

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

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# The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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**CORRECTION:** In the last issue of the Icelandic Canadian, this woman should have been identified as Snolaug Johannsdottir.

## 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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## On the Cover



*John Matthiasson*

PHOTO BY LINDA SIGURDSON COLLETT



*Top: Doug Rognvaldson, Edmonton.  
Middle: Martha Brooks, Winnipeg.  
Bottom: Ruth Christie, Selkirk.*

## Editorial

*by Gail Einarson-McCleery, O.F.*

The resurgence of interest in the ties of Icelandic-Canadians with Iceland has taken on near phenomenal proportions in the past few years. Before then, when observing the scene from Toronto, I could only regard with envy the ever increasing number of Icelanders who ventured to the Interlake area of Manitoba bringing with them displays of artistic and intellectual talent. On a visit to Red Deer, Alberta in 1995 while attending the "Icelandic Connections" conference, I was delighted to see the participation of so many people from Iceland, but felt it was a shame that they had made such a long journey only to be restricted to a "one off" twenty minute presentation and to such a small audience. My immediate thought was that people of this caliber, with so much of Iceland to communicate to all of us, should be able to visit all over Canada and the U.S., and to do so in an on-going manner.

From that thought, came the idea of creating something permanent in the way of cultural visits between Canada and Iceland. The result was the formation of the Icelandic National League's International Visits Program, now in its (sixth) year. From the outset, the idea was enhanced to create an exchange program; in effect, offering Icelanders the opportunity to know something of the artistic talents of Icelandic-Canadians. I had been active in the Icelandic Canadian Club of Toronto for many years, and I knew of several people within our own group who would be very supportive of the idea. Local artist, Tom Bjarnason was quick to respond and he suggested that the first person to introduce to Canadians was the Icelandic art critic, Adalsteinn Ingólfsson. "Addie" was a former curator of the National Gallery in Iceland, and with the support of Garry Oddleifson, president of the ICCT at that time, the concept was presented to the INL

convention and accepted as a viable project.

In 1997, Addalsteinn gave a total of sixteen lectures supported by slide shows of Icelandic art to local clubs and universities across Canada. On the suggestion of Tammy Axelsson, Executive Secretary of the INL, Patricia Guttormson Peacock of Vancouver, became the first in a series of Canadian artists to visit Iceland under the program and she was able to take her Norse themed paintings to Hofsós the following year. Following that visit, Páll Stefánsson, Iceland Review's internationally acclaimed photographer, came to Canada to be followed by Friður Ólafsdóttir, Iceland's leading expert in the history of the national costume. From this side of the ocean, we have since sent as cultural ambassadors, Einar Vigfusson, naturalistic bird carver and the soprano Carole Davis together with her accompanist Harold Brown.

As each tour was planned, local clubs across the country became more and more involved. Artists, previously known only to a narrow group of people, began making themselves known and asked to be considered as exchange candidates. This has provided all of us with an added bonus—we have all been able to learn more of the creative talent within our own communities as well as those artists coming from Iceland. Before long, our friends in the Icelandic communities in Minneapolis and Seattle became participants in the program.

As is so often the case with successful programs, the "canvas" is now becoming much larger. Coming this fall is the most ambitious project to date with the impending visit of mezzo soprano Ingveldur Yr Jónsdóttir and pianist Guðríður St. Sigurðardóttir. Inga and Gurry are artists of international stature and their talents are of such a kind that the Canada Council for the Arts has generously provided assistance

to enable them to tour Canada.

The story continues to unfold. Doug Rognvaldson from Edmonton will be visiting Iceland in October to acquaint Icelanders with his family's way of making spinning wheels; and he is to be followed in March next year by aboriginal story teller Ruth Christie, a descendent of John Ramsay, a friend of the early settlers to Canada. In the fall of 2003, the multi-talented Martha Brooks will be in Iceland performing jazz vocals with her trio as well as reading from books she has written for teen-agers.

A by-product of these initiatives was the belief that the talent emerging within Canada should be given the opportunity to display their wares to all of us here at home. So, we now have the North American Youth Exchange program about to take hold, under the capable hands of INL Cultural and Youth Director Leslie Bardal. The first participant, Ross Snashall, a visual artist from Calgary will be touring in the summer of 2003.

All of these gestures to promote Icelandic culture within Canada and the U.S and to promote Icelandic-Canadian culture to Iceland come at a price. In order to place the program on a firm footing, the Cultural Exchange fund was set up under the umbrella of the Canada Iceland Foundation so that it can make grants to artists for this important work. Donations from individuals, groups and corporations have been and are still much sought after and are publicly recognized. There is also the added incentive for donors in qualify-

ing for a credit for taxation purposes.

All of us within the Canadian Icelandic community have been fortunate to receive the moral and financial support of many donors here and in Iceland. Icelandair has been a good friend from the beginning. Others who have generously contributed have included the Iceland Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Canada Iceland Foundation, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Leica Cameras, and individual INL chapters. The continuing success of these exchange programs does, however, depend in great part on support from individuals and local community groups. Without a continuing financial commitment from everyone, programs for the future will not be assured of success. Your support is necessary because Icelandic-Canadians have such a strong heritage to admire and protect. Our place within Canada and the U.S is unique. When viewed on a numerical scale, our numbers may be seen as small but, when we are seen, and see ourselves from the perspective of our cultural significance, we are large on the map of North America.

If you would like to support the program, please contact Gail Einarson-McCleery, Director, International Visits Program, 84 Morningside Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6S 1C9, icegem@compuserve.com 416 762-8627 or make out a cheque to Canada Iceland Foundation Inc. marked "Re Cultural Exchange Fund" and forward to Iris S. Torfason, 617 Shawinigan Dr. S.W. Calgary, Alberta T2Y 2Y6.

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# John Matthiasson

## In His Own Words

by Lorna Tergesen

*The Board of the Icelandic Canadian lost a valued member in June 2001. John Matthiasson had been active for many, many years. His loyalty and knowledgeable advice will be truly missed, plus his pon-nukurs. An oral recounting of his life had been put to tape prior to his death by John himself. The transcription follows, hence there are repetitive situations, that have not been edited out. We hope those that knew John, as we did, will hear his voice as you read through this tribute.*

My name is John Stephen Matthiasson. My parents were Matthias Matthiasson and Jonina Johnson. My earliest memories of the first seven years of my life are a very pleasant time in my own history. We lived in a small town in Wisconsin, named Randolph. My father was a dentist there. He had recently become established. We had a lovely home and as an only child I was probably very pampered. I have only fleeting memories of this period. Probably the most eventful time in my early childhood was the death of my father. He had high blood pressure and an aneurysm, passing away at the age of forty three. My sister Mary was born only a few days prior to his death. My mother was still in the hospital caring for Mary and dealing with the loss of her husband. It was a very upsetting and traumatic time for me.

Shortly after we moved back to Winnipeg. My mother bought a house on Lipton St. only a block away from her father (my grandfather) on Wellington Ave. She began to make a living by teaching piano lessons. I had the job of becoming a second father to my kid sister. This was a very dramatic change. It stands out as a meaningful memory.

Our family history goes back to Iceland on both sides.

On my father's side, my great grandfather had inherited a farm in the West of Iceland in the fjords. He drowned at sea at age 43 likely with his sister. A group had gone out to sea gathering driftwood. I don't know if a storm blew in. We don't know details other than the boat capsized. One or two men made it to shore but not my great grandfather nor his sister. This left my great grandmother a widow with two small sons. Somehow she made it to North Dakota. She was likely traveling with friends and had gone through New Iceland in Manitoba. I have not checked this out.

Her son Jon Matthiasson became my grandfather and I am named after him. His brother Bjarni passed away before adulthood. My grandmother, on my father's side, Kristine Olafson came from the south west side of Iceland. They came after the majority of immigration had occurred. Story has it that she was born in a covered wagon somewhere passing through Wisconsin. They went on through Minnesota and north to North Dakota where they settled.

The Olafsons became very successful farmers. My grandmother had several brothers. Her brother Rev. K.K. Olafson became the President of the Icelandic Synod. He served as minister in the Glenboro, Manitoba area for many years. Another brother was a member of the State Legislature of North Dakota. All of the brothers were successful. They all had the name "Kristin" as a middle name, and were nick-named "K.K.", "J.K.", and "O.K." and so on. My son Stephen's middle name is Kristin, keeping up that family tradition.



John Matthiasson

My mother's side came from the Borganes region of Iceland with very rich farm land. They were not driven out but came for their own reasons. They came directly to Winnipeg. My mother's eldest sister, Kristine was the only child born in Iceland, the rest all being born in Winnipeg.

My grandfather was Helgi Johnson (Jonsson) and my grandmother, Asta. They had a large family.

I've often joked that I am Icelandic on three sides as my mother married Wilhelm Kristjanson when I was 13 years of age. Wilhelm was the author of *Icelandic People of Manitoba* an often used scholarly source. He was from the Lundar area. Both his parents were from Iceland.

I had a very large extended family in North Dakota and enjoyed spending my summers there after my mother moved back to Winnipeg. I would go back and forth among the farm families there. My grandfather's very modest log cabin had no heating or water but it was in a very beautiful setting where I had many good times. These were good summers.

In earlier days, Mary had been my only sibling, so when my mother remarried I acquired three more siblings. Ronald, who died from cancer six years ago and two sisters, Evelyn and Dorothy. I had a large extended family in the West End of Winnipeg—Neil Bardal and Jean, Magnus Johnson, his twin brothers and two sisters and Gordon and Don Olson. I was fortunate to have two such large families—a good network of kin. Now they are spread out in the western States and all over Canada in different directions. We have

had the occasional reunions. One in North Dakota three years ago and another in Manitoba seven years ago. My son Stephen was able to attend both. I've always felt a strong sense of family with my cousins both in North Dakota and Manitoba. I organized the reunion in North Dakota.

I was married twice. My first wife was Carolyn Weesner. The marriage broke up after 12 years. She had her Ph.D. in anthropology and taught full time at University of Winnipeg. Once separated, she returned to the United States as she was American. We had adopted an Inuit daughter, Nancy, when she was six going on seven. In the following year, Carolyn conceived our son Stephen, so we had two children.

