Canada Iceland Foundation Inc.

An organization funded by Canadians of Icelandic Descent, dedicated to the preservation of their Cultural Heritage.

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The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

ISSN 0046-8452

Vol.56 #2 (2001

The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

VOLUME 56, No 2 (2001) • WINNIPEG, CANADA

Cover: Svefnleysi - Insomnia by Katrina Koven

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

North America's quarterly magazine in celebration of the Icelandic Heritage published by Canadian Icelandic Heritage, Inc., Winnipeg, Canada.

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The Icelandic Canadian, Box 1156, Gimli, Manitoba R0C 1B0 CANADA

Subscription rates: $24 per year, $48 for two years (U.S. & Canadian funds). Single copies, $6.00 plus postage.

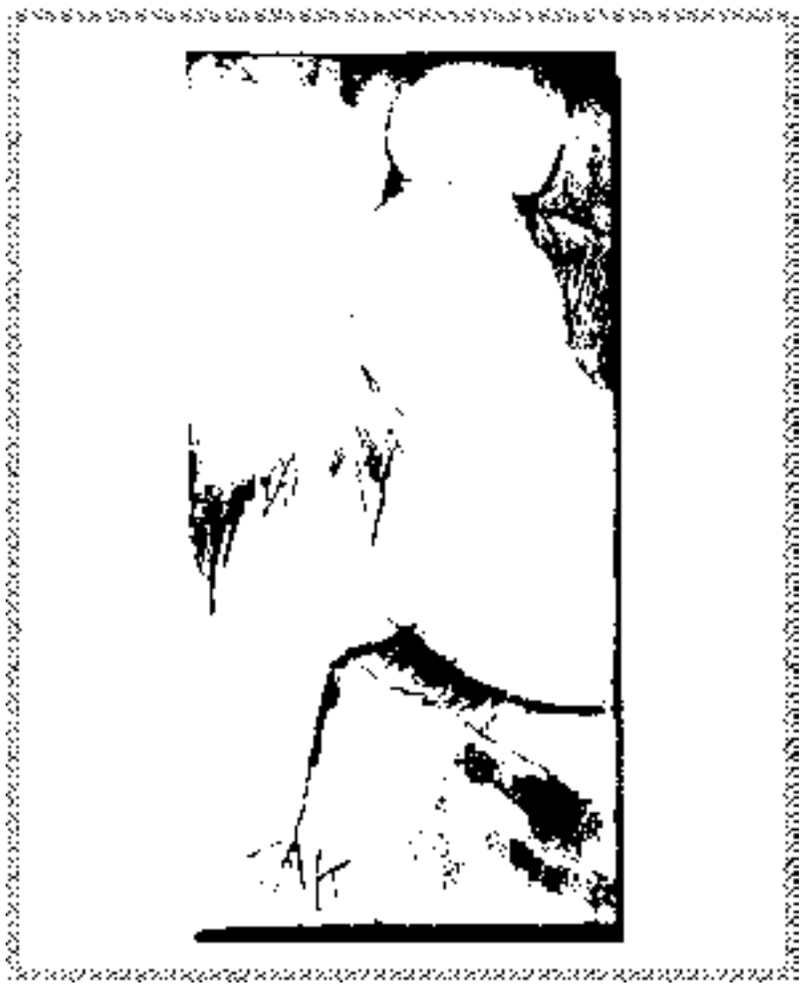
Typed submissions of articles, book reviews, short stories and poetry are welcome. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. E-mail submissions welcome: icelandiccanadian@yahoo.com.

The views expressed in all contributions which appear in ***The Icelandic Canadian*** *are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the publisher or editorial committee.*

PAP registration # 09999 and Postal Agreement # 1397893

Printed in Winnipeg, Canada.

On the Cover



Svefnleysi - Insomnia

Editorial

by Stefan Jonasson

On the eve of the First World War, my paternal grandfather arrived in Canada as a young boy. By then, the migration of Icelanders to North America had slowed to a trickle, the settlement patterns in their new home had been well established, and the dream of a "New Iceland" (where the expatriates would dwell together) had all but been abandoned.

My grandfather was brought to this new land—where he would eventually grow to maturity, work hard to establish himself and his family, and eventually be laid to rest—by his mother and step-father. My grandfather's step-father—"Old Jónas" as he's known in our family—can hardly be described as a willing immigrant. He brought his adopted family to Canada after his store in Bólungarvík burned to the ground. Old Jónas would now be characterized as having been an economic refugee—a fact that gives me pause when I hear so many of my hard-hearted neighbours casually dismiss those who still seek to build new lives in this grand country of ours as economic refugees, as if those who have come here have ever been anything but!

Old Jónas rebuilt his life from the scorched earth upwards, establishing a dairy at Selkirk before acquiring the Oak Dairy in East Kildonan. This enterprise shared a telephone line with the A.S. Bardal Funeral Home, something that must have left his customers wondering about the quality of the milk!

Old Jónas never really settled into Canadian life - his heart longed for the homeland. It was his considered opinion that Canada was a good place to live and work . . . but he wouldn't have wanted to die here. So, in 1932, he returned to Iceland with my great-grandmother. By then, his three step-sons were well established here and not even the effects of the Great Depression could lure them to return to the land of their birth.

In contrast to Old Jónas, one of my great-great-grandfathers, Elías Kjærnested, came to Canada with the intention of remaining here. Before he left his home in Iceland, he paid a genealogist to trace the family tree, for he knew that he would never return to the old country but he wanted his two daughters to have a record of their rich ancestral heritage. Elías was fifty years old when he sold his Icelandic farm in 1881 and embarked upon the ocean voyage which carried him to the Muskoka district of Ontario by way of Glasgow and Québec City. He abandoned his Muskoka home two years later, settling on a farm at Husavik, near his brother who had immigrated to Manitoba a year after the initial settlement of New Iceland.

The common hardships of pioneer life took their toll on Elías. Within a decade of his arrival in Canada, his youngest daughter noticed him "trudging with a stoop, tired-looking, slow of foot. This kind of a life ages a man . . . before his time." Years later, she recalled asking herself, "Is this my father? Is he getting old?" So she averted her eyes and hurried away before her father noticed her presence. "I could not account for it," she wrote, "but I would have been ashamed to have him see that I realized that his Viking strength and spirit were declining."

These two figures from my own family's past are representative of the tension between the two different ways that those of Icelandic descent have come to understand their identity. As a youngster, I remember people using the terms "Western Icelander" and "Icelandic Canadian" almost interchangeably. In recent years, however, there has been a periodic debate among members of the Icelandic community in Canada about which term more accurately reflects our identity. Old Jónas was a "Western Icelander," pure and simple, who looked affectionately to Iceland as not only the land of his birth but also as what Dorothy, in The Wizard of Oz, would have called "the land of his heart's desire." In contrast, Elias allowed Iceland to become an artifact of his

past—a place once known and loved, but clearly a place that was no longer his home, however much it continued to inspire him.

In his trudging gate, stooped and slow of foot, Elias took the first steps towards becoming an Icelandic Canadian. I am not an Icelander of a diaspora but rather a Canadian of partial Icelandic descent—not a Western Icelander but an Icelandic Canadian.

The difference is more than simply semantic and it seems clear to me that the Icelandic experience in this country has been marked by the steady evolution from a self-identification as Western Icelanders to one as Icelandic Canadians. While the term "Western Icelander" might still offer a convenient label for the collective community of those who claim Icelandic heritage in Canada and the United States (and even the hardy souls who settled in Brazil), it does not adequately reflect our identity after so many generations away from the land of fire and ice. From Old Jónas I take my family name but from Elías I claim my spirit.

The late Axel Vopnfjord, long-time editor of The Icelandic Canadian, wrote: "There can be no doubt, that the ideals and traditions that sustained the Icelandic immigrants in their time of trial and tribulation, and led them to victory over unfavorable and undesirable conditions, must have been built on solid foundations. We, their descendants, can still draw the living waters of inspiration from the heritage they cherished." Yet, at the same time, he maintained that "it is not desirable that we consider ourselves hyphenated Canadians," but rather Canadians first, who appreciate "the value of the Icelandic heritage, not only for its own sake, but also as something which can enrich the cultural aspect of Canadian citizenship."

When I think of the enormous contributions that people of Icelandic descent have made to this fair land, it is a source of both great pride and honest humility. From industrious farmers to risk-taking entrepreneurs, from sensitive men to powerful women, from gentle poets to insightful scientists and explorers, from concerned educators to public figures, Icelandic Canadians have contributed many sparkling tiles to the Canadian mosaic. It is hard to imagine what Canada (and Manitoba in particular) might have looked like without the contributions of those whose gifts sprang forth from their Icelandic ancestry. It is equally difficult to imagine what life might have been like for those generations who have been heirs to the migration of the Icelanders to this beautiful and prosperous land. Here we have been part of a bold and imaginative experiment, where the Icelandic heritage enriches what it means to be a Canadian for all Canadians, and being Canadian fulfills the hope embodied in our ancestors' noblest dreams.

Steven, Rachel and Katrina Koven

Katrina Koven

by Freyja Arnason

On November 7th, 2000, Katrina Anderson Koven opened her art show at the Chiendog Gallery in Winnipeg.

Koven, a Winnipeg born artist, left our fine prairie city at the age of eighteen to further her musical education in Toronto, where she has done everything from playing bass in a band to writing jingles for commercials.

Although Koven's formal training is in music, art has always been an integral part of her life.

The inspiration for this show is deeply tied to her Icelandic Canadian heritage. Koven is an active member in the Icelandic Canadian Club of Toronto where she served as the editor of the newsletter for many years. She has hosted Icelandic language classes in her home and although she does not speak fluent Icelandic (she is fluent in French and German) she finds the language to be an inexhaustible source of ideas.

"Sometimes I just open the dictionary for inspiration," she says with a laugh. "I'm very proud of this culture that is so steeped in the literary tradition. That is why I always try to include a little book in my shows."

This show, entitled GAK—the God of Silence was a great success. Koven offers insight to the solitary figure depicted in the pieces of this show in her statement:

"Last winter my brother went to an art auction and bought a floppy faceless doll stuffed with factory sock remnants and one marble egg. The title given by its creator Dana Klemke, was Melancholy Dolly. I renamed it GAK. GAK is the perfect 3-D version of the figures I have been drawing since I was a child. Expressionistic, abstract, loose. GAK became my model and during the past year I've drawn hundreds of GAK studies on paper, canvas, walls, clothing, skin and Barbie® doll legs. I invented a life story for GAK. He became GAK—God Pagtrinur, Icelandic for God of Silence. I imagine that the doll was an artifact from the Viking Days. That he belonged to some Nordic child who lived near what is now Rekjavik. That perhaps the local women used to sew the dolls in the image of the god of silence believing that if their children took the doll to bed they would have a sound sleep.

