

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

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

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The
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First Lutheran Church, Winnipeg

Celebrating 125 Years!

1878-2003

We honour the memory of those who established our strong roots. Our life and work as a congregation today are like the branches of a mighty tree, one that shelters and protects, growing toward a future of joyful faith.

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Our goal is to raise \$125,000 for an extraordinary support and outreach program. 50% refurbishes our 1913 church home, 25% goes to the needy at home and abroad, 25% supports the ministries of the wider Lutheran Church.

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The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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On the Cover



Rosa Stephansson Benediktson



Stephan Vilberg Benediktson

Editorial

By Stephan Vilberg Benediktson

I retired from Alberta to warmer climes in early 2001, over two years ago now, and when trying to decide where to retire to, I convinced Adriana to consider Buenos Aires, Argentina. I lived there for a number of years in the 1980s and love this “Paris of South America”. I knew that I wanted to retire in a Latin ambience; I love the Latin spirit, their good manners, music, eating late, etc. I told her that it would be her call; if it did not work for her we would look elsewhere. We were there for three days when she announced “this does not work for me”. We stayed for three months but she never changed her mind. As a result, we have retired to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, a fascinating town of some 110,000 people, more or less 5,000 foreigners, in old colonial, central Mexico some 250 miles north of Mexico City. The climate here is almost perfect and if you want to, you can drive from here to Atlanta, Georgia, where Adriana’s children live, or Calgary, Alberta where my children and my roots are.

San Miguel has been known as a writers and artists colony since the 1930s. The town was declared a national monument in 1926, has an illustrious and sometimes notorious past, refer info@portalsanmiguel.com. The streets are lined with fountains, monuments, churches and 18th century mansions, many of which are owned by interesting foreigners such as Canada’s Olympic figure skating medallist and artist, Toller Cranston. Its cultural offerings are renowned ranging from literary readings, art shows, music festivals to a running of the bulls through town. There are a number of art schools located here, most notably the accredited Instituto Allende. I am taking a course in drawing and painting and am discovering in the process that art adds a whole new dimension to an otherwise “dull” engineers’ thought processes.

One of the few problems I have with San Miguel is the apparent complete absence of any Icelandic presence. I usually meet Icelanders wherever I go in the world. Having said this, I must explain that I have developed a very generous system for classifying people as Icelanders. Any drop of Icelandic blood is enough; ten percent would be plenty in my system to qualify as an Icelander. As you may recall, at the time of the Gorbachev Reagan conference in Reykjavik it came out that one of Ronald Reagan’s grandmothers was Icelandic; Reagan was therefore clearly Icelandic. In my system, I consider that any one married to an Icelander is Icelandic, by osmosis. I will continue the search here in San Miguel.

When Lorna asked me to write an editorial for this issue that contains some of my mothers writings I was honoured. I am and was very proud of my mother. She was a lady of great integrity with the highest personal standards. Rosa had the fondest memories of her college years and education was a priority in her world. She kept the pressure on me to finish my education which was an important factor in my decision to go back to high school at the age of 24 with a young family. Rosa was very Icelandic and felt a great loyalty and obligation to her Icelandic heritage. She remembered very well how the Icelandic people helped her by sending a sum of money when my father died suddenly in 1942 and left her in very difficult circumstances; the start of winter in an unfinished house on the prairies with four small children and little money. She managed, and the world could learn a lot from the centuries old tradition in Iceland of helping their people through difficult times.

It had been suggested for some time that a book should be written about Rosa that would include her writings. It has been said that she responded to the special

responsibilities that accrue to the daughters of "famous men." As a result, my sister Helga Iris Bourne, Jane Ross McCracken (author of *Stephan G. Stephansson: The Poet of the Rocky Mountains*) and I are now collaborating with an Edmonton writer, Joanne White, who is writing a book entitled *Stephan's Daughter: the Story of Rosa Siglaug Benediktson*. The book will contain articles and speeches about the history of the Western Icelanders and the family and should be printed this year.

In the Icelandic tradition, I too have written a book; it must be in the genes. If this sounds like a self-serving statement, please forgive me because it probably is. When you retire from an active career, you can undertake projects that you always wanted to do but did not have the time for. My book is called *Stefan's Story* and as

when grandfather anglicized his name from Stefan to Stephan, he said that in spite of the change he was "one and the same, however". In reverting to the Icelandic spelling of my name, I remain one and the same. Finnbogi Gudmundsson has called my book "a sort of history of the oil business, travelogue autobiography". Proceeds of the sale of both books will be given to the Stephan G. Stephansson Society in Markerville as they seem to always have some very worthwhile project, such as restoring Fensela Hall, which is in progress.

If I missed you at the INL conference at Edmonton or the Markerville picnic. I hope to see you at Islendingadagurinn in Gimli or the Johnson family reunion at Gardar, North Dakota or at Stephan G's 150th at Sudarkrokur in October. I now have time to "hang out" and I love it. Bless.

Canada has turned the corner on SARS.

Respected health professionals and specialists in disease control are all coming to the same conclusion: Canada has turned the corner on SARS. To put things in perspective, Health Canada believes it is important to remember the following points:

- The number of people who have **recovered from SARS** is going up.
- The total number of people in quarantine is going down.