In the separation, both children went with Carolyn to Arizona for the winter, returning to me in the summer. Nancy had many, many problems and so she remained with me full time. I brought her up as a single parent.

Stephen is married to Jill, and they have two sons, Harry and Kai. Nancy was married and has two little girls, not little, now teenagers. They are living with their father. I see them periodically.

Very importantly, at present there is a very special person in my life—Bernice Martinson Lawrence. We have had a wonderful four-year relationship.

When I was 18 years of age in third year at United College, which was then a part of University of Manitoba, I came down with tuberculosis. This was unusual for a university student at the time to develop the disease. Diagnosis sent me off to the Sanitarium at Ninette, Manitoba, where I spent a year and half and had major

surgery. This was another very dramatic event.

I was interested in the helping professions. I was also interested in the ministry. My own church, First Lutheran, had adopted me as possible theology candidate. Rev. Eylands encouraged me. These ideas were in my mind when I was in the Sanitarium, but when I came out I went back to University where they were then teaching sociology.

There I developed a mentor, Bill Morrison, who was a sociologist with a background in anthropology. My grades had been terrible before I went to Ninette (likely due to my illness) but I tended to excel in sociology and psychology.

I changed my mind about the ministry, where I had thought more to be a teacher at a seminary than to have a congregation. I wanted an academic career.

I was encouraged by Dr. Morrison to pursue graduate school in sociology. I didn't even know what anthropology was. I applied to various schools and was given a teaching assistantship at University of Michigan State in East Lansing, where I spent two years working on my Masters degree.

There I developed a new mentor, Richard Adams, a prominent anthropologist, who taught in the combined sociology and anthropology department. Then I applied to receive a teaching assistant job at Cornell University. My plans had been to work in India. Bill Morrison had done research there and I had met some others in Michigan and also at Cornell with special interest in India. However, a latent interest in Canadian Arctic studies rekindled itself. I had met Vilhjalmur Stefansson when he spoke and I was student in Winnipeg and he had an influence on me. Just a number of things came together—I didn't want to work in India for it would require a lifetime of commitment to work and also the language and written materials to learn. I did my doctorate on the Canadian Arctic. I taught for two years at Marquette, Milwaukee. An offer came through to teach at UCLA. I really had planned to stay and teach in the United States, but then another offer came up. It was from the

University of Manitoba where they had something new called "Senate for Settlement Studies". They brought me up for a two year term. They had very good research funding for studying new communities across the northern frontier. I accepted and have stayed here ever since.

I had an interest in law and did my masters in the area of legal sociology. I wanted to look at what was happening to the Inuit of Arctic Canada as they were brought into the Canadian legal and social systems. I believed they had a legal system of their own and I wanted to see what kind of conflict there might be and how they resolved it.

So I went to a place called Pond Inlet in northern Baffin Island for that research. Something happened there that I was not expecting. I felt I would spend the year's field work, which was mandatory at that time, in the settlement. Most of the Inuit were living on the land in small hunting camps. If I was going to work with them I would have to go out of the settlement. I arranged with the local Mountie that I would move in with an Inuit family just for a few weeks out on the land in a hunting camp about 100 miles from the settlement. He took me out on a tour of all the camps and had arranged for me to meet Jimmy Muckpah who was about my age. I was to stay with him. I ended up staying almost a whole year with them. This was not what I had expected! The Mountie had explained to Jimmy that I wanted to live as an Inuit. Jimmy took this very seriously and he decided to teach me to be like him and his people.

I brought some food with me that I bought from the Mounties. That first night, I gave it to the family and we had a Western feast. They could not speak a word of English and I could not speak their language. The next day I had to eat with them (native food). They were full time hunters living in tents. Shortly after I went with them to their winter camp which was partially made of sod and scraps of lumber. We made snow houses when we hunted. We became very close, and we have preserved our relationship.

I wrote a book about called *Living on*

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*the Land: Change among the Inuit of Baffin Island* describing the cultural changes. It was my swan song for my Arctic research. The book describes a tremendous change in the people themselves. It is a very personalized ethnography, as I am giving my own experiences of living on the land. I tried to follow them as they moved into settlements. I continually went back to Pond Inlet.

I worked with the Inuit for many, many years. I like to think that I developed a reputation of being an Inuit expert. Many journal pieces and grant applications were forwarded to me for scrutiny. With the publication of my book, I felt that the Inuit were at the stage where they are capable of studying themselves, bringing with that a higher respectability.

Since then I have been studying Icelanders. I feel much closer to home studying my people, my ethnic roots. My Icelandic roots are very strong. I am trying to look at Western Icelanders in connection with the Icelandic psyche from an anthropological perspective.

I'll give you a little anecdote. A very dear friend of mine, Don Swainson (we went to school and University together) was very active in the NDP party, called the CCF at that time. As we would get together for a hamburger and milkshake and argue—in the best Icelandic tradition, Don remarked "Matthiasson, you always take the opposite point of view in any debate, but I know what your position is!" I did enjoy debate but I never affiliated myself with any political party.

I was born in the United States, com-

ing to Canada at age seven. There was a certain amount of anti American feeling in Winnipeg, due to the slow entrance of the US into the WW2. I can remember being called a "dirty American" and it hurt. Kids picked this up from their parents. My father was an American and had passed away there. I returned to the US when I was 18. I cannot vote in Canada. I have seriously thought of taking Canadian citizenship in the last few years. I was also at the University of Manitoba in the post Sputnik era and most of the social science professors were American. I was bothered by the fact that we were contributing something to Canada and not being recognized for it. These factors aside, I have always kept my American citizenship. I did vote once in a national election for John F. Kennedy. It was his first round. He was campaigning and came to Michigan State while I was a student there. It was the only time I voted and I am proud that I voted for him.

I've been called a humanist many times. Now I find myself to be in the secular humanist movement. There was a symposium at the University of Waterloo a few years ago, where people were invited to attend on the basis of their writings. I asked why I had been invited and the answer was that they had read much of my work and found it very humanistic. This pleased me very much. Those attending were sociologists, theologians as well as some prominent professionals and some academics such as myself. Now I am very flattered by this because I feel anthropology is not as much a science as an art. ● One of the things, before

I retired, was to get some courses in applied anthropology.

Some of my colleagues felt that this was a clinical field not appropriate for scientific minded people. When I left the University, many of the students signed a petition asking that these course be kept on the books. They succeeded and I am very proud of that.

What is applied anthropology? Using anthropology, our knowledge and our skills, as researchers to not only ask basic questions of humanity and human conditions but to use them in the service of society. I think this an important part of


anthropology today. I like to think I played a part in this.

Historically I have never been a real joiner. My step brother Ron and I were very close friends. Ron, who was a clinical psychologist, died about six years ago of cancer. He once brought to my attention that I was not a joiner. I have now become a more involved person since moving to Gimli and having more time.

I had my professional associations. I was a fellow of the American Anthropology Association and also with the Society of Applied Anthropology International Association. I did form the



*John, Stephen, Carolyn and Nancy*

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Society for Applied Anthropology in Canada to provide a national association to encompass those not only in the professional Universities and Museums but all interested. I am a member of the Rotary, and active with the planning of the new museum in Gimli where I can help by using my anthropology. I now sing with the Gimli Senior choir. I may be the junior member of it, but it is great fun. I was the President of the Icelandic Canadian Club in Winnipeg and on the board of the Icelandic Canadian magazine for many years.

I did not attend church for many years. A few years before I retired I returned to the Lutheran Church, in Fort Richmond. Rev. Lindquist was the minister there. We became very good friends. We would often have lunch together and discuss matters of theology which interested me. My return to the church did not mean that I joined in socializing such as going to their social gatherings.

Since my move to Gimli and retirement, I have roused my interest in art. I have always had an interest in art, even in high school I elected art over "shops". My interest has always been in painting. On a sabbatical leave, I spent a wonderful year on an island just out from Nanaimo, British Columbia—Protection Island. There I became part of a society of people who were welders, fisherman and some hippies left over from the '60s. It was unlike anything I had done before. I wasn't sure how they would accept me as an academic professor as I certainly didn't know how to handle a chain saw! They accepted

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me very graciously. I joined the Lions Club as it was the only service club there. We would work on little community projects and so on. Life was very different from what I was accustomed to. I had planned to write during that year. I began to paint, and that got me back to into art again and I have done it sporadically since.

I did belong to an art club where we took lessons from a professional back in Winnipeg. Now in Gimli, I belong to the Art Club that is very active. Again, I do not participate as actively as some members do.

As far as my professional career, I have done a lot of writing--about 50 articles, journal writings, and book reviews. As stated before I am very proud of my book and the fact that it used by Universities now. I wrote poetry down through the years and have published some. I find I want to go back to that. I don't know if I have any talent for it. I don't know who said it but "poetry is crystallized truth". You can often see things in context of a poem which would bring pithiness of experience. I like that style.

I have now turned my attention to other kinds of writing. I am writing a play on Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who I said was my hero ever since I decided to go to the Arctic, and a novel. I now have the freedom and can write and draw on my anthropology without having a journal editor putting it into format.

Music has always been something that is around me. My mother was an accomplished pianist. She taught music in Winnipeg and also in a small rural community before her marriage. After my father's death she made her living by teaching and as an accompanist for local singers.

At a very early age I became interested in jazz. I subscribed to Downbeat Magazine when I was only ten years old. I began to play the trumpet at age eleven. At that age, I would get on my bicycle on Saturday morning to ride around Winnipeg looking for record sales that had been advertised. I became a collector at that early age.

I played with some of the local musicians in the evenings after their gigs, when we would go to one another's homes. I

really would have loved to have been a professional jazz musician. It is such a creative field of improvisation. I see it as a dialogue. However, I knew I would never make it as I didn't have the talent. I still play my horn occasionally. Jazz has been one of my abiding loves. Fortunately, my son has picked it up, although he doesn't play, he has one of the best jazz collections in Davis, California. I always sent him CDs for his birthday, such as Bessie Smith. Jazz, the music, does something for me in life that nothing else does.

When I think of places where I felt peace and tranquility, there are two particular places—Protection Island, just off Nanaimo, B.C. and my grandfather's farm.