These paintings represent a return to a simpler, freer form of expression for me. The lines are frank, relaxed, the GAK figure looking boneless, almost resigned. There is a child-like feeling to the work that in many ways reflects a return to the roots of my passion for art that started here, when I was a child in Winnipeg."

The use of the God of Silence in Koven's

work is focal. Using at times a layering and mark making technique for texture, Koven has created several pieces where GAK stands out as a strong and powerful image. Other pieces however, are soft and serene with an uninterrupted flux of the picture plane. An excellent example of this flow is her series of six entitled, 'The Girls of Gimli are Dreaming." While employing warm shades of reds, peaches and pinks, Koven creates a womb like atmosphere surrounding her GAK figure.

These warm embryonic canvases explore shape and space and convert them into a temporal suspension that exudes a calm silence, conforming to Koven's myth of GAK the God of Silence.

It was a privilege to attend this show and meet the artist. Koven and her husband run an alternative music school in Toronto where they live with their daughter. Koven looks forward to returning to Winnipeg for future shows and she hopes one day soon to visit Iceland.

Letters from Bosnia

by Len and Karen Vopnfjord

Len and I have had an interesting year, making some important decisions, which have resulted in a major move from our easy laid back west coast lifestyle to choices which give a whole new meaning to "career". For Len the decision was easy as he had over a year, after retirement from his Director of Planning position at Victoria City Hall, to determine which option to choose. For me the decision was more difficult as I was more than happy with my work as a reporter / producer with SHAW TV and as a Municipal Recycling Coordinator. But the bottom line was that this was what we had planned for years, and when the opportunity came from the Canadian Urban Institute to move to Bosnia to assist them in the aftermath of war, in a Canadian International Development Agency funded program, the decision was practically made for us. Working with this team, who had sent us, on short term assignments, twice to the Philippines, to Hungary and most recently Len to Paraguay, was something we knew that we could do.

Our mission here in Bosnia is basically to assist the Tuzla region in preparing a master town plan and, in so doing, to transform its practices from the old top-down communist style of planning to that of a democratic, market driven economy. Previous plans have been implemented under the old communist style system without any public input. This time the plan will be done Western style with the public being involved throughout. It will be the first one of its kind in the country and our Bosnian colleagues are somewhat nervous. But they need not be because they are very competent people and will do just fine. In fact, most of the people we've met are very well educated, European oriented and well aware of the need to change. The assignment calls for us to work with the Urban Institute of Tuzla, with Len in the capacity of Project Manager. I will be responsible for communications, utilizing local TV well as newsletters. Funding is for three years, which began last August, but of course we are not here for that length of time. This is our first long term placement with CUI and the exact length is yet to be determined. We have rented out our house in Victoria for a year, with the option to renew. We will be scouting out local professionals to take over our positions, and when that is done we will return home. So at this time, we can't exactly say how long our stay will be here.

Bosnia emerged as an independent country as early as 1180, but was conquered by the Ottoman Empire (modern day Turkey) in 1463 and then by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878. In 1918 they became a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia). World War I began in Bosnia in Sarajevo with the assassination of Arch Duke Ferdinand. After World War II, Yugoslavia was created under Tito and lasted until early 1990's when ultra-nationalist Serbs attempted to retain control over Bosnia and Croatia thus causing the war that went on from 1992 until the end of 1995.

In the first instance, the thought of moving to this war torn country, was a bit intimidating. From 1992 to 1995+, these people were at war and the evidence is obvious, from shell holes in buildings, blown up homes in the countryside and new graveyards on the hillsides. We are very aware of the devastation that took place. Over a million people are refugees and a quarter of a million were killed. The people here are mostly Muslim, but of course they look like the average Canadian, as they are of Slavic background. Our understanding is that the Serbs under Milosovic's orders did his best to "ethnically cleanse" Bosnia. We have heard some very sad stories from people that we have met and tears fall easily as the stories unfold. It will take generations for this to end, if it ever will. The peacekeepers will be here for a long time. The Americans are in Tuzla, driving around in

hummers with machine guns at the ready. But in actuality, we feel very safe and we have found the people here to be very honest and friendly, in our dealings with them. We were annoyed at first when we found that there were two prices for everything here. One price for Bosnians and a larger one for foreigners. Amazingly enough, after the first week or so, our sights were set not on the damage caused by the war but rather the incredible restoration and building that is going on. It's like everyone decided on the same day to renovate their homes and business'.

Finding a place to live was not easy. There are so many people looking for housing and so many buildings were damaged that we had a hard time finding accommodation. However, we did find a clean, warm and safe 2 bedroom apartment which is actually the second level of a new alpine-style house with a large balcony overlooking the valley and hills, about a half hour walk from our office. The house is owned by a couple who have two sons, aged 8 and 11. The wife is a doctor and he is an engineer. They are originally from a Serb dominated city, Banja Luka, but had to move to a Muslim area. After the Dayton Accord the country was divided into areas for Serbs, Croats and Muslims. They apparently traded houses with someone who took over their place. Eventually, they wish to return to their original city but under the circumstances, this may not be possible. They are wonderful to us and with her limited understanding of English, and much determination, we are able to communicate. The rent that we pay is $700 CDN per month. Even though these people are professionals, their salaries are somewhere around $800 to $1000 CDN per month, so this rent is most helpful to them. Electricity and heat come from coal, which they have in abundance. The downside is that, with Tuzla being in a valley, the burning of coal causes air pollution and it is uncomfortable to breathe. Frequently it is like a fog outside due to this. A clear day is to be celebrated.

We are set up in the Canadian Urban Institute office, which is one room within the Urban Institute of Tuzla building in a busy downtown location. We have a delightful, fun loving and competent 25 year old Bosnian woman working for us in our office and she translates for us. Very few people here speak English, so having Alma with us is a necessity. Alma's father is Muslim and her mother was a Serb. The CUI brought her and the Director of the UIT over to Canada to Toronto and Victoria for 2 weeks, so we were able to take them to meet our colleagues in Victoria and arrange for them to see some of our beautiful west coast. This turned out to be most helpful, and we really feel like a team.

We have traveled about in the countryside a bit, to see the Tuzla Canton which is made up of thirteen municipalities. The country is beautiful, and as we are so close to Austria, we can almost see Julie Andrews dancing on a mountain side singing "The hills are alive with the sound of music."

But, there are many farm homes which have been destroyed in the country. We are told that many of them belonged to Serbs, who, when told to depart after the Dayton Accord, blew them up rather than have anyone else live in them. There are an estimated 4 million land mines in Bosnia and it will take a very long time to remove this problem. We are advised to walk only in safe areas or on pavement.

North of Tuzla, on the Bosnian / Croatian border, is a market with thousands of stalls. Interestingly enough it is called "Arizona." It is an outdoor bazaar and anything that you can think of can be purchased there. We don't know where the merchandise comes from as it is a "black market" and the Bosnian government is leaving the owners of these shops alone for the time being. During the war these same merchants were killing each other and now, with the ability to make a living, they appear to be getting along. Eventually, the Bosnian government will collect taxes from them.

We are about 3 hours drive north of Sarajevo, which hosted the 1984 Olympic Winter Games and we have been there a couple of times. This beautiful city, in a valley, was very badly damaged, and some buildings such as a museum which housed a thousand years of Muslim history was totally destroyed with all the historical information and artifacts. Losses such as that will never be recovered. The drive from Tuzla to Sarajevo is beautiful, with rolling hills and low mountains. We have gone twice, once in the fall when the leaves were in full colour and just last weekend when it was a winter wonderland. Driving is somewhat scary at times because people drive fast and passing on the narrow roads must be done at one's peril. So far, we have had great drivers and feel confident that they won't take any chances. Actually, one of them could easily drive in the Indy 500 or one of those races. We are considering purchasing a vehicle and have been told what not to buy. Car theft is a problem if you decide to get a nice one, so we'll be looking for about a 5 year old VW Golf with a good engine. One of the drivers from the Institute has kindly offered to help us if we buy one. We really have been so lucky with people that we meet, they seem to go out of their way to be helpful. Maybe we just look like we need their assistance.

During our stay here we plan to travel as much as possible in Europe. Everything is so close, 8 hour drive to Vienna, 6 hours to Croatian coast and a car ferry to Italy and so on. We also have one trip per year paid for to return home. So it should be an exciting time. We just have to figure out when to fit in the working part. Actually, we are already hard at work and, because we are in the office together, the challenge will be not to talk about work all the time.

That said, we have planned trips to Budapest and Slovakia early in the New Year to meet with our colleagues in the Canadian Urban Institute there.

I think this time will go by quickly and we hope that we will be able to accomplish something lasting and worthwhile during our stay here. Probably, when we do return our neighbours will ask "Have you been away, I haven't seen you for awhile?"

Best regards,
Karen & Len

Jon Sigurdsson

History of Pioneers and Pioneer Communities—A continual process

Part one of a two part series

by Frank Sigurdson

I have discovered that the most important concept for people writing family history and genealogy is that you are never finished. It is a continual process as lost or unknown historical documents may surface, a person may come forward with new information, or relevant material may be found in books, magazines and newspapers.

All of these have surfaced to provide valuable information in my extensive research to find out information about my father, Jon Sigurdsson, a pioneer in Vidir, Manitoba. For many years it has been my passion to discover what kind of life he was leaving behind in Iceland, what type of life was waiting for him in New Iceland and what were his pioneer accomplishments as he worked with settlers who led the way in developing a new community.

He died when I was very young, therefore, I remember on a few of his activities. One in particular is of the times that he came home from his twice weekly trips to Arborg bringing the Vidir and Sylvan mail. On some occasions it was the joyous handout of candy and other times it was the sight of him in winter wearing a huge fur coat and having icicles of frost hanging from his moustache.

Much of my information about him has come from family stories relayed from Mother to child and child to child and stories gleaned from talks with Vidir pioneers who have related vivid accounts of his contributions to the community.

In my research related to writing a major paper, "The Icelanders," in 1970, for my Masters Degree in History, I found information as I searched more than 42 books, periodicals, magazines, newspapers.

Nelson S. Gerrard's book, *Icelandic River Saga*, has historical accounts about Jon Bjornsson, a brother of Sigurdur Bjornsson, who is Jon's father, Gudjon Finnsson, a cousin of Jon, Bjorn Sigurdsson, a brother of Jon, Asmundur Austmann, husband of Helga, Jon's sister and Jon Halldorsson, married to Jon's sister, Anna. *Vestur-íslenskar æviskrár I*, by Benjamín Kristjánsson, has articles about the descendants of Bjorn Bjornsson, a brother of Jon's father and Anna Halldorsson. I have been able to discover important background information about my father by reading these stories.

