheses. Notes should be typed with double spacing at the bottom of the relevant pages or on separate sheets and arranged in one continuous numbered sequence indicated by the Arabic numeral followed by a stop.

A corresponding bibliographical list should be included at the end of the article. The bibliographical list should be in alphabetical order by the surname(s) of the

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Matthiasson, John S. "Adaptation to an Ethnic Structure: The Urban Icelandic Canadians of Winnipeg." In *The Anthropology of Iceland*, ed. Paul Durrenberger and Gisli Pálsson. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989, pp. 157-175.

Kristjanson, Gustaf. "The Icelanders of Blaine." *The Icelandic Canadian* 45:3 (1987), pp. 15-21.

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*Eirikur & Ólöf*  
*Golden Wedding Anniversary, 1937*

## The Baldursbrá

by *Mattie Clegg*

Eirikur & Ólöf Johannsson had retired from farming and moved into a small, two room cottage on their son's property in town.

They were our new neighbors, and grandparents to my friend Christine and her siblings. They spoke only Icelandic, but we were able, with our limited knowledge of the language, to converse with them.

I felt envious that Christine had these two grandparents and another grandmother living near by, as I had only one grandfather, who lived miles away, that I rarely saw. I decided to do something about the situation, and at the age of five, I asked Eirikur & Ólöf if I could "borrow" them as grandparents. This was very well received!

Eirikur was a dapper old gentleman, short in stature, and walked with precise, quick movements. He had bright blue eyes and thick white hair and mustache. His voice was very deep and resonant.

Ólöf was slim, dark eyed, with long gray-ing hair, braided, and neatly wrapped around her head. She was a reserved and dignified woman who seldom spoke. She seemed always to be knitting; needles clicking at a fast, even pace and socks and mittens would emerge, created from the yarn she had so meticulously spun. Whether knitting or spinning, she seldom looked at her work except for a quick and occasional glance.

Their house contained the bare necessities - a large wood stove, a wood box with two water pails on the top of it, a kitchen table covered with oilcloth, chairs, an old, low, rocking chair, a small cupboard with a coal oil lamp positioned on the top shelf. In one corner sat the spinning wheel, its spindles smooth from wear, and next to it, on the floor, a box with wool carders, yarn, and a supply of raw wool.

The other room contained a bed, a chest of drawers, and the old trunk they brought with them from Iceland when they emigrated. Clothes were hung on coat hooks fastened to the wall as there were no closets. A shelf on a kitchen wall held an assortment of treasured

books, the space shared by a lovely old clock that chimed out the time, every quarter hour.

Quite frequently a slight bouquet of Snuff could be detected in the air and there was often the savory aroma of soup simmering on a back burner of the stove. Their little home was warm, homey and safe.

From about 1934 to 1938 the Heimskringla, one of the two weekly Icelandic papers from Winnipeg, published a series of children's stories and Icelandic lessons; it was called "Baldursbrá."

When I was ten years-old, Mother arranged with Eirikur to teach me to read Icelandic. Every Saturday at 10 A.M. I would call on the Johannssons' for my lessons. Eirikur sat at one end of the small table, Ólöf, with her knitting, at the other, and I, between them, with the Baldursbrá spread out in front of me.

The old man was very patient, exacting and thorough. My readings were punctuated by an encouraging loud "Já" (yes) from my mentor, and an approving smile and nod from Ólöf, as I struggled through the difficult pronunciation. Eirikur had me master the alphabet with all its various vowel sounds and extra letters. After this was accomplished, the reading went well.

I treasured my Icelandic lessons and the time spent with these two special people. It was a positive and loving atmosphere in which to learn. I wonder if my special Amma and Afi ever realized how much they gave by taking the time to teach their "acquired granddaughter" the basics of her Mother's language.

Thank you, Eirikur & Ólöf.

Editor's note:

Eirikur Johannsson emigrated to Canada in 1891 at age 28, with him came Ólöf Ingolfsson, age 29. Registered with them were Margret Solveig Eiriksdottir, aged two and also Johann and Ingibjorg under the age of one. They were from Gilkot in Skagafjardarsysla.