On Protection Island, I rented a cottage with water on three sides of it and spent a sabbatical year. It was lovely. At low tide, I would go out on the beach to pick oysters that I would then have for lunch. There was an eagle on a pole in front of the cottage that I would watch each day. There was other wildlife on the island, but not near me.

I rented the cottage from Frank May, a very interesting man. He was the mayor of Nanaimo. We became very good friends. He would take me out for boat rides on the weekends. My son, Stephen came to visit me once for several days. Frank kind of adopted him, taking him skiing up in northern BC. The people on the island were mostly retired loggers and fishermen. It was a very different system of life in comparison to the University setting. I developed some very close friendships there. They accepted me, showing me how

to be a part of that very simple, caring community.

I painted there and did some writing. I adopted two wild cats, or they adopted me. They would come each day to eat, but never let me touch them. I found them a great source of companionship.

The other place was my grandfather's farm in North Dakota. I spent my summers there from age of seven to 13. It is a very special place to me. It is in the Pembina Hills in northern North Dakota, with rolling hills just off the main plains moving to very heavily wooded areas with two small coulees and creeks running through the property. There was a high hill and behind it a wooded area where the cattle were kept. I remember a big tree by the creek and the log cabin.

I was always a fan of Tarzan. My father had been too. In the bookcase were all his books that I read. I would go down to the woods and play Tarzan, frightening the people on the next farm with my Johnny Wisemuller yells. I was there a lot of the time by myself.

I would go to get the cattle with my grandfather. He taught me my first words of Icelandic, swear words to use cursing the cows. It was a very simple, quiet life there on the farm as on the island. These places are spots I can go back to today and feel a great sense of peace and quietude.

Religion has always been a part of my thinking, I never completely walked away from it. I certainly had periods of agnosticism. I always had some nagging questions about religion and some answers given.

I believe Lutheranism is the kind of denomination that allows freedom of thought. I remember once having lunch with the Bishop for the territories of Manitoba. I said to him "One of the nice things about the Lutheran church is you can debate whether God exists." I don't know if he appreciated hearing that, but I feel it is true. The existentialist thinkers like Kirkegard and others come from the Lutheran church.

That is another influence on my life. Existentialism has been a philosophy that informed me since I was very young. I am not quite sure why, perhaps the loss of my

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father when I was very young or becoming part of a blended family at age thirteen (not a good age for that) or being treated for TB at the sanitarium. It made kind of an absurd sense of life and that is existential philosophy. I have heard it said existentialism is passé philosophy but I don't agree with that. It's been around for a long time and will continue to be so. It is a way of looking at reality.

I feel very much a sense that there is a spiritual dimensional part of my life, I don't know what is. I think I may run into it sometime. Some people say this is a contradiction in terms of my concern with evaluation and absurdity of existence.

In many ways I find my own way reconciling them. That is becoming increasingly part of my own personal philosophy.

In terms of what I would like to pass on to my children. I jotted these notes down quickly.

Be gentle. Be gentle with one another.

Care for one another, I would encourage that in my children and grandchildren.



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### Afterward

*by Neil Bardal*

I wanted to say something about John's time in Gimli. It is really that time he valued the most toward the end. His childhood until 4 years old was idyllic but somewhat a fanciful childhood memory which was exaggerated with the passage of time and some horrific experiences in later life. It was in Gimli that he realized, I think for the first time, that people actually liked and respected John for who he really was, not the Professor, not the writer, not the facade that he felt he had to live behind for most of his life. Jonas Johnson and Russ MacMillian liked the real John with all his foibles and realized that they had met a superb intellect who could go the distance intellectually with them. He also was encouraged to paint, play the trumpet, work on a play and do things that he had real talent for by people that recognized that talent in him.

In the many rides we had back and forth to Winnipeg, we were re-introduced to one another. I got to know a John that I had not known previously, and I got to truly love him in a brotherly way. His careful analytical mind, his scrupulous research into matters that interested him, and his intellectual integrity were all put to good use in his retirement in Gimli. He hid behind the professional robes for years, feeling that if people knew the real John with his real human strengths and weaknesses, they would somehow think less of him. The opposite was true, we all loved the real John much better than the stuffy professor. Jekyll and Hyde could come together and form the balanced, very human, very warm, very kind, still very studious John Matthiasson, whose passing we all are mourning.



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## Horses and the Midnight Sun

by John Weier



Those dazzling Icelandic horses. We hadn't driven too many miles after our breakfast on the harbour in Reykjavik before we saw them. Icelandic horses, large herds of them seldom in ones or twos, colourful herds of horses. In their graveled and grassy pastures.

Pinto. And buckskin. Palomino and chestnut and bay. White horse. Black horse. Silver dapple and silver bay. Paint horse. And blue or strawberry roan. Forty-two different colour patterns according to the literature. Sorrel with flaxen mane and tail, liver chestnut, cremello, and dun. Horses, and their half-ragged coats, still early spring, still shedding their winter fur. Icelandic horses, with their five natural gaits; the famous tolt, the pride of every proud Icelander.

A small horse, twelve to fourteen hands in height and below the approved world standard for separating horse from pony; this Icelandic breed clings stubbornly to its elevated status. No true Icelander will be pleased to hear you speak of her mount as a pony. And with good reason. Known for its tremendous strength and endurance, at eight hundred pounds the Icelandic will easily carry a very large man for hours. Sure-footed, hardy, self-sufficient, loyal; Icelandic horses are known to out-pull ordinary horses, to carry one third of their body-weight, while most horses can carry only one fifth as a maximum.

And they mature later than other horses, grow until the age of seven, reach their prime at twenty, broodmares throwing foals almost into their thirties. The oldest known Icelandic horse, Thulle, died not so long ago in Denmark at age fifty-seven; she simply stopped eating when her eighty-three year old owner passed away. Twenty-eight years she'd pulled his carriage of eggs from farm to farm, another eight they'd been retired together. Small

horse Thulle, but with a big heart.

More than a thousand years this even-tempered creature has lived and worked in Iceland. Plowing fields, packing goods, herding sheep from out of the hills, before the recent introduction of the automobile providing most of the country's transportation saddle or cart; since it stepped off the ships of those early Nordic pioneers. Eighth century A.D., either the ships of the Vikings or the ships of those fleeing the Vikings.

This land of two hundred and fifty thousand people, one hundred thousand horses; once an Icelandic horse leaves the island it can never return, and no horse of any breed may ever visit. That was already stipulated in ancient Icelandic law. The purity of the breed must be maintained, its natural gaits, its health and vigor.

There on the road between Hofsos and Reykjavik in a landscape of pasture and hills and snowy peaks a round-up of horses appeared suddenly in front of us, blocked our route. On the pavement and in the ditches. Geldings, and yearlings. Mares with gamboling foals. Maybe one hundred horses their manes and tails eddied in the wind, maybe two hundred, and a dozen men riding. We had flown through the night, so little sleep in the few hours from Minneapolis. But we scrambled from the bus for a breath of air, for a picture and a better look, for the thud and the clip of hooves, the smell of horse dropping. We stood and marveled under a large Icelandic sky.

The landing that morning at the Keflavik airport, I couldn't help thinking of Churchill, that one summer trip north six years ago to Churchill. I looked out the Icelandair window, through the clouds and the rain, the fog. Barren, and flat. Rocks and moss. Rocks and rocks and moss. Black lava fields, and lichen. And water.

And rocks. Desolation. Gloom.

I thought of Churchill, the shores of the Hudson Bay, windswept tundra, nothing ever looks hopeful to me after such a short night flying. We climbed on the bus that early morning and drove. More lava. This island of geysers and hot springs and boiling mud lakes, craters and earthquakes, of constant structural change.

Somewhere along the road we passed near the foot of a volcano. More than twenty-five volcanoes have erupted in Iceland in historic times. Perhaps the most noteworthy; when Laki exploded in 1783 the liquid lava, volcanic ash and gas, and torrential flooding brought the death of more than nine thousand people, destroyed large areas of agricultural land, killed about eighty percent of the island's cattle and horses and sheep. Then Hekla blew up in 1947 and 1980. Surtsey in 1963, the volcano on Heimaey in 1973. What an unhappy terrain.

We drove and Bill spoke from the front of the bus about old manuscripts, the Icelandic sagas. He told stories of people battling disease and poverty, famine. People confronting the teachings of a narrow and foreign church a difficult business to survive, Bill said, the church. David in turn talked about Icelandic mythology. Here in Iceland, he said, the end of the world is always at hand. Baldur, the god of Icelandic innocence, has always just died. We travelers sank deep into our seats imagining the country's exhaustion, despair.

But then the rain stopped. And the clouds slid past. We breakfasted with workers and fishermen along the harbour;

cheese, and bread, sliced cucumbers and eggs and tomatoes, smoked lamb. We drank coffee, strong coffee, ate kleina a long twisted doughnut flavoured with cardamom and traditionally fried in sheep fat, a tasty dessert but not much benefit to my cholesterol levels.

We drove again, my finger following on the map. We passed through the Hvalfjardargong, a tunnel under the Hvalfjörður that cut an hour off the journey north. An hour, as any Icelander will tell you, of the most breathtaking Icelandic scenery. We passed through the town of Borgarnes and on toward Holtavorduheiði, the divide we'd cross before we reached the northern fjords.

Bill uttered the words literacy, spirit, tolerance, referred them to the people of Iceland. David put forward some gentle Icelandic joke. We saw mountains, and long flat tablelands. Saw blue sky and shimmering glaciers, clusters of dwarf birch and willow, saw green grass. We began to feel cheerful again, our human bodies seem always ready for some excuse to feel cheerful even after the worst anguish we seem always ready to love again. Then suddenly the round-up of grazing and galloping horses appeared on the road ahead of us.

Eighteen pilgrims on that pink and black and yellow bus with Guðmundur our driver completing the journey from destinations in the centre of North America to a tiny settlement far in the north of Iceland. Return journey for at least half the group, their ancestors had left these fjords more than one hundred years ago to migrate to

North America, to find a better life, an easier life.

Eighteen pilgrims. Some of us came to write, and others to teach writing. Some only to rest. But Richard wanted to fish. Arctic char, cod. He needed to rise early in the morning to dangle a string down from the boat or the dock into the cold Icelandic water. Until a few months ago I had never even dreamed of visiting Iceland. But I'd hatched a plan too; intended to mark my own series of trails north, and south, and east from the hamlet, to witness the lives of Icelandic birds, and flowers, rocks, to scribble again in my overseas journal. My travel plans, in that sense at least, have become entirely predictable.