There is information about Jon in *Heimskringla, Beyond the Marsh,* a history of the Vidir, Lowland and Sylvan school districts, and *Sequel to Beyond the Marsh,* both compiled by the Vidir Ladies Aid, and *A Century Unfolds: A History of Arborg and District,* compiled by the Arborg Historical Society.

I was fortunate to discover that the minutes of the Vidir School Board, 1908 - 1965, is one of the documents being saved in the Evergreen School Division Office in Gimli. Important historical information about Jon Sigurdsson can be gleaned by reading about the history of Vidir School.

Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi, by Þorstein Þorsteinsson has an article about the emigration of Sigurdur Bjornsson to New Iceland. It contains important information related to his background and that of his wife, Gudfinna, and their children and relatives. It also quotes information about Jon's leadership qualities from Ólafur Thorgeirsson's, *Almanak.*

The 1933 volume of the *Almanak* has an article about Jon Sigurdsson which provides some significant details about his life. Magnús Sigurðsson writes that he can be counted with the foremost leaders in the Municipality. The article relates that Jon Sigurdsson has good intelligence, possesses

knowledge about various topics and has the qualities of a leader. It also points out that he speaks excellent Icelandic and also can speak well in English. Thorgeirsson also writes that he is energetic, progressive and has a friendly and helpful manner and that he is a good representative for the people. Finally, the article provides information about Jon's parents and about his homestead, community work and family in Vidir.

My first attempt to write an historical paper about the life of my father, Jon Sigurdsson, came in 1983, when I heard that community members in Arborg were preparing material for an Arborg and district history book. My story, titled, "Jon Sigurdson, A Pioneer Sketch," was printed in the book. Then, I wrote an historical article, "Jon Sigurdson: An Icelandic Pioneer," which was published in the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* on July 27, 1990.

In 1993, my family had the one and only family reunion for all descendants of Jon Sigurdsson, his first wife, Kristin Jonsdottir and his second wife, Sigrun Sigvaldadottir. This gave me the opportunity to do more research about our family and due to new information much was added to the original story published in the Arborg history book and in *Lögberg-Heimskringla.*

The fourth occasion for re-visiting this topic occurred in 1997, when the Vidir Ladies Aid was preparing material for a new history of Vidir, **Sequel to Beyond the Marsh.** I wrote a revised history of my father for the book and included information about Kristin Jonsdottir, Jon's first wife and his second wife, Sigrun Sigvaldadóttir, and their descendants.

The Vidir Hall

In the year 2000, I began exciting work on a new revision because one of the most important historical documents, dated 1917, surfaced. It is believed that this document was never published and had been read only by Jon's immediate family. However, there is a reference to it at the end of the article about Anna Halldorsson, Jon's sister, in *Vestur-íslenskar æviskrár* I. This reference is, Kristján Ásg. Benediktsson hefur skrifað ættartölo fyrir Jón bróðir Önnu Halldórsson og söguþátt af honum, sem hún hefur með höndum: Sagnað ættir um nokkra merka Íslendinga."

In April, 2000, I received information from Robert Asgeirsson who is the grandson of Anna Halldorsson, my father's sister. He had been looking at material that he had inherited from his mother, Ingibjorg Asgeirsson. He told me about what appeared to be an important document containing the genealogy of Jon Sigurdsson's mother, Guðfinna Oddsdóttir and an historical account of Jon. Robert wrote, "I recently came across two scribblers dated in 1917 and created by a Kristján Ásgeir Benediktsson. These scribblers were among my mother's old family photos. The first page title is "Ættartala Jóns Sigurðssonar og móðir hans Guðfinnu Oddsdóttir á Víðir, Man. 24 Desember 1917. The second part of this manuscript was headed, Sagnaþættir, nokkura merka Íslendinga, (Historical articles about a few noteworthy Icelanders)" collected and written by K. Ásg. Benediktsson."

This was written in 1917 and was handwritten in Icelandic. Robert sent a copy of the document to his sister, Sigrid Kellas, who lives in Winnipeg. We decided to seek help in translating it. Sigrid was able to get Arný Hjaltaðóttir, a Library Assistant, in the Icelandic collection, University of Manitoba Libraries to translate it for us.

The following is the translation of this document:

JON SIGURDSSON
REEVE AT BIFROST MANITOBA

1. Chapter

Here begin a few factual stories about Jón Sigurðsson. Jón's father was Sigurður Björnsson. Sigurður's mother was named Margrét Eyjólfsdóttir, Þórðarsson who farmed at Borg in Skriðdalur. Jón's mother

was named Guðfinna Oddsdóttir from Borgargerði in Reyðarfjörður, Pálsson farmer at Dalir in Mjóafjörður. Guðfinna's mother was named Helga Jóhannesdóttir. He was called Jóhannes "stóri" (big), because he was considered the biggest man around that place. He was also referred to as being from Fjallsel in N. Múlasýsla. Jón's family tree has already been traced beforehand.

Sigurður and Guðfinna moved to Canada in 1883 from Hryggstakkur in Skriðdalur. Their children went with them: Jón, María and Anna. Sigurður had two more brothers in Canada, Björn (in Winnipeg) and Jón (at Grund in New Iceland). When this couple arrived in New Iceland they were poor. Björn, Sigurður's brother, gave his brother a cow's value, and that was all they had to begin their farming in this country. There was an abandoned farmstead in the north corner of Bræðrahöfn (where Hnausa now is) which was named Aðalból. Jón from Grund helped Sigurður and Guðfinna to acquire that place for the winter 1883-1884. The house was in very poor condition, but at that time there was not much to choose from in New Iceland. The following spring, Sigurður acquired a permit to settle land north of Aðalból and named it Ekru. There they lived until 1890. After five years farming at Ekru, Sigurður's health failed him. He was a man of medium build man, a strong man and hardy but tough on himself, and he overexerted himself clearing wood off the land. When he became sick he wanted to go back to his country and die there. Therefore Sigurður went back to Iceland in the summer of 1890 and spent the money he received for his livestock for the fare. After one year in Iceland he dared to come back to his wife and children in Canada and arrived in the summer of 1891. Then their daughter Helga came with him. Sigurður's son, Björn, came to Canada somewhere between 1883-1890. Björn married Jóhanna Antoníusdóttir, the son of Ebúkur from Stöðvarfjörður and Antonius' wife Ingvildur Jóhannesdóttir the poets Árnason. They have children and live in Shoal Lake District. In 1892 Sigurður died on his land, Ekru, surrounded by his wife and children.

2. Chapter

Jón Sigurðsson was born on Sept. 1, 1870 at Mýri in Skriðdalur. He lived with his parents at many different places in that area. Jón was physically and mentally precocious. By the age of 9 he had studied his catechism. When he was in his tenth summer, his father allowed him to go to Eyjólfur farmer at Stuðlar in Reyðarförður as a sheepherder. Eyjólfur offered to let him stay with him during the winter and to learn to write. Jón was there for a period of time the next few winters. Eyjólfur's daughter was named Kristín, she taught Jón to write. She had a beautiful handwriting and was well educated for her time. That was all the instruction Jón received in Iceland. In the spring of the year when Jón's parents moved to Canada they asked and received permission for him to be confirmed. He was then in his thirteenth year. When Jón arrived in Canada the only choice he had was to work as a labourer for strangers. Although Jón was just a child when he arrived, even then he was more capable than most to withstand the severity and many stumbling blocks

which the Icelanders faced in this country at that time. He was big and strong, with an even temperament, and steadfast. He was energetic and trustworthy, quick to learn the language and a capable worker. He went first to Winnipeg and worked there as a labourer for two years. Then he went with his paternal uncle, Björn, to North Dakota. There he worked on farms for two years. Then he went back to Winnipeg and hired himself out to the Canadian Pacific Railroad Company. He went as their employee west to the Rocky Mountains. That railroad had just been laid from sea to sea and many things needed to be repaired and improved. While Jón worked in the mountains he never saw any Icelanders. During those years he learned the daily language of the workers quite well and made more money than before. All his pay cheque went to his parents except what he needed for his daily fare. He was thrifty in every way. It was not for the faint-hearted to work in the mountains and many a man has complained about it. Therefore the company usually hired strong men for that kind of job. In the winter avalanches are common, especially in the latter part of the winter when it begins to warm up and mud slides in the summer when it rains a lot. The labourers must work day and night to clear the tracks. For a full 72 hours he worked at this job without any rest. In this case there were but two things to choose from, to endure or quit. Jón was then in his eighteenth year and was bigger than the average man both in size and strength. He had always counted it in his favor to be an Icelander and had therefore often wrangled with arrogant (Canadians) in matters of urgency. There is no doubt that he did strive to show his Icelandic strength and endurance in these endeavours. And he endured the hardship until the end. He said that he had ached all over when he finished but was not exhausted.

Jón had been away from his parents for many years and they were impatient for him to return. By then his father's health had deteriorated and he wanted to go back to Iceland as soon as possible. Jón went home to Ekru and settled there, then barely twenty years old. His father went to Iceland in 1890, and as has been mentioned here earlier, Jón took over the farm, which was impoverished once his father had taken money for his fare. Shortly after this Jón moved to Þingvellir in the Geysir district with his mother and sisters. There he lived for a year and a bit. When his father returned he moved back to Ekru and did not want to reside anywhere else. This time Jón moved to Ekru for good. Sigurður died in 1892 and Jón lived at Ekru until he sold it. Then he bought Tungustaður, which is in the far south corner of Breiðavík. There he lived until he moved to Víðir, which will be mentioned later on.

3. Chapter

On October 16, 1893 Jón married Miss Kristín Jónsdóttir from Þingeýjarssla. Kristín's father Jón was the son of Erlendur from Rauðá, Jónsson from Mýri in Bárðardalur. They are from the so-called "Skinnastaður" family, the descendants of Finnbogi, the old, from Ás in Kelduherfi. That family tree can be traced back to most all settlers in Iceland, to kings in the Nordic countries, to the east as far as Russia, to the west as far as England, Iceland, Scotland and the Orkneys, and south to Normandy in France. But, what can be seen makes more sense than a story and there is many a bold man in this family, especially in Þingeyjarþingi, but then the family is scattered all over the country as well.

The children of Jón and Kristín are: Sigurbjörg Ísabella, married to Davíð Stefánsson, Guðmundsson (from Kúaþing) who now lives in Árborg. Second: Jón Valdimar. He joined the Canadian Army on Nov. 4, 1915, the Fort Garry Battalion No. 551-242 (?). He went to England in Jan. 1916 and to the front lines in France in June the same year and has been there since. He has not been wounded yet as far as men know. Their third child was named Marinó, who died when he was two weeks old. Kristín, Jón's wife, was born at Grænavatn by Mývatn and lived in that parish until she had been confirmed. Then she moved to her parents who then lived at Brettingstaðir in Laxdalur at that time. Shortly after she moved back to her parent's home her father died. Her mother, Kristbjörg, married again to Sigurjón Davíðson. Then they moved to Skarð in Reykjahverfi and lived there for a short while and then later on moved to Hvammur or Reykjadalur. After that Kristín didn't stay with them much. She went to Canada early on. Kristín became ill with dropsy in 1907 and died in May 1909. She was born on Feb. 13, 1862 and was buried in the cemetery (the newest) at Hnausa.