# Poetry

## Untitled

by Jeff Solmundson

I was a knight-errant and inside everything was whole and good  
 I did battle with worms and everything I could  
 when I was lost I would cut a path  
 I had courage for that  
 I had sand from far away places in my eyes  
 there was every adventure God could devise  
 I sat with priests and warrior-kings and beggars in empty fountains  
 I ran with savages and viewed the serengeti from a mountain  
 and drank with Alexander in his tent before he died  
 we spoke of requited and unrequited love  
 and drank a toast to home  
 I brought trinkets in the marketplace  
 and saw troops marching to one man's hate  
 My companions and I laughed at the watchmen  
 and they could not bring us in  
 tables were our chairs and we would dance all night  
 and the women would smile at us  
 where we took shelter we kept safe from any harm  
 and when I spoke I was body of wit and charm  
 the world was the place I knew  
 the place I thought it to be  
 I saw many wonders there  
 there were no heights I'd seen from which I hadn't slipped  
 no water I'd heard of from which I hadn't sipped  
 I travelled through ice and snow and over frozen lakes  
 where the northern lights were worth the trouble and risk  
 I've heard the screams and shouts echo from the hippodrome  
 and stood inside the walls of the stately pleasure dome

wherein are meadows, pleasant springs, and delightful streams  
 and all sorts of beasts and djinn and other wondrous things  
 I've worked the harvest along the river Nile  
 and been to costume balls done in Persian style  
 I was deep in the forest where no sky is seen  
 and I was not afraid  
 I was root and branch and knew the ways between  
 I slew the guardian at my gate  
 I was on the threshold and would not wait  
 at the ends of the earth I sat down to a feast  
 plates of life and religions whipped like cream  
 cakes and ices and the steaming meat of dreams  
 and I left there wanting nothing  
 I left a tavern and heard something on the sea wail  
 the four winds each had equal time behind my sails  
 and when it was time I took off my armaments  
 and slept beneath a tree  
 I was just outside the castle  
 the most beautiful castle  
 well met we embraced and shook each other  
 "Well met, well met, by the heart of Jesus Christ  
 you are the picture of the living knight! "  
 I felt gentle and true  
 we decided to meet here in one year's time  
 and tell what we had seen  
 but I was wounded and it was all a dream

# Book Reviews



## Northern Fright Series

**Draugr, The Haunting of Drang Island,  
The Loki Wolf**

by Arthur G. Slade  
*Orca Books, Fiction - ages 8-12  
Softcover.*

Reviewed by Joan Eyolfson Cadham

The year 2000 has become the Canadian year for things Icelandic - the rediscovery of Vinland by a Viking crew led by Gunnar Marel Eggertsson (a descendent of Leifur the Lucky), aboard the *Islandingur*, celebrations in honour of the Icelandic decision to become Christian 1000 years ago, and a veritable flood of talented Icelandic entertainers.

However, it was three years ago that the first modern draugr appeared in the woods near Gimli.

This draugr, an Icelandic undead with attitude, was followed to Canada by a second, who appeared on Drang Island, off Vancouver Island, in 1998. The third draugr

was waiting in Iceland for a trio of American young people and their Canadian Icelandic grandfather when they visited in 2000.

Or, so Saskatchewan writer, Arthur G. Slade, would have us believe.

Slade is responsible for the three-book series, Northern Frights, wherein a couple of American-Icelandic teens keep company with their Canadian-Icelandic relatives and an ever-increasing collection of re-emerging mythological creatures, most of them entirely unpleasant.

The books, which Slade aimed at the eight to 14 year old market, are well-crafted, featuring strong, literate English that is deceptively simple enough to attract less-than-avid readers. All the plots involve male and female characters working closely with one another in a fight for survival in a world that becomes progressively more alien and more dangerous.

The three plots are built around some authentic Canadian-Icelandic history - the settlement of Gimli, the movement of Icelanders to Vancouver Island, an opportunity to explore ancient Icelandic roots.