We arrived finally in the early afternoon in Hofsos, an ancient trading post and fishing village of some three hundred people, cast on the eastern shore of Skagafjörður and less than seventy-five kilometres south of the Arctic Circle. Eight hundred kilometres nearer the North Pole than the port of Churchill, Manitoba but, because of the Gulf Stream, reporting winter temperatures an average of twenty-five degrees Celsius warmer. A land so green, so beautiful and austere. A land completely without mosquitoes, not one single Churchill mosquito. I'll never forget the swarm and buzz, the sting of those northern mosquitoes.

No trees anywhere on the Hofsos horizon, except those planted and nurtured in village yards. Nothing to block our view of the rim of flatland along the fjord, the basalt and cliffs that fell to the sea, mountains that clambered from emerald pastures up toward the cold and the snow. Nothing to hide the headland of Drangey, home of Grettir the old saga outlaw, home of a million nesting birds puffin and murre, fulmar and guillemot and kittiwake, looming six miles distant over the water. No object to mask the sun's peculiar circle round the broad Icelandic sky.

Thrift bank. Common scurvygrass. Alpine cinquefoil. Hairy stonecrop, wild pansy, and nootka lupine. Marsh marigold bloomed in the bogs and ditches. Heath dog-violet and trailing azalea. Dandelions, our common North American weed some

species of the genus *Taraxacum* smiled and waved on the hillside along the river. The name dandelion borrowed from the Old French dent de lion, tooth of the lion, a reference no doubt to its sharply indented leaves. The plant is cultivated in several countries for food, for its medicinal properties; it may contain more nutrients than most of the foods grown in your garden. Lady smock. Moss campion and moonwort. Alpine mouse-ear. Northern gentian.

I left my small room in the house next to the church in the village of Hofsos and walked with my plant guide and bird guide and Pentax binoculars along the main street and past the scattered houses. Red roof, and black roof, or green, aluminum siding and stucco, these Icelandic houses. I marched over the river and north to the dirt road that skirted the shining fjord.

Whimbrels scoured the lawns around me. Ringed plovers and European golden-plovers. One redwing sang on a rooftop. Gravel scrunched under my feet. Black-tailed godwits those cinnamon birds with their long legs and long bills and black and white markings in flight, a pair called from above. And Arctic terns, *Sterna paradisaea* kria, both their Icelandic name and the sound of their reckless call from the pasture.

I had already begun to contemplate the difficulties of my life here on Skagafjörður. Seven days in Iceland, each trail I chose dismissed so many others, each hour I slept an hour of daylight wasted; I felt wrenched in every inverse direction. June, two weeks until the summer solstice. Last night at midnight and the sun still bright in the northern sky; I felt exhausted, I needed to sleep. But I wished even more to go out on the boat with Jon the fisherman. He said in a half hour I would catch six large cod, more than enough for tomorrow's group supper.

The appropriate time for guidelines I thought, my body wouldn't do well without structure, the wisdom of middle age. And I'm not an easy sleeper in any case. I decided every night at eleven p.m. to begin preparations for bed. To pour a nightcap. To complete my daily diaries, read two or three pages from a book. In a manner of

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speaking, to turn off the sun. I talked to my housemates about a twelve o'clock quiet rule. I tried the blinds in the bedroom, searched through the luggage for my travelers's sleeping mask, located my earplugs the birds here apparently never stop singing.

I peered out the window that first midnight in Hofsos as the black-headed gulls circled above and noticed next door at the church the painter still painting the church's white walls; discovered a man and a woman beyond wielding shovel and hoe and at work in their garden. Four words came to me then just as I fell into bed this tyranny of light, I must have stolen them somewhere. And then I slept.

And so I walked north in the morning on the dirt road along the fjord with the island of Drangey on my left, the ridge of clambering mountains two kilometres distant to my right, the Arctic Ocean far ahead. I walked past the whimbrels and terns, past the flying and winnowing snipe, the dozen perched common snipe. Those snipe, I could actually see in my binoculars their two outer tail feathers vibrating as they soared overhead. And dunlins, I found them in the ditches, black bellies and their short down-curved beaks. I noted the great black-backed gull gliding, and a cormorant on the water, great cormorant. There in a puddle beside the road after a brisk walk I met with a family of phalaropes.

Red-necked phalaropes, *Phalaropus lobatus*, their lobed feet, a species I had only ever seen before in Churchill. That female so brilliant in appearance; her rust-coloured neck, her black mask, the white throat and white spot by her eye, gold and gray etching each feather on her back and wings. The male paler, smaller. That male often builds his nest alone, waits for his mate to lay her eggs; then incubates and raises their young while she flies off to look for another male, another nest, to start a second brood. Red-necked phalaropes, except when breeding, spend most of their life on the ocean. They rest and sleep on the water, swim and spin and dab with their bills to pick small crustaceans and fish from the sea.

P.A. Taverner, in *Birds of Canada*, writes of that phalarope whirligig action on the water, the inland Wilson's phalarope: They swim about like blown thistle-down, their white bodies riding high... They pause here and there and whirl about in little circles as the black water-beetles do, stirring up the mud with their delicate little feet and bringing to the surface a harvest of tidbits which they seize with quick passes of their rapier-like bill.

I passed fences along that road, to the left and the right, pastures for sheep; some five hundred thousand sheep in Iceland twice as many as people raised for their wool and their mutton. I passed ewes with single lambs, passed ewes with twins, ewes with triplets. I passed black sheep and scruffy white sheep. I passed white ewes with black lambs, black ewes with white, families of mixed colour. Sheep, they all turned to stare at me and bleated as I wandered by.

My father and I, one early morning when I was barely a teenager, took the black two-door 1957 Ford and drove a half hour from home up onto the Niagara Escarpment south of Vineland, Ontario. From there if we turned around and if it was clear looking out over the lake, even before construction of the monster CN Tower, we could sometimes make out the taller buildings of downtown Toronto forty miles straight to the north of us dark shapes on the horizon.

But not that day. No time to stop, no time to admire city skylines; we had come out thinking real estate, farm real estate. Maybe my father had fallen into one of my own boyish dreams. I never once thought fruit farming quite up to the mark. Seven piddling acres; I needed a property with broad tracts of land and animals, like my uncle's in Manitoba. Or maybe my dad had his own phantoms to chase. He may have thought this his last chance to capture me, to build a dynasty, to find someone to take over his twenty-years' labour, to inherit the family farm.

We had come out looking for farms we might buy, large farms. There on the escarpment we could find dairies, and silos for corn, and granaries, cattle and com-

bines. Those were days of pleasure for us, our real estate outings together. We stopped that day to visit a sheep farm; my father and I had ordered and studied a selection of booklets on sheep husbandry. We stepped into the weathered and run-down house to speak with the sheep owner, a bachelor, and found his kitchen, his parlour, the walls covered, tacked high and low with pictures of naked women. Legs and breasts and buttocks of naked or lingered women.

Playboy, I imagine. I had never seen anything like it, nothing closer to women's nudity than the pictures I found in *Time* magazine or on my brother's television. I didn't know where to turn my eyes. I wanted to look, needed to look, but I didn't want my father to catch me. I was a normal boy but I knew then already my father's taste for judgement and disgust.

Sheep. And horses again, meadows with still more Icelandic horses. Icelandic meadows, how do I describe them. Covered with lumps, and humps, and rocks, and natural grass Bill calls those lumps tussocks. More mares, and more foals, and two stallions up on their hind legs quarrelling. I called to that herd there in the north meadow along the road where I stood by the fence and they all came running. I stroked their soft necks and offered my palm to their muzzles.

One male ptarmigan flew from the furrow beside me when I turned, white mottled back and red eyebrow, its dry belching call. Rock ptarmigan. And then a female. A meadow pipit sang and fluttered from a post down into the grass.

Red, when I rode him in my early teens, must have been about the size of these Iceland horses. We spoke of him as a Welsh pony but he was likely some large Shetland cross Welsh just somehow sounded better to us boys, more romantic, and the Shetland was small and common. As red as his name, a sorrel, I borrowed him from a Reimer family that lived on a peach and grape farm a few miles east of Virgil near my childhood home. Days my four or five friends and I were going to ride I phoned ahead to ask the Reimers' permission and then peddled my old blue bike over.

A gelding, and lazy, Red had mastered a few interesting riding habits. When I laid on the saddle and cinched the girth he blew up his gut quite large. I had to poke him in the ribs a few times with my knee before I could draw the girth tight enough to ride. Most horses of course know this trick, but Red seemed a champion once out of the barn at emptying his lungs and letting both saddle and one of us riders slide off and fall to the side. Maybe it was our youth and inexperience.

If that prank failed in getting him back to the pasture, he knew another. Successfully saddled and mounted and fifty feet down the driveway, if his rider wasn't careful he would lower his head and fall to his knees, plop on his fat shaggy side and roll over. Forewarned, I knew to pull hard on the reins with his first downward motion, to wait for it, jab with my heels on his belly to push him on to a trot. That trot. I wish old Red had been an Icelder, had known the Iceland tolt, his ride was as rough as any you've ever imagined. And I don't think I ever persuaded him to a gallop.

Once on the road, however, he settled in. Not the most elegant animal in our group and the only pony, but he forgot his tricks, until the next day. Unlike my friends, I had no horse of my own to ride. My father wouldn't, or couldn't, buy me one; and Red even if my legs were already a bit too long was a lot better than no ride at all. I may not have been enthusiastic about many things as a boy but I was crazy about horsemanship and horses.

In those days, in the days of Red and real estate adventures, I still felt forced into my parents' religion, into the creed of my community. Mennonites, a branch of the old Anabaptist stock, a radical and peasant movement of the sixteenth century Reformation and once persecuted everywhere; we had squandered our heretic belief in pacifism, in the communal sharing of goods, in the equality of all people, and had joined with other pious denominations in the fight to maintain traditional interpretations of the Bible, traditional hierarchies, to reassert conventional beliefs and practices.