4. Chapter

When Jón worked as a labourer in Winnipeg, which has been mentioned before, he studied English at the Central School in Winnipeg, for only two months. He speaks and writes English so well that he holds and performs the duties of an officer for public affairs. He is very much for all things Icelandic and speaks and writes pure Icelandic and reads a lot of Icelandic books in comparison to what is fashionable according to Canadian standards.

After Jón took over his parents' farm he fished on Lake Winnipeg for eighteen years. He was either at the fishing station or hauling fish to market. In those days it was a long way to haul the fish to market, from far north of the lake all the way to Selkirk. As time passed the route shortened a bit more as the construction of the road advanced further north, first to Winnipeg Beach, next to Gimli and then to Riverton. This extension took many

The Sigurdson house in 1908.

years to complete.

In those days the price for fish was low. Some years the loss was great. Other years the pay was low and there were very few winters with a profit. Then fishing was about the only available trade in New Iceland. Even though men cleared quite a bit of woodland it was almost impossible to transport the firewood to the market. At that time there was a lack of transportation. In those days men were usually very poor. People survived mostly on fish and milk which was in short supply. I have heard that it was considered to be excellent contribution of grain, if a farmer was able to buy two bags of wheat a year for household use. It would be 180 pounds on Danish scales. One pound of coffee had to be enough for many a household. Vegetable gardens were few during the first years. There were no tools to plow the earth and a shortage of seeds. Still, it was what people were able to grow at the time, mainly potatoes. In those days Icelanders drank Indian tea, it is a brew from a special plant which grows in the moss in pinewoods. Said to be similar to ptarmigan leaves brew. People used another plant called peppermint tea, also silver-weed and foliage brew, or the leaves of a poplar tree. People didn't have sugar to sweeten these brews but milk was often mixed with them. All these brews proved to be harmless and perhaps worked as blood cleansers. At least people had just as beautiful and healthy complexions as now, when coffee and tea drinking is almost excessive. Many interesting things about the circumstances of the Icelanders in New Iceland have been forgotten, both from those early years of the settlement, up to the turn of the century and even past that time, all the way until the time when the railroad was laid north to Gimli. These stories are not necessarily told to explain Jón's circumstances and that of his people. On the contrary, his people probably lived a better life under better circumstances than many others did. Jón is and was a good manager and a good farmer, if one takes into account the circumstances in New Iceland. From the time Jón was about twenty he has been involved with parliamentary elections and politics in New Iceland. It was Baldvin L. Baldvinsson who first influenced him in those matters. Jón was a constant and faithful follower of the Conservative Party. He has been a standard bearer for this party at home and in other parts of Gimli district and in Bifröst district after he moved to Víðir. Jón was involved with the school board before he moved from the lake to Víðir, among other things.

The Vidir School

5. Chapter

In the year 1900 new ideas began to surface in the minds of men who lived close to the waterfront. Then serious discussions about laying railroad tracks north, through the New Iceland settlement. Around and after 1900 a few farmers moved north to the west side of the Icelandic River, from North Dakota. They were grain farmers of some means and were knowledgeable about agriculture. They had surveyed the area they had settled and named it Árdalsbyggð. The Icelanders from Dakota prospered from the very beginning in this new settlement. Then The New Icelanders who had lived down by the lake began to look westward. The woods were difficult and cumbersome to clear and the out-fields by the lake an unlikely place for increased feeding for livestock. Farther west away from the lake the natural clearings in the

woods became larger as did the hay lands. There it was more feasible to increase the numbers of livestock, such as cattle, horses and sheep, than it was by the lakefront. The Icelanders had tried their hand at fishing for thirty years, which had been unstable and difficult. Then, Jón Sigurðsson was in his prime and ambitious. At that time he turned from the difficult and poor paying fishing job to farming, especially cattle farming. Then he looked for a farmstead north of Árdalsbyggð. That area was unfamiliar to both Icelanders and people of other nationalities. Jón went to look for land northwest of Árdalsbyggð and surveyed a large area. Four men followed Jón into that wilderness, which was unfamiliar to most white men. Then it was the home of all kinds of wild beasts: deer, moose, elk, black bear, wolves, fox, and all kinds of smaller animals. Jón liked the land in the north, especially for cattle. There were good pastures and decent out-fields. The main problem for farmsteading was that the land was low lying and there was not enough drainage, because roads had not been built and draining had not been done, but there was unlimited wood for fence posts and firewood. Jón settled the northwest Quarter, Section 30, Township 23, Range 2nd. east of Principal Equator. In the autumn of 1905, Jón moved his family to the northwest quarter and began farming his land. A short while later he sold his other farm, Flugustaður.

When Jón and the other settlers had settled their new lands, then many of their former neighbours were in a frenzy to move into the district and claim lands there. And it was settled more or less in 3 years and fully within 5 years time. This story I have from Halldór Austmann (Ásmundsson, Björgvinsson, Geirmundsson, from Seyðisfjörður). Halldór arrived with his parents to the district three years after Jón had settled there. At that time all the Icelanders who now live there had settled there. His parents moved to their land which had been claimed in the winter.

6. Chapter

"Those who have the experience, know best" is an ancient expression. It belongs to those who settle new land and build new districts. Most of those men who moved and settled the district which now is called Víðibyggð were poor and some without any means. Jón Sigurðsson was considered to have satisfactory livestock when he moved to Víðir. He owned about 30 animals and didn't have much debt. At the beginning he built a timber house with a flat roof and a barn made of logs as was typical in the those early times of settlement. The district was already populated by 1907. That summer was the wettest, rainiest summer, ever in the district was and still is to this day called "the year of the flood." The inhabitants had scarcely had time to settle down and become content with what they had. Many became agitated and felt that it would be unwise to stay. And so it happened that many of the inhabitants decided that summer that they would move out of the district for good, because it was not to their satisfaction and would make them destitute. Then Jón was, as so often, courageous and careful, but resourceful. He went over to his neighbour who had decided it was unwise to stay and was on the verge of moving away along with some others.The man's name is Sigurður K. Finnsson, he is quite perceptive and a man of action. Jón's conversation with

him was something to this effect: that the inhabitants of the district should themselves make an effort to acquire the resources which the land had to offer them, before running away and deciding that there was nothing to be had from the land. Jón offered to go along with other men to the provincial government and ask them for money for roads and drainage systems. He suggested that men should exert themselves and work together to drain the land. In the end, Sigurður decided to stay and supported Jón in all his endeavors. The outcome was that the inhabitants of the district had a general meeting where it was decided that they would begin right away to work on a drainage system, draining the water off the land into the river. Jón and Tryggvi Ingjaldsson from Árdalsbyggð were sent to the provincial government to receive their input and assistance to keep the district dry in the future.The inhabitants dug a mile and a half long ditch, which was an immediate help. At the time Roblin and his caucus were at the helm of the provincial government and they favoured farming and farmers. This was Jón's first errand on behalf of the district to a government meeting. Jón and Tryggvi gained audience with R. P. Roblin and Robert Rodger the Minister for Public Works. They received a warm reception, and were promised help and money the following spring or after the next legislative assembly. They went home bearing this news and promises. The inhabitants were content and nobody (not one) moved from Víðibyggð district that summer nor later. The Roblin Government kept their promises the following year and while they were in power. And since then there haven't been any signs of restlessness in the district. The Roblin Government sent surveyors in the fall of 1907.

The digging of the ditch that summer was a difficult and dirty job for the inhabitants. The water and the mud was never lower than to the knee, and often, waist high. Finally by September the water had petered out enough for men to begin to make hay, which they continued to do until the end of October and until it began to freeze and snow. That fall men had to slaughter many animals and the price for cattle was very low. Then the Thyla Meat Co. was happy and some men felt that the company was taking advantage of the circumstances of the people and was paid as low a price as possible. In general the animals which were kept that winter were in good shape the next spring, even though the hay was poor and in short supply. Still, the odd farmer wasn't so fortunate. Previously and since then the inhabitants have had abundance of hay and healthy livestock.

7. Chapter

At the beginning of the settlement of Víðir, people had to go for their mail at "Framnes" which is south of the district. The people asked the Federal Government in Ottawa to open a post office in the middle of the district, or as close to its center as possible. After wrangling and squabbling the government sent the necessary papers to be filled out and a postmaster had to be chosen. Jón Sigurðsson was chosen unanimously by the inhabitants. At first Jón's farm had been named Aðalból (after Aðalból ın Hrafnkelsdal in N. Múlasýsla). It was not considered to be a good name for a post office, since people of many different nationalities frequented the place, therefore the name Víðir came about derived from the small bushes around the place. Jón Sigurðsson and Sigurður K. Finnson are probably the men who decided on the name. The government appointed Jón Sigurðsson postmaster on June 22, 1906. The post office was opened on Nov. 1, 1906 (or the same year). Jón has held that position since. The post office at Víðir serves: Sylvan, Morweena, Okno and Rosenburg as well. The school district was established in 1908. School districts borrow money from the banks but the Provincial Government backs the school district. The municipal council imposes an educational tax on all farms in the school district, each year, and that money is used to pay in installments, for school buildings, teachers' salaries and other things needed to run a school. But the provincial government pays 75 cents per day, while the school is open, towards teachers' salary.

Continued in the next Icelandic Canadian Magazine.

Lillian Vilborg studying Icelandic

Recovering My Mother Tongue

by Lillian Vilborg

When you lose your language, you lose the sound, the rhythm, the forms of your unconscious. Deep memories, resonances, sounds of childhood come through the mother tongue - when these are missing the brain cuts off connections.[1]

Mine was the generation that gave up its mother tongue. It opted for unilingualism, for the dominant Canadian language, English. As a result, we were separated from our parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles who settled comfortably into intimate conversation which excluded us, but for the odd word or phrase. When they spoke Icelandic they sounded sure, the language lilted musically to our ears, they were softer, quieter, funnier. They smiled and laughed a lot. The language was them, they were the language.

On my first trip to Iceland in 1971 I was amazed and chagrined to see and hear the extent of multilingual capability amongst my extended family there. At a dinner party in Reykjavík people slipped from Icelandic to Danish to English with ease. We were the only unilingual people there. It was embarrassing. When I had to I spoke very broken and rudimentary Icelandic to often disastrous results. I definitely didn't speak the language.