Slade, interestingly, is not officially Icelandic, although he admits that, given his

English/Irish/Scottish background, he probably possesses several strands of Viking DNA.

Authentic genes or not, Slade is unabashedly obsessed with Icelandic history, mythology and folklore, in particular with Icelandic creatures of the dark side.

"I always wanted to be a Viking!" he insists. Slade's strongest passion in literature has been fantasy and ghost stories, first fostered in Tompkins, where an understanding librarian nurtured young Arthur's obsession with Norse, Greek and Celtic mythology and related topics including siege engines and plate armour. At eight or nine, he was devouring a heady mixture of ancient myths and very modern science fiction.

"The more I read," says Slade, "the more I understood that it was the Icelandic sagas and Norse myths that inspired such works as *The Lord of the Rings*. So I wanted to read everything in its original source. What could be more interesting than a group of people who spend their time raiding other countries and spouting poetry? At least that's the stereotype."

"My specific connection with Icelanders came at the University of Saskatchewan during my Old Icelandic Literature class. In my third and fourth years of university I studied both Old Norse Myths and Old Icelandic Literature as part of my English Honours degree. My professor described his experiences in Iceland and talked about this mystical place called Gimli. That was the spark that got me interested in Icelandic culture, and more specifically in Canadian Icelanders.

"The more I read, the more I realized I could use this mythological/folklore"stuff" in my writing, possibly updating it for modern teens. It was only natural to set my first novel in Gimli."

"It was great to rediscover the myths and it was only natural to use them as the foundation for my series. The sagas and folklore were a perfect fit because they had sword, sorcery and "horror" elements. So I could go in a number of directions."

Draugr, the first in the series, begins when Sarah, Michael and Angie arrive from the United States to spend a summer holiday with their Grandpa Thursten in Gimli. They know that Grandpa likes to tell scary stories based on Icelandic mythology. But before

summer properly comes to Gimli, the young people are living their own terrifying story when a draugr, a man who comes back from the dead, makes his presence known.

The Haunting of Drang Island involves Michael, who joins father on a camping trip that is supposed to give Dad time to finish the book of Norse stories he is writing.

Michael meets a local Canadian girl who seems to attract terrifying adventures as easily as Michael does, and they quickly discover that Drang Island is awash in spirits, sacrifices, serpents - and possibly the set of sequences that will result in the end of the world as we know it.

"Drang Island," says Slade, "is a ways past the north end of Vancouver Island. Keep your eyes peeled for thick fog, mist, tall cliff walls, and lightning. It can sometimes be very hard to find. Don't believe anyone who tells you it doesn't exist."

There's no way to overstate the effect of the opening line of *Loki Wolf*.

"One week before my trip to Iceland, I died in my sleep."

Angie struggles with realistic nightmares, including death by being devoured by a giant wolf. Her parents brush the dreams off as the product of an over-active imagination.

However, Grandpa Thursten, who takes the young people to visit an uncle in Iceland, is much more alarmed. He has every reason to worry.

Slade wraps his plots around pieces of Icelandic mythology so that many characters draw something from Icelandic gods and



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creatures of folklore - and Michael rides a bike named Sleipnir. A child who reads these books might want to be equipped with a good volume on Norse Mythology from the moment of opening the first book.

Although these are intended as young adult novels, the plots will hold an adult, especially one who discovers his or her own special places featured in a book.

The characters ring true - perhaps too true for young people who are prone to hearing things go bump in the night. Because the main characters are so believable, and so likable, the horrors that surround them are even more terrifying.

The question remains. How old should a child be before Amma or Afi offers up this set, and a book of Norse mythology, as a birthday gift? Certainly these books are too graphic for young people whose private nightmares might be fed by the vivid dreams that are a central part of the plots.

Perhaps the best advice would be to read the books first, before offering them as a gift. The second piece of advice might be to use them as read-aloud books.

Well developed plots and characters, certainly, but filled with a lingering sense of horror that could be as durable as the Morar who discovered Drang Island.