My parents sent me off to a Christian

high school two miles from home, Eden Christian College. I attended compulsory prayer meetings there. I witnessed my classmates' testimonies a horror and embarrassment to me. I suffered the iron will of a severe all-male faculty.

I couldn't believe when I attended the catechism class, when we paraded in front of the church for our baptism, that my peers would agree to such a collection of guarantees, such ideas, the jargon, this grotesque epistle of black and white. (And I'm sorry to write all this now, I imagine some of my most loved readers will be offended.) The Trinity, the Resurrection, the blood and the cross, the elements of a fundamentalist Salvation, this Christian victory over darkness, I found nothing in the dogma that called to me, in this tyranny of light.

Like those early Iceland missionaries, Þorvaldur and Olaf Tryggvason executioners and men of the sword, Christians as well as politicians; some of my highschool colleagues splashed off overseas to bring light to contemporary dark nations. Unwitting soldiers for a consumer civilization.

Barbara Kingsolver in *The Poisonwood Bible*, the story of a missionary family in Africa, documents in fiction how that light offered its share to the destruction of those so-called heathen; helped to undermine their culture, their traditions, their spirituality; pirated their wealth and resources; exploited the cruelties and hatreds that had flourished there for centuries. Poor Africa. No other continent has endured such an unspeakably bizarre combination of foreign thievery and foreign goodwill. We whites and westerners need to command everything, will steal anything, destroy anything we can't understand. The tyranny of white, of black and white.

Still, all the world moves in circles, much like the Iceland sun. Some of the gospel taught to me thirty-five years ago I might now preach in simpler more palatable clothing. I sit with my computer and keyboard every day to write some kind of hope and salvation for my own spirit.

Spirit birds, I watched those pale ptarmigans fly off low across the pasture east of

the Hofsos north road. So much like the willow ptarmigan I saw in Churchill but a life species for me, I had never seen them before, not even in Canada. Large birds, I watched where they settled on a green knoll, where they vanished into the herbage, the shadows.

I turned and looked for the sun. Behind me. And a trailing ghostly quarter moon. I had begun to wonder about my directions, the sun's path confused me. I pulled my compass from the pocket of my old pack. Yes, this north-south road, I smiled a confirmation and marched on.

My voyage of discovery. My first hike across the Icelandic frontier, first glance out over this polar ocean. The road began to climb ahead of me, I marched up. And then the road fell, I marched down. I marched to the very end of the north road, to the clustered buildings of the last farm, where the fields crumbled into the fjord, where the water and the brown cliffs and islands beckoned from beyond. I squatted there on a rock for some biscuits and a soft drink while the coloured roofs of Hofsos glimmered in the distance.

I waited for Nancy to catch up with me. And when she came I pointed at the four or five parasitic jaegers flying just over the headland to our left. Some of them completely dark and chocolate in colour, others with bleached bellies and throats. I told Nancy about their feeding practices, their piracy, that they harass other birds, gulls and terns, and snatch the food they disgorge and drop. Strong fast flyers those jaegers, skua, falconlike, with long and pointed wings; we watched as they spun and wheeled and plunged.

Later that afternoon we visited the island of Drangey, Nancy and I and maybe a dozen others.

Pelagic birds auks and petrels and shearwaters, though they prefer life out on the open ocean must, of course, go ashore in spring to nest and breed. They arrive in huge flocks on the cliffs where they hatched, sometimes on the very ledge. They court and feed and raise their young and disappear again in summer, flying and swimming, to their secret places on the high seas.

Drangey, a flat-topped mass of compacted volcanic ash tuff towering two hundred metres above the water has offered its cliffs to these seabird colonies probably for millennia. And residents of Skagafjörður have come in their boats every year for centuries to hunt and trap puffins, to gather eggs, to hang their ropes from above, to dangle and swing with their bags or pails along the rock face. Those eggs, in earlier years a staple of life for struggling and starving Icelanders, have now become a delicacy.

Farmer Jon from Fagranes on the far side of the fjord came with his Drangey scrapbook and his 30-foot boat to pick us up and ferry us across the water. Northern fulmars blew along behind us, their tubenose nostrils and their easy flight. And black-legged shining kittiwakes. Some thirty minutes journey under a blue sky. Wind. And spray. Common murrens began to gather round, and thick-billed murrens, and razor-bills floating on the water. A few black guillemot, white wing patches and their orange legs. Atlantic puffins interrupted their feeding and popped like toast out of the sea.

Our boat slowed and chugged up next to its mooring on the island. Birds everywhere. Birds above. Birds alongside. And below. Birds in large flocks on the waves, in long lines and crowded side by side along the shelves on the island walls. Grunting. And groaning. Sighing. Screaming. Birds. Such a clamour of birds, a babel of birds. Thousands and thousands of birds. A whirlwind of birds. One of a paltry human minority, I felt suddenly we had entered their world, a world populated and governed by birds.

We sidled up cliffs of shale and loose clay. Over rocks. Along ledges. We crept from one stone face to another. We found ladders and ropes to guide us, a few bolted and rusted climbing irons. A breathtaking climb for a prairie boy my thirty years on the prairies, Canadian city slicker, a flathead. I thought our adventure a bit foolhardy. I felt disoriented, perhaps some lingering jetlag, perhaps because of the constant call and turmoil of birds, the anarchy of birds. But Farmer Jon I noticed, despite his eighty long years, followed easily close

behind.

Some of the other climbers struggled above me with their footing and Farmer Jon's son, a teenager, a mountain goat of a boy, and friendly, sprinted back and forth along the trail to help them. He turned and beckoned to me at a certain stage in a narrow crossing. "Come." He took me aside to a careful pile of boulders and crossed himself and began to pray. A long prayer, and rhythmic. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. And forgive us our debts... He told me in his broken English that it was the tradition to pray here, to ward off the island evil.

And so we came to the top of the headland, to the green meadows at the top of the headland where the old man Jon found us and told us stories of Grettir the bandit, Grettir the outlaw, Grettir the villain turned human and hero.

Grettir, who swam from the mainland to hide on the island of Drangey. Grettir, the strongest man in the history of Iceland; he could lift rocks the size of houses. Grettir, who lived here one thousand years ago; this hollow in the ground where he fashioned a hut, that bit of soil where he planted a garden. Grettir, who always felt lonely. Grettir who was betrayed by his friends and murdered on Drangey. This spot here marking his grave on the island of Drangey.

Nancy came and sat beside me again in the grass on the northern slopes of the headland with the birds just below and said she needed to ask me a favour. "I wonder if I could ask a favour." She'd heard me talk about the two or three hour excursions I planned every day from the village and she wondered if she could come along. She said walking alone she'd surely get lost, she had no sense of direction. She loved walking she said, and she wasn't interested in staying inside with the others, in writing or working on manuscripts.

A difficult question for me, her request. I meant to hike with my microcassette, to gather notes for my writing, notes that these paragraphs might later be built on. A human presence would distract and inhibit me.

So we made an agreement. We would

leave together every morning after Diddi's breakfast. Diddi, our Hofsos cook and Nancy would walk a hundred metres behind me. Or in front of me. We'd walk out our hour or two separately, I'd get my spoken notes and my privacy. We'd stop now and then for a drink and a snack, a visit. Returning we'd walk together. The trek would be far less lonely for me and Nancy wouldn't need to worry about losing her way.

Nancy told me her life's ambition. She said she wanted to stay out of jail, that was first. And she wanted to be happy. "Not much else," she said. She spoke as though we were discussing the coffee we had for breakfast. With an even tone, a good but ordinary cup of coffee.

"Whoa!" I gave my head a shake. "Just a few simple goals. They should be easy to measure anyway," I said. I'm not sure now whether I meant that as a joke or not.

We'd hiked out three hours east along the Hofsos River where the white wagtail

and golden plover and whimbrel sang. Gravel road, and trail. Pastures again. For sheep, for horses. We'd passed through farmyards, through barbed wire gates that we opened and cramped shut behind us. Passed a modest sign on the road with an arrow pointing up a long drive to a house on the southern hillside, Holkot.

We'd hiked up a large hill through a cluster of barns and back down into the river valley where a washed out bridge waited for us to cross. Two narrow iron girders spanning the noisy torrent, and no crosspieces, perhaps for twenty metres. Where one plaintive redshank called to mirror our concern. Where I stopped to remove the first of my two flannel shirts. Then, arms spread, and one careful foot in front of the other, we inched along the girders till we both stood safe on the other side of the water. We'd wondered aloud a few times about private property and trespassing, but our trail showed on the map and it led through this series of yards.

That was the first day we saw cloud in Hofsos, after four days of blue sky and brilliant sunshine. Heavy leaden cloud all around us, just a few hundred metres above our heads. And a bitter Arctic wind blowing across the fjord. We'd packed our rain gear, some cheese, a couple of oranges and apples, chocolate-covered biscuits, four bottles of water. We'd walked out along the rushing and rocky river, up and up along the tumbling turning river. Up the valley. Mountains and cliffs on either side and the glacier waiting ahead of us. And then the sun beginning to break through farther up the draw, its glare on the glacier up ahead of us.

So many colours on the hillsides, so many varied hues of green. Olive, and apple-green. Beryl. Verdigris. Chartreuse. So many different shades of pink, of brown and gray. The pigment of straw and sand, of basalt, and patches of rust. The bloom of rock, the bias of vegetation. Orange lichen. Green lichen. Gray lichen. And moss. Such an assortment of values for snow above, values for soil below. Ginger. And bronze. And sienna.

To be happy. And to stay out of jail. You can imagine how that surprised me. It was our fourth long hike together. Nancy and I had found an old stone fence drawn across the valley and a rock foundation, perhaps the remains of a former shepherd's hut. We'd settled there for our lunch and Nancy told me her story. I never once thought before about the need to stay out of jail, about making that a life goal; I'd even imagined that the local penitentiary would be a great place to do some writing. John's Collected Prison Diaries; a fatuous idea, I know.

Nancy lives in Madison, Wisconsin where she does some kind of work with disturbed children, elementary special education. She says her students in their frustration sometimes swear and throw chairs at her, then come to her an hour later for love and comfort. Troubled and unnurtured babes she calls them.