When, in 1979, I decided to return to university to study law, I remember saying to the Dean, "I don't know why I'm doing this. What I really want to do is study Icelandic language and literature." He looked at me as if I had four eyes. But my desire to learn Icelandic ran deep. It stayed with me, quietly nagging at me. Then one day it stared at me insistently. It had become a necessity. The protagonist in a book I was writing landed in 19th century Iceland. Now I had to learn Icelandic, otherwise how could I do the research necessary to complete my project. So twenty six years after I first visited Iceland, I finally determined to change my unilingual state. I had it in my mind that I was at least going to learn to read the language during my nine month stay. But I hadn't been in Reykjavík long before the sound of the language enchanted me, and I longed to learn to speak it. I sensed that if I re-created the cadence, the rhythm, the vocabulary, the people and culture would come alive to me, and I and my history would open up to me.

One of two fortunate recipients of the Government of Iceland Scholarship in 1997/98, I studied the first of a three year programme in the University of Iceland's programme to teach foreigners Icelandic, Íslensk fyrir erlenda studenta. Besides attending classes without fail, preparing carefully for class, doing all the assignments, I exposed myself as much as possible to the language. I did all my transactions at the stores and the bank in Icelandic, no matter how pathetic and broken my speech. I listened religiously to the radio—Rás 1, the old fashioned station where they talk a lot, read stories and whole books aloud. I found television less satisfactory (except for the news and a few locally produced programs) because so much of it is in English, either British or American, with Icelandic subtitles. (I did read the subtitles to see how something was said in English as compared to the way it is expressed in Icelandic.) I attended symphonies, plays, opera. I went to lectures and lectures and lectures, and usually only heard individual words, not full sentences. I didn't catch the complete meaning, and usually didn't understand the context. Except in our classes, where the professors were skilled at speaking Icelandic slowly, articulating clearly, using accessible vocabulary, so that the unaccus-

1. Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters*, New York: Oxford UP, 1997, 39.

Nicolle Olafson and Lillian Vilborg studying in the sun

tomed ear could hear what was being said.

During the last month of my stay I was at a Symphony Orchestra concert. I was surprised that I understood a lot of the written programme notes. All the times I had attended before I never had a clue what was on the written programme, except for the composer's names. At a meeting that same day I understood big chunks of the discussion, but still missed some stories that I thought I should have caught. I conducted several interviews in Icelandic, and even took notes in Icelandic. So, I know I made some progress in my time there.

During all this I discovered that learning a language is an extremely complex process. It is not just a matter of understanding grammatical constructions and rules, nor of memorizing words. It's definitely not about translating from one language to another. I have been told that language acquisition occurs in stages, and that auditory recognition precedes the ability to reproduce what you hear. Many people in Iceland have said to me "Þú skilir meira en Þú talar." "You understand more than you can say." No kidding. One thing that surprised me was the extent to which language is "embodied." This struck me one day when I read the word "ýta" on the door of the bank, and felt my arm automatically raise and push on the door, my brain not having engaged to translate the word to the English "push." I felt I had made a giant leap. Language isn't just brain work, it's also body work.

Some days, as I tried to stuff more and more into my brain, my body tightened up inside, and seemed to say "No more. I can't take any more." Other days I got so discouraged I thought it was an absolutely hopeless and ridiculous task I had set for myself. It felt harder than law school!! Many days I found myself physically exhausted from the effort to hear, speak and read. And on another day I had a conversation that seemed relatively normal and I felt elated, floating home, smiling to myself. However, after a successful communicating day, I might come home and turn on the television for the 11:00 news, and my brain would feel like it was chasing its tail, running, running in circles, trying to keep up with the speed of the talk. Chasing words.

It's a rocky road, being serious about learning a language. And I'm surprised that I have never been told by anyone how very difficult it is. I know many people who have studied French as adults in Canada and I have never heard them discuss their experience of language acquisition. My own daughter studied French in immersion as a child, and she used to tell me how her brain worked differently depending on which language she was

working in. I thought it was cute at the time. Now I'm beginning to understand the wisdom of the small child's words.

Soon after I arrived in Iceland, I received two e-mail messages which commented on the foolishness of attempting to learn to speak Icelandic in a year of study. I felt defensive. Why wouldn't I be able to learn Icelandic in a year? Wasn't it my mother tongue? Then I met a friend from Edmonton, who has lived in Reykjavík for several years. He said that after seven years he is speaking the language in a way that brings the query "Did you study abroad for a time?" A signal to him that he is finally speaking close to the way native speakers do. His five year old daughter, however, still corrects his grammatical errors. My stomach fell at hearing this story. But surely it wouldn't be so hard for me. Afterall I did hear it as a child. A couple of months later one of my classmates told me it took him seven years to learn to speak Finnish. That he had completely given up when finally it came. Yes, well, that's Finnish, I thought. Not Icelandic. Finnish has way more cases. Seven, however, was starting to sound like an apocryphal number. Then I read an e-mail on the INL listserv from someone who said sixteen years in Iceland didn't do it for him, he still didn't speak. And I met people who had lived in Reykjavík for as many as twenty years, and still spoke only English. Thank goodness there were people who sent me messages telling me their language success stories. Of suddenly hearing a full sentence on the radio and feeling they had made a big break through. Of feeling relatively competent after three years.

When I asked people how they knew what was going on where and when, they told me to listen to the radio, or read about it in the paper. But I found I couldn't distinguish between one kind of programme and another on the radio. I couldn't tell when they swung into advertisements of coming events. Certain things I identified early on—the news; announcements of those who had died, which read like a mantra twice a day, each death announcement usually ending with "börn, barnabörn og barnabarnbörn;" the weather report; stories being read. But when and where the symphony was playing, or where there was an opening of an art show, or when a play was being staged, or who was giving a talk when. No. I couldn't hear that at all. Finally, the last week I was there, I began hearing them, and knew I had hit it when I heard my name blasting out—I was giving a lecture that day.

I felt like I had to hear a new word over and over and over again before I could remember it to say it. I was sometimes frustrated to tears at how difficult it was to remember a word or a declension of a noun or adjective or pronoun or the parts of a verb.

Or the numbers one to four, which decline. I walked to the university repeating the paradigms over and over, glancing at a paper folded in my pocket when I got stuck. It had a chant-like quality to it—er hestur, um hest, frá hesti, til hests, eru hestar, um hesta, frá hestum, til hesta. Over and over and over again. Then I would add the definite article—er hesturinn, um hestinn, frá hestinum, til hestsins, eru hestarnir, um hestana, frá hestunum, til hestanna. Over and over and over again.

I felt like it took at least five passes at the same information before it sunk in. Our professor for Nútíma mál (Grammar), Jón Friðjónsson, covered the material at least

twice in class, and would follow that with an exercise to demonstrate how the concept worked. I laboriously read the textbook, written in Icelandic. Then I did exercises associated with the concept. And then I went over it once or twice with my study group. How could it be so hard, I asked myself. How could it take so much time. Because even after all that, I didn't necessarily retain it permanently! I reminded myself that my study mates, who seemed so much more knowledgeable than I, had in fact covered the material before, some of them twice. And that they were young enough to be my children. I asked one of the whiz kids in class how he remembered words. He replied breezily that he made a practice of using a new word every day. I could feel my brain screaming, resisting. A new word every day. On the one hand, that is just too hard. On the other, the language will never come one word a day. I will be dead before I have any vocabulary built up.

I grilled my relatives on how to use words. When do I use sækja as opposed to ná as opposed to fá—they all mean to get, obtain. Or the word til—how is it used. It seems to be used for everything—búa til—to make something, taka til—to tidy the house, hlakka til—to look forward to something, ekki til—it's not. Let alone using it just as the preposition "to." I asked them how to say things that I said all the time in English, like "amazing." Ótrulegt they suggested.

Phrases were delightful but seemed to have no relationship to the meaning of the individual words in the phrase. When I saw the movie *As Good as It Gets* subtitled in English, the phrase Hvað er að? finally sunk in. "What's the matter?" To me "að" doesn't signify "matter," but that doesn't matter. What is matter anyway. There are many many many phrases that just don't compute if you attempt to translate. Some phrases I heard used over and over and couldn't figure them out. Hlýtur að vera—must be; það skiptir máli—that's important; fara á fætur—get up (out of bed), and I wondered how I could make these phrases part of me, since if I was just translating, I would never get them. Never. Fara á fætur means literally "go to feet."

Icelandic is what is called a transparent language—you can see how words are made up—as in vandamál, which means difficulty. If you take the word apart vanda means bad and one of the meanings of mál is matter. Bad matter = difficulty. The language program at the university puts a lot of emphasis on identifying the elements of words, because that makes it possible to discern the meaning of a word, even though it may require looking up several words in the dictionary to get at the meaning of one word. I faithfully purchased the Morgunblaðið, the daily newspaper, a few times a week, and attempted to read it. The vocabulary seemed so very difficult—great long words—true examples of the transparent language, words put together to create new words to suit the changing times.

One of my classmates kept telling me how similar Icelandic was to English, how many words have the same root. When we were learning the words hingað and þangað, he said "We have the same words in English. What would they be?" I drew a blank. "Hither and thither" he said triumphantly. "Yes," I replied sarcastically, "And I say hither and thither every day." But he is in fact right. Many words do have the same root in English as in Icelandic. For some reason I did not find this a helpful approach.

One difference from English that intrigued me is the way that the Icelandic language distances the expression of feelings. You don't say "I long" for something, you say "Mig langar" (Me longs) making the speaker the object rather than the subject of the verb. There is a long list of verbs, many of which have to do with feelings, which are treated this way. "I feel" translates to "Mér finnst" taking the "I" all the way to its dative form, three steps removed from the subject. (My comparing classmate said this was equivalent to the English "Methinks.") If you talk about time passing you say "Tíminn líður" exactly as we would in English, but if you want to respond to a question about how life is going for you , it is "Mér líður." Icelanders have the reputation of being reserved, except when they drink. This kind of sentence construction seems to confirm that reserve.

From the beginning I listened carefully when people spoke. I found certain words stood out - einmitt said with emphasis after someone said something. Exactly. Skog. Placed almost anywhere in a sentence. A word to stop the speaking, to give the speaker

time to think about the next word s/he was about to say. Allt í lagi. OK, all right. And yet I didn't hear other words until much later. For instance, about seven months into my stay, I began to notice people saying endilega. Absolutely. Surely they had been saying endilega since I arrived. But I hadn't heard it before. Sometimes I began hearing words after I learned them for a class project in Talað mál (Language Lab, Conversation and Pronunciation). Gagnrýnandi—critic, kúreki—cowboy, sýning—show, as in art show, fylki—state, landslag—landscape, kraftur—power. I heard people use words that seemed to emphasize what they were saying. I longed to say those words as if I understood when to say them and what they meant—æðislegt, glæsilegt, hræðilegt, rósalegt, rólsalega gott, sniðugt, flott. With the right emphasis. Then I think I would sound like I belonged.