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*Red Right  
Returning*



by Joan Eyolfson Cadham

## Red Right Returning

by Joan Eyolfson Cadham

*Shoreline, Non-fiction soft cover, 159 pages*

ISBN: 1-896754-06-6

Reviewed by Karen Emilson

To the sailor, there is very little that matters more to him or her than boat and the crew who sails it.

True sailors would rather be on the water than anywhere else and to them, May to August is not summer - it is sailing season. All the remaining months of the year are spent remembering the past season and consumed with thoughts of future onboard. And while the off-season is viewed as a bit of an inconvenience, most will concede that these months are needed to prepare the sailing craft for the next wind and water adventure.

One of the most difficult obstacles a sailor faces is finding a companion who views the sport (hobby, obsession?) with the same passion. It is a lucky sailor indeed, who can find a partner who loves the open water and cramped cabin as much as the captain himself.

What Joyce Eyolfson Cadham has done with *Red Right Returning*, is given hope to all sailors that such companions do exist. She proves in this romantic, real-life adventure that partners can cohabitate within the limited confines of a boat for entire sailing seasons

and emerge from it spiritually, emotionally and matrimonially strong.

In the pairing of Joan and her husband Jack, the resulting fireworks from the extended periods of time alone on the water, are but a celebration of their respect for one another and their common love for a boat.

As a writer and philosopher, Cadham explores the relationship between herself, dubbed "The Viking," and her husband "The Skipper" as they sail purposefully through numerous lakes and rivers throughout Quebec, Ontario and parts of Saskatchewan. Their boat, the "Hirondelle" is a 24ft. wooden sloop that they initially spent as much time repairing, sanding and varnishing as they later spent sailing. Through experiences on both land and on water, they learn to appreciate the journey not the destination, and this becomes Cadham's philosophy for life.

The adventures and challenges they face will be somewhat foreign to the non-sailor, but to anyone who has owned a boat and mast, the tales ring true. It is obvious that Cadham embraced the art of sailing when she was re-introduced to the sport in mid-life, as she recalls their adventures through memories and by recollections noted in her journal and the boat's log. She does this in true sailor's jargon - in the foreign words that sailors use, but in a lighthearted tone that rejects the haughtiness sometimes heard by yachtsmen.

We feel as if we know Cadham well by the book's mid-point and when the story ends. The remaining pages provide us with a cornucopia of recipes and ideas that she refers to throughout the story. In the true spirit of the teacher and the scribe, she shares with us the hard earned ideas and recommendations she's learned, borne through years of experience living off shore.

The reader will get the sense that *Red Right Returning* is a tale that Cadham needed to tell. In doing so, she pays tribute to a life and love now gone, but to a life's experience that has shaped her life forever. Sailors will appreciate a tale told in their language and the practical ideas that Cadham offers.

The romanticism of the nomadic life of wind and water in *Red Right Returning* is something that everyone, regardless of their shore experience, can long for and truly appreciate.



## Introducing new board member Wendy Johnson Brown

Wendy is an educator and therapist who has worked passionately for many years to further the rights of women and children. She is the parent of three grown children, Kristen, Jon, and Caitlin. Her parents, Joseph Johnson and Metta Thorkelson Johnson (originally from Arnes), raised five children in the small community of Eddystone, Manitoba, just west of Lake Manitoba Narrows. In addition to an on-going thirst for knowledge, her Icelandic legacy includes both pride and patience, and the spirited attitude of 'carpe diem.'

# Contributors

**JOAN EYOLFSON CADHAM** moved from Montreal to Foam Lake, Saskatchewan in 1992, giving up a "real job" in favour of writing full time. A freelance writer/editor/photographer, she has also discovered that schools and libraries will pay wandering story tellers. Her old Icelandic fairy tales aren't as scary as Arthur Slade's Northern Frights series.

**NINNA BJARNASON CAMPBELL** received an honorary life membership from the Edmonton Chapter of the Icelandic National League for her outstanding contribution to the Nordurljos Chapter and the Icelandic community. She now lives in Winnipeg so that she can be closer to her grandchildren.