She has a city backyard that opens into a small patch of forest where wild turkeys and grouse and a variety of songbirds rose-breasted grosbeaks and indigo buntings

and Eastern towhees gather round the feeders that she hangs from poles and tree branches with easy sightlines to her windows. A good place to be happy it seems. And she is. But Nancy quarrels often with the squirrels and starlings that chase round those sunflower feeders. Who knows, maybe that trifling battle against nature's dark forces on her days off school brings her a kind of joy.


Nancy's grandparents mixed Croatian and Austrian on the one side, Swiss on the other were already proud of their socialist beliefs when they arrived in America, and they settled in the already socialist Milwaukee. The Swiss grandfather had been forced to leave a neutral but conservative Switzerland because of his politics and Nancy's father, a quiet man but a charismatic speaker, became a union leader at the local Allis-Chalmers plant. A tractor and farm equipment manufacturer since 1914, Allis Chalmers sent its business roots in Milwaukee back to 1847.

My California-based Mindscape CD Encyclopedia defines Joseph Raymond McCarthy, the Republican senator from Wisconsin (1947-1957), as opportunistic and shady, a liar and a blustering bully. It was he who presided over the permanent subcommittee on investigations which charged a variety of army officials, members of the media, and public figures of being spies and Communists.

His words given in an address at Wheeling, West Virginia in February 9, 1950: While I cannot take the time to name all of the men in the State Department who have been named as members of the Communist Party and members of a spy ring, I have here in my hand a list of two hundred and five that were known to the secretary of state as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping the policy of the State Department.

McCarthy's accusations were never proven and he was censured by the Senate in 1954 dead by 1957 because of his heavy drinking. And though it preceded him, he lent his name to the ongoing campaign of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. McCarthyism, that particular

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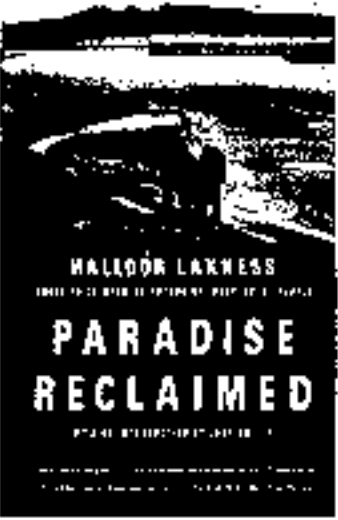


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brand of right-wing hysteria that damaged the lives of so many Americans; Pete Seeger, Paul Robeson, Dorothy Parker, Anne Revere, Charlie Chaplin, that landed Harold Christoffel behind bars for his leftist leanings and his Allis-Chalmers union activity.

And so, given his World War II military service and the time he spent in prison waiting for hearings in Washington, D.C., waiting for trials, waiting for his impossible bail to be collected, serving his six-years at the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana Nancy spent much of her youth without her father. Harold Christoffel, a villain to some, but a hero to the Milwaukee masses, almost a Grettir reminder, but without the embellishment of time. Nancy remembers watching with horror as wooden crosses burned for him at night in her front yard, the work of intolerant neighbours.

Even today her family has never received compensation for the tragedy they suffered at the hands of that reactionary inquisition. Her father remained a felon, was never again allowed to vote, or to leave the country. There have been no suits, no legal actions. The ruling parties have never recognized the contribution he made in his battle for the worker and the common people, never acknowledged the life he gave.

And so Nancy, though proud of her father and his accomplishments, has named her heart's first desire; she'd prefer to stay out of jail.

We walked from our lunch out upon the open trail. A wheatear flew from a rock. A raven called. I had thought at first the absence of trees in Iceland would be more unsettling, just a few struggling and stunted birch or spruce scattered far and wide in the northland. And none at all here in the valley. Only grass, and wildflowers. Green grass and painted wildflowers; all the vegetation we saw herbaceous and stopping well below the knee. This treeless Iceland so bold and so green.

A jumble of porous and volcanic rock gathering now around us, boulders that had tumbled from the mountains. And a small forgotten slough. Marsh reed. Almost forgotten. Four quiet ponds and a flutter of red-necked phalaropes courting

on the liquid surface. The way this river splintered into islands and divergent streams, the way it folded back together to race down to Skagafjordur. The way our path wandered from the river, turned to meet it again

Suddenly the water seemed to babble everywhere around us. Brooks and bourns and streamlets zagging every which way across the meadow. Over pebbles. Around rocks. Across our track. Rushing pell-mell helter-skelter piggedly-higgledy, bustling down and down to meet the river below. Meltwater from the ice and snow still blooming in the mountains just a few hundred metres away. This narrow floodplain and the mountains soaring on either side. Babble, and gurgle, and roar. Suddenly Nancy and I had started calling back and forth to each other. We were shouting. Where could we cross.

"Over here!"

"Do you think we can make it?"

"What about this?"

"Could you step to that rock?"

We pulled off our shoes and tied them and threw them up over our shoulders. We stripped off our socks and rolled our pant legs to our knees, struck out again with our bare feet across the flooding meadow. Over the toppled grass. Over the pebbles. Sharp pebbles. Rock to teetering rock. Cold water. Ice-cold water. Racking, bone-chilling cold. Some fifteen car-lengths, the width of six city lots, we hobbled. Then, finding an island of desert, we sat on a rock to sun dry our feet, to warm our poor aching feet.

There in the valley of the Hofsos River sitting on that rock with Nancy I began to wonder about the meaning of fidelity. I felt good to be out there in the wilds of Iceland with a companion. And new friends are always exciting, new conversations. You find yourself talking about things you've never talked about before, hearing things you never heard before. New ideas. And the two of us seemed to fit together. I asked Nancy if her husband back at home in Wisconsin would be jealous of our walks and conversation. She said no. She was sure of that, he trusted her. And I asked myself what Susan might feel.

I thought about fidelity. I wondered if,

like my Christian upbringing, the rules for marriage might be far too tightly bound. Too stingy. Too well-defined. Men are supposed to stick with men friends, and women with women; anything else would be far too dangerous. And one close companion, a husband or wife, should be good enough for anyone. How do we balance this, I thought. Our need for security, for long-term relationships. Our need for broader friendships, male and female. For variety. For passion. For new relational discoveries.

I've heard stories from the Soviet Union. The Mennonite families there, some of them my relatives, were broken up during the Stalin regime and individuals shipped to different parts of the country the men always to Siberia. Marriages were broken up. And with the impossibility of contact some of those men not knowing what had happened to their first wives and children perhaps they'd been killed, perhaps emigrated and lost for all eternity remarried and started second families.

Here in the north of Iceland, far from Canada and Susan, I wondered how fickle my affections might be, how quickly I might establish new friendships and alliances. By the end of two days I was out hiking with Nancy as though we've been together for years.

It's not that I fell in love with Nancy. Not like that, it was more the walking. The walking; I thought I should name it existential, make it a philosophy, a walking ideology. Each step seemed to swell with intimacy and experience. Those long miles we traveled, I could feel them in the muscles of my legs. I carried a pack on my shoulders and my back began to ache. My heart could tell the distance too; the thump, thump, thump in my chest. And my lungs. Uphill I was always out of breath, and I could hear Nancy breathing behind me. My nose. I smelled the horses and the wildflowers, the rotting slough. My ears, the birdsong and the whistling wind.

Was I being unfaithful? Of course not. My pants remained forever belted and buckled, and my imagination too. But monogamy may not offer the best strategy for human genetic survival. And relationships do begin and grow on platforms

other than physical desire. It may be one of the curiosities of our culture that we attach so much to our taboos on human sexuality, when there may be infidelities far more threatening.

I don't know much about marriage, or infidelity. Earlier in the day I had no idea how I'd ever turn around, return to Hofsos. If we hadn't faced the flooded meadow and the aching cold against our naked feet we might have walked like that forever. We might have walked on up the mountain, and across the glacier, along the northern lowland and into the sea. Walked to the island of Grimsey. And on, and on. Perhaps across the water and to the North Pole. Nancy and I, we walked well together.

My dreams for the future have always been simpler than Nancy's, and more complicated too. I wanted as a young man to experience, to feel things. I wanted adventure. I wished to be a farmer. And a fisherman. A scholar and a truck driver. A forester. A monk, and a musician. Those three or four few good jobs I was offered in my life would certainly have cramped me. I didn't take them, they were all office jobs. And I hoped to fall in love, to be happy in that love, to come home in the evening from my pursuits to find contentment. I longed to live with intensity but I wished as well to be free from tension. My dreams so full of conflict. Or full of paradox. There is a difference.

Martha, in her sixties and breakfasting in Iceland, spoke one day about her need to swim in the fjord. Skinny-dip, she said, she had to do it, couldn't sleep thinking about it. She meant to go early next morning, she hoped someone would join her. She said she didn't understand that need, that yearning, didn't know how to describe it; though she tried.

But it was clear to me, Martha's meaning. One word. Desire. With a capital D. She was looking for a god, a goddess. Eros, or Aphrodite. A sacrament to carry her to the next stage of life's journey.

My early years, two and three and four, we still kept a horse to help us with our farm work. Nellie; a big bay, probably some Clydesdale cross. She must have been gentle, I was never afraid of her; though my



father did warn me about her back legs. He thought it wise always to be careful of a horse's back legs, or a cow's, especially if the animal didn't know you. He said they could strike out so far, and so quickly, so hard; he told a story of a villager in Ukraine who had been killed by a single kick from a horse. And he said I should be careful never to surprise a horse if she was napping.

Work days in spring he often gathered Nellie to the harness, set me on her back, and took us out to the asparagus or strawberry patch to cultivate. Gee, Nellie! Haw, Nellie! One small seven-tined horse-drawn cultivator. The reins around his back and two wooden cultivator handles for him to lean on. I don't remember whether I enjoyed those mornings on Nellie's back, whether I begged to be taken down. But I do recall the movement of the muscles in her back, the pinch of the harness against my legs, my hands on her leather collar, her sweat soaking up my pant leg.

I imagine now that must have been a pleasant experience for me, the riding, for that old mare left a large impression. When we traded her for our first red Farmall tractor, when we sent her off on the truck to a glue factory to supply some violin or furniture maker with animal glue, I wept for Nellie. I missed her shape in the barn. And her smell. I missed the soft hard feel of her. And I began a search that still calls me summers to local horse shows; that still finds my car pulled up on gravel roads, me with arms stretched across barb wire, face against some eager horse's neck.