After my nine months were over, I wondered where I would/could go with what I had learned. I could try writing. From Canada, letters to my friends and relatives in Iceland, always trying to use new words and constructions, trying to expand my ability. But what would I do without Sigga Þorvaldsdóttir, my professor in Ritað mál, (Reading and Writing) going over my writing and correcting my sentence structure and word use.

Where would I get that feedback from an expert. I could try reading. That would expand my vocabulary. Before leaving Iceland I was able to get the general meaning of a book written for young people without too much reference to a dictionary, although I undoubtedly missed nuances—I read Vestur í bláinn by Kristín Steinsdóttir for Ritað mál and other books for Talað mál. Adult literature was another thing. In class we read several short stories, sophisticated, well written short stories, which I would have found very difficult to understand without the aids prepared for us by the professors. At home I listened while following along with the text, to Gréttir's Saga and Böðvar Guðmundsson´s *Híbýli vindanna* on tape, which I borrowed from the Public Library. And I read Einar Már Guðmundsson's *Englar alheimsins* aloud with some of my classmates, and at the end of each chapter, we went over the text until we all understood it.

So there's no question that I can read, given self discipline. Speaking is another matter. With whom will I speak in Canada. In Iceland people are very patient with the person who is learning, who speaks poorly, hesitatingly, ungrammatically. They are prepared to encourage practice without criticism. They seem delighted that you are making the effort to learn their language. But would

Canadians who speak Icelandic have that attitude? Would I be too embarrassed to reveal my ungrammatical limited language base?

I do know that it's been, besides hard work, a real privilege to get some sense of the embodied-ness of language, the way in which my mother tongue felt right, even though it was frustratingly elusive. It was also a humbling experience to essentially be in the position of a very small child, hearing conversation and not knowing its meaning. Trying to communicate, searching for words, searching for form, doing the best I could do. Letting go of my pride. It was also a frustrating experience, because even though I longed to converse with my friends and relatives, I was determined not to switch to English, which most of them spoke fluently.

It meant my conversations were very limited in scope. I gained a new admiration for my grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, and friends who spoke Icelandic flawlessly and at the same time spoke English better than most who speak only English.

This mother tongue that I have attempted to re-cover is a gift we should not have let go, and sadly one we will never re-gain. This is a loss to our memory, our understanding of and relationship to the land and to people.

Silence on the Seventh Floor

by Evelyn K. Thorvaldson

Not a sound. People, yes. The odd sniffle —the odd snore. But, more often, not a sound.

In silence, everyone in the lounge on the 7th floor waits for the news on his or her family member/friend from the operating room. The anticipation of the words from the Doctor. Was it successful? Was it not?

Personal experience of life threatening emergency surgery can bring one to reality in a very short time. It can remind you that life is not to be taken for granted. It can end in a moment. It can bring about a lifestyle that is a stranger. It can make you—it can break you. It is yours to deal with.

Thoughts! So many thoughts run through the mind. And—the silence.

Nearly three years ago, I was one of those people on the seventh floor lounge at the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg. My husband Gordon, then aged 61 years, suffered a ruptured aneurysm on the aorta as the medical team was preparing him for surgery. Only with the expertise and talent that was available to us did he survive The first 24 hours were crucial—then on to the next 48 hours. A respiratory system was in place and keeping him alive. The intensive care unit (SICU) was the comforting area in terms of his struggle—and in terms of my faith. All around me were families watching their clergy delivering the last rites—praying and making that incredible decision to remove all apparatus called life support. Meanwhile, Gordon kept the monitors showing that he was still with us. Complications were bountiful—but seemed to be addressed with confidence by the medical staff. There appeared to be a solution for each problem that arose. Each time, the treatment was a success. The medical staff was amazed, as was I. This was indeed a man with a will to live, given the chance.

Five weeks of intensive care—and five weeks of silence on the seventh floor. I came to feel very familiar with the events and the sound of the silence. Families were waiting for the ultimate answer about their loved one. Some came out the operating room and directly to the recovery unit. Others did not. The message was clear. But, there was always the silence that followed the news.

The volunteers of the HSC White Cross Guild became familiar. They would make fresh coffee throughout the day. They would offer a pillow and a blanket to any of us that tried to sleep between surgeries and visits. They were most comforting and seemed to understand and respect the silence. A young hospital Chaplain would quietly survey the lounge. She seemed to know when it was time to make contact. Her ability to open the conversation was incredible. Her ability to listen was even more amazing. She was there at the most opportune times.

It never ceased to amaze me how the medical staff could be so professional and yet so gentle. Several times, during the first nine hour surgery that Gordon endured, one of the Doctors, a nurse—and at one time, the anesthetists came to the waiting room to advise me on the progress and the process they were attempting to save Gordon's life. The diagnosis—and the prognosis were dim. Chances of survival was minimal. And yet, this Viking beat the odds.

I recall the peace—and a chance to rest in the visitors lounge on the seventh floor. There were couches—long enough to stretch out and on occasion, have a power nap. Those were lengthy periods between the visits in the SICU area. Periods of silence. Periods that gave one a chance to console someone else. Periods to listen to words of wisdom. Periods to get closer to our families —and cherish every moment. People became aware of each other—some were even able to reach out in comfort. There was absolutely no place to run in order to shed tears or re-group following bad times or bad news from the ICU. There was a stairwell. Many of us went there on occasion. There was also a "Family

Introducing new board member
Allison Holm

Allison Holm is the daughter of Jane (Johnson) and Hugh Holm (formerly of Gimli). Her grandparents were Solvin and Gudborg Holm of Gimli, Manitoba. Great grandparents were Maria and Sigurdur Einarson and Magnus and Thuridur Holm. Allison was raised in Winnipeg Manitoba and received her education at the University of Manitoba and Winnipeg Technical College. She is currently employed by Canada Safeway Pharmacy. Allison looks after advertising in the magazine.

Are you harbouring your own little modern-day saga and need somewhere to share it? Do you have a story, poem, biography, or favourite memory just waiting to be expressed? The Icelandic Canadian welcomes all original articles of interest to our readers and would like to hear from you!

Our editorial staff will consider all submissions, and are willing to assist you to prepare your work for print. In addition to your article, we also welcome accompanying photographs, and a brief autobiography.

Please send written material to:

The Icelandic Canadian Magazine

Box 1156, Gimli, Manitoba R0C 1B0

You can also e-mail submissions to:

icelandiccanadian@yahoo.com

Room" provided for those who had just lost their family member and friend. This room was also the area that families were called together for a meeting with the Doctors to hear the latest medical update on our patients. Some of us were fortunate to have our Pastor with us at all these meetings—as well as regular visits throughout the week. His presence was of the utmost importance.

From the SICU area to the "Step Down" ward for cardiac patients was a big day. Anxious moments caused major concern in terms of the 24-hour care that we had become accustomed to. However, the step down ward was comforting with the greatest of medical attention and needs. Progressing after a few days, we saw the move to the regular ward. A room with two beds and still, the professional care. There were sitters that were on duty 24 hours while the patient was still unable to communicate. There were speech therapists and occupational therapists already on the scene which eventually became vitally important to the restoration of the communication links and body healing.

After a period of approximately three months, two major surgeries and the removal of the trachea, the next step was "home." On a "pass" from the hospital after just three hours, Gordon developed a blood clot in his leg. It was back to the hospital—and intravenous for another eight days. The '98 Brier was being telecast—and took much of the disappointment away from the setback. The trials and tribulations were many following release from the hospital—but with determination and continuing care from community services, Gordon is now a member of the Kinsmen Reh-Fit Centre and his state of health is remarkable.

Often, on our visits and appointments to Cardiac Surgeons, Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapists—and just a neat "hello" to the 3rd floor staff, I would find a way to revisit the 7th floor. The silence is still there.

We will always understand the faith that is needed. We will always respect our medical people for their service. We will always appreciate the silence.

This article was written with the greatest respect for those persons and medical staff who were involved (and, in some cases continue) with Gordon's survival and amazing recovery beginning in January of 1998. It is a thumb nail sketch of anyone and everyone who has been the "visitor" in the lounge on the 7th floor by the SICU, at the 'step down' ward and the general cardiac ward on the 3rd floor at the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg.

The United Nations
International Year of Volunteers 2001

Viking village at Norstead

Viking Adventure

by Muriel Dodge

When I first saw the ad for "Adventure Canada's Millennium Voyage of Discovery and Floating Photography Symposium," I was impressed. The photography portion of this adventure was not as interesting as the Millennium Voyage of Discovery, which entailed following the voyage route of the Vikings to the New World—Vinland. I have an Icelandic (Viking) background and have always been intrigued with the sense of adventure that prevailed in the days of the Vikings.

This adventure was to start in Greenland, follow the Viking trail across Davis Strait to the north shore of Labrador, south to Newfoundland and end at St. John's.

Our journey to the Arctic began with a very early morning departure from Ottawa by charter to Kangerlaussuaq, situated at the head of a 90 mile long Sondre Stromsfjord in Greenland in the afternoon. We had a bus tour of the area and got a great view of the Greenland Ice Cap, where herds of muskox have taken up residence.

That afternoon we boarded zodiacs (the first of many trips) that transferred us to our home for the next 10 days, the ship Lyubov Orlova.

The interior of the ship was like taking a step back in history. The furnishings and decor were 1950s—mirrors, red brocade furniture and brass and wood on the stairways. The crew of the ship was Russian—the service and food were superb.

We got settled quickly in our rooms. I was very lucky to have two wonderful roommates—Sherri and Shirley. Both girls were from Ontario and both were there for the adventure.

After a great evening meal, we retired to our beds. The gentle rocking of the ship and the drone of the motors contrasted the hurried events of the day. I soon found myself lulled into a deep sleep.

Our wakeup call, that morning and all mornings to follow, was the gentle voice of Ian Tamblyn, our on-board musician/entertainer/zodiac driver/Viking leader, who described the weather, geographical position and a brief itinerary of the day's events.

This particular morning we were into the zodiacs early (at dawn) to view one of the largest glaciers in Greenland, Sukkertoppen. What a spectacular site—the early morning sun glistening off the white and deep blue colours of this gigantic ice field. We all felt very overwhelmed and insignificant in close proximity to this massive spectacle of Nature.

We returned to our ship to partake in a very healthy, delicious breakfast, one of many, and to talk with the other passengers about our first "adventure."

Later in the day, we arrived at the small village of Kangamiut, Greenland. This village's inhabitants are mostly of Inuit origin and speak the Greenlandic language. Their teachers and most of the business people in the small village speak Danish, Greenlandic and some English. There are only 500 inhabitants, with a good percentage under the age of twelve. We were greeted warmly and visited the church and school where we were entertained by a children's choir singing in harmony.