**KRISTIANA MAGNUSON CLARK** of British Columbia, formerly from the Arborg-Riverton area of Manitoba, is an author and poet. Her most recently published book is Winds of Spring. She is a frequent contributor to the Icelandic Canadian Magazine. She is also the British Columbia editor for the magazine.

**MATTIE CLEGG** is a first generation Canadian, whose parents were Hermann von Renesse from Köln, Germany and Ingibjörg (Emma) Sveinsdóttir from Norrurmulasysla Iceland. born and raised in Arborg, Manitoba, Mattie is keenly interested in genealogy, Icelandic culture and the arts. She was Fjallkona for the Icelanders of Victoria, 2000. She is retired, living on Vancouver Island with her husband, Alan.

**KAREN EMILSON** is an Icelander by marriage, living in the Siglunes farming community near Ashern, Manitoba. She is a writer who worked as a reporter with the Interlake Spectator and has done some freelance work for a number of provincial newspapers and publications. She has written and published a non-fiction book and is currently working on the sequel.

**GUDBJORG BERTHA JOHNSON** (1902- 1980) was born in Canada. She taught school in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Her short story "Game of Chance" won first prize in a competition sponsored by the Icelandic Canadian Magazine in 1955. Her last place of abode was Flin Flon, Manitoba.

**INGIBJORG JONSSON** began in 1944 as Editor of the Womens page of the Logberg newspaper and continued till 1959. From 1956 - 1959 she was the assistant editor of Logberg plus office manager. She became the Editor of Logberg-Heimskringla in 1959 and retired in 1971, remaining as editor emeritus till her death.

**JEFF SOLMUNDSON** is the eldest son of David and Donna Solmundson. He graduated from Creative Communications at Red River College in 1998, receiving the Max Goldin award for creative writing. He currently works in Winnipeg as a freelance journalist and has contributed many articles to local newspapers, business magazines and special interest publications.

**LORNA TERGESEN** is a member of the board of the Icelandic Canadian Magazine. She is involved in several other Icelandic community organizations.

**COLLEEN WILSON** of Oakville, MB is the great granddaughter of Rannveig Kernested, making her a relative to every Kernested in Manitoba. Her parents are Kerry and Teresa Wilson. Colleen has acquired the travel bug since her trip to Iceland, and is always planning her next journey.

**BETTY JANE WYLIE** is a prolific writer and playwright. She is a very strong supporter of her Icelandic roots. Letters to Icelanders, Exploring the Northern Soul is her latest book.



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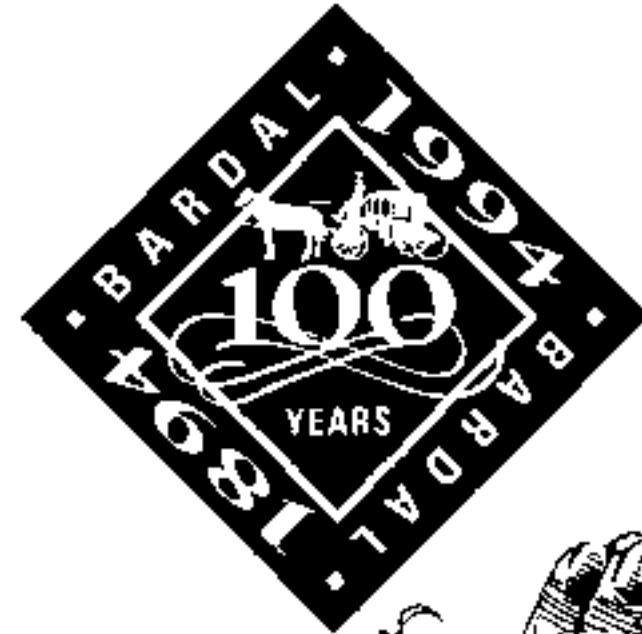
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Photo by Linda Collette Sigurdson

*Diddu (Sigrun Hjaltadottir) with some members of the New Iceland Choir at Islendingadagurinn 2000 in Gimli, Manitoba.*

*The back page*



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