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The fjord for Martha, and Equus for me. I found other horses to ride. Richard, a bachelor from our church, kept a collection of Shetland ponies; some days he brought one over for me to try. Some days my father borrowed a giant Belgian draft horse from the Friesens a mile away. Big horses, and small horses. Later I found Red. Red the Lazy. And then Star.

He was the first real horse I rode, a true riding horse. Chestnut coloured, and part Arabian, gelding. A good horse, and a good size for my tall sixteen years; the first of my loaner horses to understand the neck rein, the art of single-handed steering. I borrowed him from the music teacher and conductor, Henry Goertzen. Star and I rode the spring and summer away, several springs and several summers. We traveled the back roads of Niagara, alone, or sometimes with companions.

Star may have had one failing. If you paid attention you might sometimes catch in the sound of his gait, in his rhythm and movement, an almost stumble. An extra clip from one of his forelegs. I don't know if he was careless, or if he might once have suffered bone or nerve damage to his leg. I didn't think about it much. But one fall day when we were loping down a gravel trail, the sunshine and the birds and trees, my rambling thoughts, that clip became a clop. Star stumbled. And I was too far away in my dreams to pull him back up. Star turned a kind of somersault. I with him. And when we came to rest he lay on top of me.

Oh, the pain. Of course, he scrambled to his feet and stood. Waited. But it wasn't quite as easy for me. When I finally managed to rise, I found bruises and cuts, a few maladjusted limbs. Though no broken bones. I spent a few painful days and nights. But I recovered. And I rode Star a few more times that year. Soon after the accident I found my first girlfriend; my interest in horses suffered a period of eclipse.

I'm not sure what it is that horses impart to me; the exact nature of my need, what dream they offer or kept alive. But over the decades they seem to have materialized whenever I was most in crisis. When I was most lonely, or troubled. There, a pasture, and horses. Some touchstone to my confu-

sion.

I learned as a boy to ride in the tradition of the cowboy; Western saddle, and Stetson, and high leather boots with heels. Rough and ready. I had little skill; I never took lessons. But I had a knack for staying in the saddle long legs and a low centre of gravity. Plenty of fear, but some daring; I'd agree to ride almost anything I always needed a horse to ride with my companions. Not entirely in character my behaviour with horses; I was a quiet teenager and timid..

We learned those days that we should ride on big horses, nothing less than fifteen hands. And I found the look of these Icelandic riders a bit comical. Such big men on such small horses my first inclination was to call them all ponies.

We went for a ride, five or six of us, late in our Iceland stay two good hours into the mountains; I think Nancy came with us. Kristina, the wrangler, led us on her black steed single file and deep into the mountains. A good ride, a landscape that opened up before us; valley, and mountains, and sky.

The tolt; a running walk, a natural four-beat gait reputed to give the rider a gentle and bounce-free outing at speeds of up to twenty miles an hour. I had my doubts about that Iceland tolt. Most of us, human beings I reasoned, are prone to exaggeration. Especially in matters of nationality, especially when the given nation is small and of a fiery independent spirit. I didn't expect much from my Icelandic ride, from the famous five gaits and the tolt, but I was determined to give it a try. And Kristina was there to help me.

"Like this," she said. "Here. Lift the reins. Pull up his head."

And my Skjoni was equal to the task. Did he ride. What ever I asked him to do, he could do. He would do. What ever small task I gave him. Down through this gate. Up over that walkway. And his tolt was indeed as smooth as lying at home in bed, as constant as sitting in the pub with a mug of beer the first mug of beer. Oh my Skjoni. Suddenly it no longer mattered that my legs were longer than his.

Those dazzling horses. Those astonishing Icelandic horses. We hadn't driven too

many miles after our breakfast on the harbour in Reykjavik before we saw them. Icelandic horses, large colourful herds of horses. In their graveled and grassy pastures.

Pinto. And buckskin. Palomino and chestnut and bay. White horse. Black horse. Silver dapple and silver bay. Paint horse. And blue or strawberry roan. Forty-two different colour patterns according to the literature. Sorrel with flaxen mane and tail, liver chestnut, cremello, and dun. Horses, and their half-ragged coats, still early spring, still shedding their winter fur.

There on the road between Hofsos and Reykjavik in a landscape of pasture and hills and snowy peaks a round-up of horses appeared suddenly in front of us, blocked our route. On the pavement and in the ditches. Geldings, and yearlings. Mares with gamboling foals. Maybe one hundred horses their manes and tails eddied in the wind, maybe two hundred, and a dozen men riding. And we scrambled from the bus for a breath of air, for a picture and a better look, for the thud and the clip of hooves, the smell of horse dropping. We stood and marveled under this large Icelandic sky.



*John Weier*

# Emma

by Christine G. Best



When I look back to my childhood, special people stand out vividly in my memory. Emma Renesse was such a person.

We were neighbours in the Icelandic community of Arborg, Manitoba. In 1928 our family moved into a bungalow that my father, Mundi Johannson, a carpenter, built on a five-acre lot, adjacent to the Renesse property. Our mothers became close friends and our homes were open to each other at all times. I was the middle child of five and as Mattie Renesse and I were close in age, we were together a lot of the time. We both felt that we more or less shared our mothers - a very special privilege for a youngster to have.

The Renesse home was a neat white cottage, built in 1933 by my father to replace the house that was lost to fire in March of that year. It was not long until the area around the new home was a maze of colour with a variety of flowers and window boxes which over-

flowed with pink and purple petunias nestled between baby's breath and pansies. Sweetpeas climbed the walls around the house. Hummingbirds, although rare in the area, occasionally feasted in these gardens. A lilac hedge lined the sidewalk leading from the front gate. Families of squirrels nested high in the spruce trees to the north of the house, and Kayo, the pet crow, spent each summer on the property, migrating for the winter months, to return the following spring.

Emma was a great cook and she would create wonderful meals with ease. For many years she baked and decorated tiered wedding cakes for friends. She was well-known for her culinary expertise, gained from having cooked in hotels in Winnipeg in her early years. In 1908 she and her first husband, Barney Eyjolfson, opened Barney's Restaurant, Barbershop and Pool Room in Gimli, Manitoba. They sold the business in 1914 and moved to a farm north of Arborg. The restaurant was later named "The Falcon Café."

Gardening and flowers were of special interest to Emma. She grew a wide variety of garden produce. Rows of asparagus were a great favourite for their delicate shoots, and later in the season, as ferns for floral arrangements. She also created an orchard with an assortment of fruit trees. In former years, she grew on the same property, mushrooms which she shipped to Winnipeg restaurants by train. I was told that she had been one of the first beekeepers in the area. She was always open to new ideas and ways of doing things.

Beyond the fenced area around the house, Hanna, the prize milker Holstein cow grazed in the back acres. From her bounty Emma produced skyr, ice cream, butter and mounds of whipped cream which she lavished on her rosettes and desserts. Chickens were raised for eggs and meat, and ham was cured in the smokehouse each fall from the hogs raised during the summer months. In the winter Emma turned out on a hand operated cylindrical knitting machine dozens of pairs of woolen socks and mittens. These were sold to the local Lake Winnipeg fishermen.

Emma, who had been widowed in 1924, was in her forties when she married Hermann von Renesse, a widower who had immigrated from Germany several years earlier. Hermann was the manager of the North Star Co-Op Creamery in Arborg. They started their married

life together with her three children - Irene her fifteen year-old foster daughter, Charlie her fourteen year-old adopted son and Barney Jr., her six year-old son. Mattie was born the following year. Verna, Emma's twelve year-old niece, arrived four years later and lived with the family until her late teens.

Emma's warmth and generosity were felt by many. She had an infectious laugh and a great sense of humour. Emigrating from Iceland at the age of ten in 1894, she survived the hardships suffered by the pioneers. Never complaining, she always encouraged Mattie and I to learn more and to reach higher. She was self-taught, not having had the opportunity to attend school. She learned to read and to write Icelandic, but had no knowledge of English when she arrived in Canada. She was a good public speaker. I recall her holding her own in political discussions. During the time of women's suffrage in Manitoba, she joined Nellie McClung's movement, canvassing the countryside with a petition. Emma belonged to various organizations, including the United Farm Women of Manitoba and was the first president of the Unitarian Ladies' Aid. She was a very active worker in the latter and one of the founders of the Federated Camp at Hnusa in the 1930s.

In 1966 Emma moved from her home in Gimli where she had lived after Hermann's death in 1953, to Hofn - the Icelandic home in Vancouver. She was involved in the numerous activities offered. She enjoyed playing cards, knitting, visiting and writing letters for those who were no longer able to write. In July 1970, Emma decided to travel to Manitoba and hold a coffee party in Gimli for her old friends. She prepared most of the baking. It was held at the Falcon Café (her former restaurant) with more than 50 guests. A few days later she suffered a stroke and she passed away in Winnipeg, August 4, 1970 at the age of 86.

That I admire her spirit is evident and I shall always be grateful for her positive influence on my life.

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bardal**

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# Rachelle Gislason

by Mattie Clegg



Rachelle Gislason

Rachelle Lynne Gislason has made a name for herself in the music world. It was at the MacPherson Playhouse in Victoria where Rachelle got the break any aspiring young singer/songwriter/musician would love to have. Last April, at the age of 15, she was chosen by Nelly Furtado to open the sold-out show. It was the first show Furtado had given in her home town after winning four Juno awards. The act that was slated to open the show for Nelly was unable to make it, so she decided to enlist some local talent for her Premiere. The contest was sponsored by a local radio station - "Hot 103". More than 50 demos were submitted and sent to Nelly and her management team. Nelly chose Rachelle for her originality and unique sound.

The day before the concert, Rachelle received a phone call telling her that she had been chosen! Within hours the media was at the Gislason home - television cameras, newspaper columnists and news radio reporters arrived to interview her. She only had one day to get ready for the show and to decide what to play and sing. This would have been unnerving for even the most seasoned performer. Nelly took time to visit with Rachelle back stage before the performance, and in her friendly and positive way gave Rachelle confidence and encouragement. Last July Rachelle's first CD, *Live at the Mac*, was released. It is the recording of the actual concert.