The next forty hours crossing Davis Strait were, I must admit, not enjoyable for me; the reason being that I was very seasick. I thought I had armed myself with the medications, bracelets, ear patches, etcetera, that were supposed to ward off these nauseous feelings, but found out that none of these preventive measures were effective. I ended up being a "landlubber lying down below" (to coin the words of a song).

We woke up the next morning to a magnificent sunrise and the approaching view of the Torngat Mountains of Northern Labrador. Around this area are the remains of the settlements named and settled by the Moravian missionaries. Prior to this, about 6,000 years

ago, the Maritime Archaic Indians visited here in search of stones suitable for tool making. The chert stone was valued and used as a trading device by the natives for centuries. We were very fortunate to have Jane Thompson, a well-known historian, as one of our resource people on board ship. She and her husband, Callum, excavated sites in this area, so Jane was able to answer all the questions we had.

We visited Ramah Bay, Hebron, the abandoned Mission site, and Nain. The vegetation was very sparse. There were no trees, but what was surprising was the abundance of blueberries and cranberries. There was evidence of Caribou, but no one spotted any live animals.

We arrived at Hopedale, Labrador in the afternoon of the sixth day. We boarded our zodiacs for a ride ashore and were greeted by dozens of happy faces—a sight we were to see over and over again throughout our next few days. A lot of these small coastal villages do not have road access so therefore do not see visitors too often. The inhabitants of Hopedale made our stay worthwhile, as they opened a handicraft market—displaying and selling a variety of handcrafted items—and entertained us with singing, drumming and a demonstration of the Arctic Games.

On Saturday we arrived at Battle Harbour and met Mike, our guide. What a wonderful, colourful character! Battle Harbour is a reconstructed fishing village open to tourists and is a great way to educate us interior inhabitants to the devastation of the fishing industry in the East Coast. We had a very interesting tour of the site, a crab feast and an informal discussion of the plight of the fishing industry.

The next morning we arrived at L'Anse aux Meadows. The day was windy and the surf was choppy. We manoeuvred our zodiacs around rocks and small islands and landed on the beach at Norstead—the reincarnated Viking village. I was impressed by the location of this site as it could be easily defended by the inhabitants—the small islands and rocks would make it very difficult for the enemy to sneak up on them. We were greeted by our Viking hosts who gave us a grand tour of the village and answered our many questions about life in the early Viking occupation of North America. I was overwhelmed with

These were tributes from Iceland, Norway and Denmark to commemorate the opening of Norstead in the year 2000.

the authenticity of the buildings, the Viking ship (the Snorri), the costumes and the culture of the site. The actual site of the original Vinland is about a kilometre from Norstead. There is still a vigourous archeological dig happening at the original village, so it was decided to have the "tourist" area away from the historical site.

Another magnificent sunrise greeted us the next morning on our arrival at Woody Point in Gros Morne Park, Newfoundland. We boarded buses for a tour of this UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site. On the Tablelands our guide explained the area's awesome geology; colliding plates, upwellings of magma, the lapetus Sea, oceanic crust and mantle movements, which all have had a hand in creating this landscape. We had a leisurely day, which was welcomed by the crew as well.

Tuesday evening was my first ceilidh - Cape Breton style. What an awesome party! The people of Englishtown, Cape Breton, were extremely hospitable and everyone had a roaring good time—stepdancing and singing.

Wednesday was filled with visiting Ramea in the afternoon, and Francois, NF, at night. Both places have been devastated by the cod moratorium and have had their populations

severely decreased. In fact, at Ramea we doubled the population of the village (there were 100 of us). We were received very warmly and showered with good food, good fellowship and good music.

Our last full day on board ship was a visit to France—the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon—where we heard about the liquor smuggling that was carried out, quite successfully, during the prohibition days. There was a very European feel about this area. Most of us spent the day sightseeing, partaking of French cuisine and purchasing great French wines.

When we docked at St. John's, NF, it was a very emotional time—saying farewell to our new found friends and saying goodbye to a great Adventure. It was a wonderful surprise to have my sister, Jessie, and her partner, Jack, on the dock to greet me when I arrived. They were on an adventure of their own—travelling across Canada. Jessie, Jack and I spent the rest of the day touring St. John's. What a great city; I definitely want to go back to Newfoundland to spend some time exploring its bays, inlets and wonderful small towns with their friendly inhabitants.

A typical depiction of life in the early years of Vinland.

Muriel Dodge

My recollections of this trip are so happy and positive. I am looking forward to my next adventure with Adventure Canada.

Muriel Dodge found out about this particular Viking voyage from an advertisement in the Canadian Geographic magazine. The idea of following the Viking route to the New World was most exciting to her. Her fellow passengers were people who had also read the ad. Most of them were interested in the photography portion of the expedition.

There were 100 passengers, (mostly from Canada), and 80 crew (Russian). One of the most interesting things was that everyone was there for the adventure, so the atmosphere was jovial.

Farewell to Svavar and Guðrún

Address to Svavar Gestsson and Guðrún Ágústdóttir on March 17, 2001 at the Arborg Þorrablot

by David Gislason

Tonight belongs to Svavar and Guðrún, they have been with us for two years now, and soon they will be moving on to new duties and challenges in the Foreign Service of Iceland.

This is not so much a time to say good bye, as they will be with us for some time yet, it is more an opportunity for us to come together to celebrate the good times we have enjoyed with them. It is an opportunity to acknowledge all that they have done to further strengthen relations between Iceland, and the descendants of Icelandic settlers here in Canada.

The ties that we speak of are ties that bound the hearts of those who left their homeland in search of a new life in a strange and unknown land, they are ties that remain unbroken to this day. Svavar and Guðrún felt this very strongly when they arrived in Manitoba, and they have felt it wherever their travels have taken them, across this great country, Canada.

For us, it seems they have always been there, these ties, it is part of what we are as Canadians—Canadians with a proud Icelandic heritage. We go through long periods of time when it seems enough to simply be Canadian, coping with the complexities of making our way through life. But just below the surface, it is always there, the knowledge that there is more to us, that we are connected with our past. More than once I have heard Svavar say that our people really did not leave Iceland, they brought it with them when they came.

I have thought about this, and have often been amazed at the powerful influence a visit to Iceland has made on people that I know, myself included. I wrote a short poem on another occasion, which talks about this almost magical power, it goes like this:

The Ember

Beneath the ice a fire glows
And it burns with an ancient will.
The spirit of hope and purpose flows
And breaks forth from the surface chill.

And the spirit dwells in the hearts of those
Who left that mystic land.
It lingers at length in soft repose,
So far from the fjord-lined strand

It's an ember that lives in all of these
That wear the ancient name—
And it only takes the slightest breeze
To fan this spark to a flame.

Guðrún and Svavar have truly been "Iceland among us" these past two years, and they been more that just a slight breeze fanning the ember with in each of us. I know that they came determined to make a difference, to make a meaningful contribution, and that they have done. They have put a tremendous personal energy into the millennium programs of last year.

They have travelled this country from coast to coast, and brought Iceland officially to every part of Canada where Icelandic descendants are to be found, and believe me, we are everywhere.

According to Guðjón Arngrímsson, in his book, "Nyja Ísland", it was just after midnight of Aug. 5th, 1873 that the first organized group of emigrants left Iceland for the New World. These people, and those who would follow in later years brought with them their artifacts, their memories and their culture. Some of the artifacts have survived, memories have been handed down, and the culture lives on. We have heard an example of that from our New Iceland Youth Choir, of whom we are so proud. I heard another example just recently. We were visiting neighbours, and they brought out some old 78 RPM records, the sound quality was not what we are used to in today's technology, but we were enchanted by the far-off sounding harmonies of the New Iceland choir of the 1950s, people from Riverton, Arborg, Viðir, Geysir and Gimli getting together to do what Icelandic people have always done—sing together the old folk songs.

It took over 125 years for Iceland to formally follow us here with a diplomatic presence, but relations have come full circle. With the arrival of Svavar and Guðrún here in the spring of 1999, and the opening of the Consulate in Winnipeg, that circle was complete. They have been the finest representatives of their country, and it has been heartwarming to have them with us. They have laid the groundwork from which future Icelandic diplomats in Canada will build, and they have set a high standard. Tonight we say thank you to Svavar and Guðrún for their work here, often above and beyond the call of duty. We hope they will enjoy the time they have left in Canada, and we wish them happiness and success as they move ahead.

Poetry

Roots

by Richard Bredsteen

Gimli celebrates its Icelandic roots,
the fireworks are awesomely beautiful
spontaneously full of oooohs and ahhhhhs,
I visit the sand sculptures, dinosaurs, a turtle,
a fried egg and body
at rest under the sun,
cooked…
the puzzle of life is being completed,
do you notice how the pieces
fall into place these days,
yes, there is an underlying song…
nature and tradition is there,
love and walks in the park,
and pieces of truth
plucked from the dark,
in the middle of the night
I feel for my note book and pen,
slowly make my way to the light,
I am only so very mortal
and life is so very precious,
My life with this Icelandic family is an adventure
and I may be discovering love
in a completely new way,
It is true, we live out a dream
within a dream,
and with one another
we mirror the past
and your Icelandic roots
reflect life's precious jewel
each day,
letting go of our attachment
to the duality of this life
gives us an eternal gift,
a space to receive
and be who
we truly are…

Book Reviews

Where the Winds Dwell

by Böðvar Guðmundsson
Turnstone Press
364 pages, $18.95 Cdn.
ISBN # 0888012543

Reviewed by Donald E. Gislason

Where the Winds Dwell is a journey through time, tradition and the human spirit - a poignant story from the edge of survival in Iceland to the pioneer fringes of settlement in Ontario (Kinmount) and Manitoba (New Iceland). It is a compassionate dialogue from a father to his daughter Patricia in England. The story evolves from a shoebox of old letters he has taken with him while on an opera tour to Canada, and from a bundle of ancient correspondence he inherits from a distant cousin there.

The story centres on the life and times of Patricia's great great-grandfather, Olaf Jensson Fiddle, who was born and raised in the dire economic conditions, leading up to mass emigration from Iceland during the latter part of the nineteenth century. As the name suggests, the gift of music runs through the generations.

Much of the text reads like a ballad, with a melody embedded throughout a series of adventures and vignettes.

The fiddle had been given to Olaf's father Jens during the eventful Dog Days of the early 1800s, when a wealthy English merchant and his Danish associate Jorund wrested short-lived control of Iceland from Denmark, its brutal colonial master. These interlopers opened the jail in Reykjavik and Jens was among the "pitiable beings" which made his way to freedom, having been imprisoned for a crime of poverty and hunger. To him, Jorund was "the best of all kings," who encouraged music and dance among his people. And that is where this saga begins.

The years pass and Olaf Fiddle's parents die. Gudmundsson weaves the economic, social and political hardships of the times through the adventures of several characters, many who also have pseudonyms, thus releasing them from historic scrutiny. The main events would seem to be in place, but sequence and details are sometimes reassembled in order to tell a good tale.

Poor families, who were often driven to dependency on the state, were split up and scattered. At one point, Olaf finds himself as an itinerant farm worker and by chance meets the future Governor General of Canada, Lord Dufferin, who he meets again many years later during an inspection tour of New Iceland.

Olaf Fiddle eventually meets and marries his lovely Saeunn, and the couple begin a family, struggling with poverty, increasing debt and small hopes. They have far too many children too soon, who do not survive or who are taken away. Without the chance of improving their lot they are forced, like so many others, to emigrate to North America.

The year is 1874. One of their children, a son, who remains in Iceland with foster parents, becomes a progenitor of our narrator and therefore, grist for some of the letters in the shoebox.

Although the salient events of this drama are accurate, facts and personalities are often manipulated to ensure a compact and entertaining story-line. For example, after selling their few belongings at auction and yet remaining in debt, Olaf and Saeunn find their way south to Reykjavik with their two remaining children, allowable baggage and the fiddle, where the ship Laura waits to take them to Granton harbour in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Accordingly, it is here they first set eyes on grand buildings, large horses and a busy urban life. They are then taken by train, which was a new experience, across the country to Glasgow, in order to transfer to the ocean steamer The Spirit of Canada for the long journey across the Atlantic to Quebec City, with 102 of them ending up on the edge of the Precambrian Shield at Kinmount. Several tragic deaths occur on board, including one of Olaf's remaining children.

However, the truth is that this 1874 ship load of emigrants embarked from two ports in northern Iceland, on the Allan Lines steamer SS St. Patrick, sailing directly to Canada without a transfer in Scotland. As well, the ship's manifest confirms no deaths on board and one birth. In short, a total of 352 desperate souls arrived on this vessel in Quebec City on September 23rd that year, taking their first novel train ride from there to Toronto.

Most of the able-bodied men were hired to clear the bush and blast rock in preparation for a rail line at Kinmount.

Then again, after the settlement at Kinmount failed in 1875, with the loss of many lives, the St. Patrick Icelanders moved to a new colony in the District of Keewatin north of Winnipeg. After an arduous journey across the Great Lakes, they joined a number of Mennonites from Russia for the trip down the Red River to Winnipeg.

The latter headed east of the Red River for a "colony established by other Mennonites, who had begun to settle there five years earlier." In fact, this group of German-speaking Anabaptists from Russia arrived in Manitoba the year before!

Given such discrepancies, the reader must keep in mind that Gudmundsson extracts several discreet events or characters over a period time, rearranging them in a highly interesting series of credible scenes, much like doing a painting. Periodically, Olaf plays his fiddle, stitching together various joyous and tragic high points in this epic movement of people to the new world. We meet the lay minister, John Taylor, aka "Moses," who was instrumental in relocating this group of Icelanders from Ontario to the west.

However, the narrator treats this sincere and committed man with 'tongue in cheek' comments, likely in response to various hard spirited pastors in Iceland, such as Kolbein "Suet-sucker" of Reykir.

Those who are familiar with the events leading to the founding of "New Iceland" will recognize some of the characters as they march across the page. Where the bare bones of history might dissuade a reader, Gudmundsson infuses an eloquent style into a semi-fictional treatise. Despite its historic limitations, this is an entertaining and informative book, which is hard to put down.

This is a beautifully bound paper back, with an excellent image of period farm dwellings on the cover. The original, Hibflli vindanna, published in Iceland by *Hibýli vindanna Mal og Menning* (1995) received the Icelandic Literary Award in 1996.

Böðvar Guðmundsson is a former teacher, who has translated works by Berthold Brecht, Roald Dahl and Cole Porter. He is also an acclaimed poet, playwright and composer of opera.

Frances

by W.D. Valgardson
Groundwood Books, $7.95, ISBN 0888993978

Reviewed by Linda Goodman

Frances discovers that being "born under the glacier," means, among other things, that she might be psychic. This is good news for an inquisitive adolescent who aspires to be a detective, a coroner or an anthropologist.

Frances is award-winning author, W.D. Valgardson's novel about a young girl who lives on Lake Winnipeg with her mother and grandmother.

Like Pandora's box, the discovery of an ancestor's journal at the family homestead, along with photos and an old dress, opens up questions, questions that greatly disturb both her mother and her grandmother.

"Some things should just be left alone," warns her gran.

Following her instincts Frances digs deep into her family's past in order to find clues about who she is, and where she came from. The family skeletons, (and the accompanying emotional baggage) rear their ugly heads, which naturally inspire her to dig even deeper. How were her struggling ancestors able to live in the richest house in town? And what about her own father? Frances is torn between "being sad or being mad," thinking that if he didn't drown, perhaps he is living it up in a tropical country somewhere without her.

Valgardson masterfully creates an aura of mystery and the supernatural as he brings ancient Icelandic folklore to life. A black and white raven accompany Frances on her quest for knowledge, but she is not afraid; she recognizes them as mascots of the Norse god Odin. Her discovery and inexplicable insight with Runic casting stones set Frances apart and help her to accept aspects of her own identity that up until now only caused confusion.

When the dragonflies alight on Frances as she sits quietly in the sunshine, we see a young girl who is just beginning to understand her own spiritual and physical connection to this precious earth. "She sat there covered in golden bodies and wings. This is what the island and the lagoon were all about. When she sat like this, she felt like she wasn't just her, separate, but part of something bigger."

Frances will charm all readers with her intelligence and her humorous approach to life. Her adolescent point of view is revealing, honest and hilarious. Frances is an explorer, on a journey of discovery where there is no turning back.

The settings are unmistakably Lake Winnipeg, where Valgardson spent his own youth. The book's message is invaluable to young people who are struggling to discover their own identities. Frances manages to learn from her family's past but is smart enough to forgive and go forward on the path that leads to her own destiny.

Fans of Frances will be pleased to hear that VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates, Lanham, MD, USA) was one of twenty-five books to win a place on VOYA's Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers. It was also the only Canadian book.

Divorced Kids Club

by W.D. Valgardson
$7.95, ISBN 0888993706
Reviewed by Linda Goodman

The Divorced Kids Club, by award-winning author W.D. Valgardson, is a collection of short stories written for young teens that reflect what many youth experience today as they live with blended families, complete with instant brothers and sisters. The stories ring true and readers will easily relate to the mix of Valgardson's interesting characters. The author always manages to extract humor from the mundane and very skillfully gets his message across without preaching.

Valgardson's characters see life from their own unique perspective, realizing all the while that the adults in their lives are not always using a compass that works.

"I am a woman. I can do anything," reflects Tracy in The Entertainer and The Entrepreneur. She learns it isn't so easy to make money, which is tricky since she believes that "life is a game and the one with the most toys wins."

The last story in the collection has kids coming together to help each other cope with the constant upheaval that comes with living in a new family situation. Divorce is a reality that brings together a group of kids who consider franchising a Divorced Kids Club so all kids may benefit. Joey is even inspired to become a "lawyer for kids," to help even the score.

In The Sand Sifter, Gisli is angry at being cruelly rejected by his parents who have split. After a scrape with the law, the main character takes on a laborious community service job. He learns that there are "no burgers for some, nothing but burgers for others whether they want them or not, and a whole menu for the few." Valgardson's characters are all enrolled in the school of life, a place that is anything but comfortable and predictable.

Valgardson was raised in Gimli but has lived for many years in B.C. where he teaches creative writing in Victoria. He has won awards for his stories, four of which have been produced as films. Valgardson returns to his Interlake home each year; the lake with its rambling beaches, busy harbors and rural lifestyles appear in his work and are instantly recognizable. The Divorced Kids Club is a must for all young readers.

Contributors

FREYJA ARNASON is a graduate of the University of Manitoba with a major in Political Science. She is going to Spain this spring to study Spanish and hopes to pursue a career in international development.

MURIEL DODGE was the second eldest of three children born in Winnipeg, Manitoba to Svava (Bardal) and Lorne Farrell. Muriel married Gerald Dodge in 1958 and they had four children - Sharon, Brenda, Greg and Gordon. Shortly after their marraige, they moved to Williams Lake, where she and her husband went into the ranching industry for 25 years, raising beef cattle for market. Muriel's long term interest in her Icelandic background was stimulated by a pilgrimage excursion to Iceland with her mother, Svava, in 1988. They visited most of their relatives there and Muriel came to apprecaite her Nordic heritage. Her maternal grandparents were Arinbjorn Sigurgeirsson Bardal, born at Svartarkot, Bardardalur, Thingeyjarsysla, Iceland; and Margret Olafsdottir, born at Adalboli, Midfirdi, Hunavatnssysla, Iceland.

DONALD E. GISLASON of Toronto is a retired high school Geography teacher and Department Head. He has published a number of articles about Icelandic immigration and settlement in North America. As a millennial project of the Icelandic Canadian Club of Toronto, he researched and wrote *The Icelanders of Kinmount,* which traces the preamble to the founding of Gimli, Manitoba.

LINDA M. GOODMAN received her B.A. and B.Ed from the University of Manitoba. She is editor, author and ad designer of her own weekly community newspaper, *Gimli Today.* Born in Ontario, but raised in Germany and Winnipeg, Linda now resides in the R.M. of Gimli with her husband Eric, a commercial fisherman.

FRANK SIGURDSON is a son of Jon Sigurdsson and Sigrun Sigvaldadóttir of Vidir, Manitoba. He has a B.A., M.ed. and a M.A. in History, from the University of Manitoba. He is a retired School Principal from the Winnipeg School Division No. 1.

REV. STEFAN JONASSON is a Unitarian minister and member of the board of directors of The Icelandic Canadian. He presently serves as Coordinator of Services for Large Congregations with the Unitarian Universalist Association in Boston, Massachusetts. He also serves as minister of the Unitarian churches in Arborg and Gimli. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife, Cindy, and daughters, Brandis and Heather.

EVELYN THORVALDSON has been and remains very active in the Icelandic community. She was raised in Lundar as explained in her book *My Amma and Me* published in 1993.

LILLIAN VILBORG retired after 26 years with the University of Alberta as Law Librarian and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Law. Lillian has re-located to Winnipeg, the city of her birth and formative years.

LEN AND KAREN VOPNFJORD left from Victoria, although they have deep Manitoba roots. Both Len & Karen enjoy singing and have entertained the Icelandic community often. Richard Breedsten, originally from California, is a practicing Buddist. He has a masters degree in communication.

PHOTO BY LINDA COLLETTE SIGURDSON

Statue of Jon Sigurdsson on the Legislative grounds in Winnipeg

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