For twenty-five minutes, Rachelle took the stage, spoke to the very receptive audience, sang three of her own compositions and "Somewhere over the Rainbow" while accompanying herself on the piano. The audience of over 800 sang along, clapped to keep time with one of the numbers and gave her a standing ovation. It was a tremendous evening for Rachelle, and she carried it right through like a trooper to her

final bows.

The piano is the very extension of her soul. One day when she was about six years old, she came in from school and, as usual, went straight to the piano. I heard her playing and asked where she had learned that tune. She told me that when she heard something she liked, she would think about it, and think about it and then find it on the piano. She has been "finding" and composing her own music from that early age.

Rachelle spends many hours a week playing, writing and revising her music. Usually the melody is created first, but on occasion, the lyrics are completed first. She constantly makes note of her music to keep the theme flowing, and continually works on new sounds and tones and techniques.

The subject matter of her songs is unique for someone so young - she reaches out and encourages others to seek out and recognize their own self worth and to pursue their own goals. This is very evident in "Chameleon" and "Porcelain China Doll." "Hello" was written after she had made eye contact with a young girl who was sitting on the street in downtown Victoria, begging. Rachelle's heart went out to her and without hesitation, she gave the girl her lunch that she had just bought at a Take-Away. The girl ran across the street to share the lunch with another girl. As Rachelle left them, they both called to her - "Thank you, thank you, God bless you."

This experience inspired Rachelle to write a song questioning why these young girls were without a home. Did they want to go back? Did they have a choice? She says: "It is about, no matter how alone you feel or how lost you are, God will always be there for you."

Rachelle wrote her first song when she was eight years old. She called it "A Little

Girl's Soul," Her second, at age nine, called "I Heard a Cry", a special dedication to a family friend after attending the funeral. She has continued writing music and lyrics throughout the years.

Her biggest inspiration was when she attended a concert in Victoria two years ago, featuring Chantel Krevianzuk, and most recently, Nelly Furtado, who has become a friend and given encouragement to Rachelle. At her latest concert in Victoria, Nelly sent tickets for Rachelle and guests. When Nelly spotted Rachelle in the reception line after the concert, Nelly smiled at her and sang two lines from one of Rachelle's own songs.

At age 6, Rachelle sang her first solo for the United Way campaign jingle, and did other commercials with her mother for CFX radio. Her first television performance was at the age of 11 at the Royal Theatre in Victoria, for Timmy's Telethon. We sat in the audience and watched as a grand piano was wheeled out on stage. Rachelle played one of her own compositions, accompanied by a professional band of seasoned studio musicians. She carried through quite a lengthy composition with quiet calm, without being fazed by the television cameras, lights or the audience. After leaving the stage she came up the aisle of the Royal Theatre to meet us. I stood there teary eyed, ready to give her a hug, and before I could say anything, she asked "When we get to your place Grandma, can we make bread?" My nervousness was unfounded. Rachelle was calm and composed and looking forward to going home

with us for a visit.

Rachelle is a grade XI student at Oak Bay High School where her main interests at school are music, sports, and science – (where she excels in engineering). Rachelle plays trumpet in the Concert Band and rows with the Varsity Team. Her interests are many and varied. She has been in choirs since grade two, taken piano lessons since she was five years old, and also plays a number of other instruments. Rachelle is a dedicated member of the Gorge Varsity Rowing team and takes part in many Rowing Regattas each year. Regardless of weather conditions the six girl team practices rowing five days a week—in 60 foot shells. Rachelle enjoys the rigorous challenge of this sport where discipline and teamwork is essential.

Throughout the years she has been enrolled in a great number of extra courses after school. Last summer she participated in Courtenay Youth Music School and Festival-CYMC for an intensive three-week music camp of dancing, acting and singing. She has also been a leader at Church camps.

Rachelle has been fortunate to have had full support of her parents, both professional musicians—a positive environment for her to develop her talents. A very special mentor for the past four years has been George Essihos, a well known Jazz pianist virtuoso, with a Classical music background. He has encouraged Rachelle to create her own style and challenges her with dynamic keyboard techniques.

When trying to sum up what she is all

about, I feel that this young woman is determined, dedicated, organized, and has a full realization that all accomplishments take hard work. Her positive outlook on life is expressed by "Live life to the fullest, and remember to make Today count." Her ambition is to make her life meaningful – in music and possibly in Science and research... (and she has always dreamt of winning a Grammy!)

Rachelle was born November 24, 1985, in Victoria, B.C. Her parents are Grant and April Gislason. She has three brothers, Kristjan, Aron and Bryan. Thirteen year old Bryan is an upcoming musician who

excels in playing drums.

Rachelle's paternal grandparents were the late Oscar Gislason and Mattie (von Renesse)(Gislason) Clegg of Vancouver Island, B.C. and her Icelandic Manitoba roots—Great grandparents, Mundi and Runa Gislason, Geysir, and Emma (Sveinsdóttir) and Hermann von Renesse of Arborg.


Rachelle's website is: rachellegrace.com

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# Poetry

by Kirsten Brooks

Act Three, Scene Four

Your Final Words

SPIT out over the Lip of your Cup  
betrayed

Even the Smallest of Silences inside me  
so that

Morning Broke

In short Laboured Breaths  
over the skin of my hand  
and

You Watched

in  
Fascination  
as

My Fingers

Rolled off the lid of the teapot

Steam Hanging

in beads off my heart.

# Book Reviews



## Colloquial Icelandic

by Daisy L. Neijmann  
London & New York, Routledge, 2001  
(ðvíiþ, 370 pp. + 2 cassette tapes)

This book and the two 60 minute cassettes are being sold in a single package. The author, Daisy Neijmann is an experienced Icelandic language teacher. She is certainly well known to the Icelandic Canadian community of Manitoba, where she was a lecturer at the Faculty of Icelandic Studies at the University of Manitoba between the years 1994 to 1998. The author has put together a series of lessons aimed at giving the student an

opportunity to study the Icelandic language outside of the traditional classroom setting. The narratives and situations frequently reflect the author's time in Canada. For instance, characters are as likely to refer to Saskatchewan as Scotland in describing where they are from or some other aspect of their lives.

The book is divided into sixteen sections, each with a theme and the vocabulary of each theme is the focus of that section. Themes deal with such issues as travelling, health, shopping, accommodations, family relationships, eating out; all vocabulary one would encounter as a visitor to Iceland. A visit to the doctor and the drugstore is covered. The age-old Icelandic tradition of asking about one's family history and relationships gets its own chapter. Buying shoes and clothes are all laid out in a conversation. The themes are useful for introducing various diverse groups of words such as colours, parts of the body, compass directions and cooking terms.

With each theme there is a secondary lesson on grammar. An explanation of active and passive voices, personal and impersonal pronouns, strong and weak verbs, definite and indefinite nouns are all woven in with the various conversation themes. There are several sections in each chapter called "Language points" that introduce a grammar lesson and explain the subtleties of Icelandic grammar in layman's terms, or as near to layman's terms any grammar lesson can be! This helps the reader relate to the Icelandic grammar lesson by reviewing the English examples that describe the point being taught. There is even a four-page glossary of grammatical terms for those of us whose junior high school grammar lessons have been long forgotten.

Each individual theme chapter includes several dialogues that are transcribed on the

cassette so that the reader can follow the dialogue in the book and hear the correct pronunciation. The book is printed with a little symbol of a cassette to let the reader know that this part is covered in the tapes. From time to time, the narrator on the tape suggests alternative options for listening to the tapes. She will suggest the listener take the part of one of the characters in the narrative or stop the tape and repeat the words after each sentence or phrase. The people playing out the various scenarios on the tapes are native speakers of the language and are clear and concise in their pronunciation. This makes them easy to follow in the text and to imitate in the speaking.

As a lay-teacher of colloquial Icelandic classes in an informal setting, it has been excellent for me to read the book from cover to cover. Explanations of grammar rules are what my students are constantly requesting and these are the questions for which I don't always have an answer. For someone who learned to speak Icelandic

outside of a school setting, the grammar is instinctive, but the speaker doesn't always know why one says something one way or another. The book goes a long way to making Icelandic grammar less of a mystery.

This kit is a great choice for someone who is intent on learning to speak Icelandic. The tapes are excellent, but they are not relevant on their own. The kit is a full package and the two components need to be worked together. However, after following the interactive book/tape lessons, the students will have a fuller understanding of the object of the lesson and they could spend extra time with the tapes on their own. They could give themselves auxiliary practice on a portable cassette while driving back and forth to work, or walking the dog. After several months of listening to his or her master, perhaps even the family dog will be more conversant in Icelandic!

## Contributors

**CHRISTINE JOHANSSON BEST** has been a member of the Silver Quills Writing Club of Saskatoon for many years and enjoys writing memories of her childhood in Arborg, Manitoba. Three of her stories have previously been published in the Icelandic Canadian. Christine and husband, Bert, have retired to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

**KIRSTEN BROOKS** is a Winnipeg poet and performer. As well, she is a student of Anthropology, interested in pursuing studies in the cross cultural comparison between Icelandic and Ojibwe peoples.

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

**GAIL EINARSON-MCCLEERY** was born in 1939 in Gimli, Manitoba of Icelandic parentage (Disa Helgason and Stanley Einarson), and was raised on a farm in the Minerva district. After retiring from a 30 year career with CBC-TV, she and her husband Eric became active in the Icelandic community. Gail was President of the Icelandic club in Toronto and organized the Vikings in Canada Gala in Millennium year, after which she was awarded the Order of the Falcon. She has been Director of the International Visits Program of the INL since 1998.

**ELVA SIMUNDSSON** is the regional librarian for Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Central & Arctic Region. Elva is a resident of Gimli and has taught Icelandic language classes in Winnipeg and Gimli.


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

**JOHN WEIER** is the author of a number of books, among them *Friends Coming Back As Animals*, *Marshwalker: Naturalist Memoirs*, *Coils of the Yamuna*, and *Steppe: A Novel*. He is also an avid birder; he has birded in South Africa, India, Iceland, Syria, across Europe and North America. John lives in Winnipeg where he works as a writer and a luthier—a violin restorer.

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