Canada has provided such enormous leadership

Dr. Julie Gerberding, Director of U.S. Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta - Global News 6:30 p.m. Friday, May 2, 2003

Canada was doing everything right

Dr. David Heymann, World Health Organization, Executive Director of Communicable Diseases - Closing conference - Social international meeting on SARS - Toronto, Thursday, May 1, 2003

It's safe

Dr. Paul - Health Canada - Toronto Star, Thursday, April 24, 2003

Toronto continues to be a safe place

Dr. Colin D'Curra, Commissioner of Public Health and Chief Medical Officer of Health - Toronto Star, Thursday, April 24, 2003

Thanks to the ceaseless efforts and hard work of health care workers, the threat of SARS is being dealt with across the country. As for Toronto, all the facts indicate that it is safe to work, live and travel there.

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The Icelandic North-American Relationship

More than Money can Buy

by *Horður Sigurðsson, Chairman of Icelandair delivered in Minneapolis, INL Convention, 2002*



Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honoured to be speaking to this distinguished gathering here today as we celebrate the long and wide ranging relationship between Iceland and North America. I am particularly pleased that we have with us here today people that play an important role in maintaining and strengthening that relationship for the benefit of both countries.

Iceland is, of course, a European country by origin and by culture. But in the European context Iceland is very much the smallest and the youngest member of the family.

In the context of America, Iceland has a different image of itself. First of all, Iceland proudly celebrates its role in the European discovery of America and secondly there are quite strong emotional ties between the two countries because of the Icelandic community in North America.

You could claim that if Iceland is linked to Europe by culture it is linked to America by emotion.

The very nature of Iceland, its location and the small size of the population leaves few options for the three hundred thousand souls that have made the North Atlantic rock their home. They have to seek prosperity and better life through international trade and international relations.

The Icelandic nation state, established in 1918, made economic history during the 20th Century. It came from rags to riches in record time. Important parts of that makeover were Icelandic-American trade relations. We should probably place equal significance on half a century of political relationship and shared defense interests that have created a strong bond between the two countries. Cultural relations have also played an important role. Last but by no means least, I would underline the importance of educational co-operation. Today, that is one of the most important components of the relationship between Iceland and North America.

Isolated right up to the beginning of the 20th Century, Iceland remained one of the poorest farming communities of Europe. Until 1930, more people lived on farms in rural areas than in towns and villages. But Icelanders had already laid the foundation for prosperity. Mechanized fishing started at the beginning of the 20th century and that brought international trade, at first with European countries. By the mid 20th century trade with the big neighbour in the west became an important plank in the building of the Icelandic econ-

omy.

Historically, Icelanders are Europeans and they were subject to Norwegian and Danish monarchy from 1262-1944. Their original connection with America is of course well known and documented. We have just recently celebrated the millennium of the Viking discovery of this continent. That event is clearly a part of the self-image and proud heritage of the Icelandic people.

It was the Irish born Oscar Wilde that claimed that even if the Icelanders had discovered America they had had the good sense to lose it again.

Being the only people in history to lose a whole continent, the Icelanders waited nine hundred years to rediscover what they had lost. If Oscar Wilde had had the chance to study the development of the Icelandic-American relationship that followed he would probably have concluded that this second encounter was a stroke of luck. The Icelandic rediscovery of the western world in the late 19th century led to a permanent and fruitful connection. It is estimated that more than 20 percent of the Icelandic population moved across the sea to settle in Canada and on the great plains of the United States. They created by far the largest ex-patriot Icelandic settlement anywhere in the world. Still today Icelanders tend to think of this community as their representatives in the New World.

This dramatic redeployment of a large section of the Icelandic population did not in itself lead directly to a massive buildup of trade between Iceland and North America. There are, however, examples of significant events where the new Icelandic community in Canada played a key role in helping to develop the economy of the Old Country. One such example was the foundation of Eimskip, the Icelandic Shipping Company in 1914 where the Icelandic settlers in America contributed 20% of the equity for the new company.

Undoubtedly, the Icelandic settlement in America also made Icelandic businesses and Icelandic politicians more aware of possibilities offered by Icelandic-American relations and in that way helped pave the way for future relations in trade, in

tourism, in defense, in culture and in education.

There were of course also other geopolitical factors that moved things along. The defining moment of Icelandic-American relations for the latter half of the 20th Century was World War II.

It is interesting to reflect on the fact that the Military Protection Treaty between Iceland and the United States was signed in July 1941. That was five months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the event that eventually drove the United States into a direct participation in the war effort.

The war had come to Iceland the year before. British troops came ashore in May 1940. They had not been invited but were soon made to feel welcome. As a result of the Military Protection Treaty, U.S. troops relieved British troops in the summer of 1941 and by that, the United States had become involved in the war effort before Pearl Harbor. The treaty was therefore a step in the making of the alliance between the United States and Britain.

It was under these conditions and during the turmoil of the war that Iceland found the self-confidence to proclaim itself a republic. The 1951 Defense Agreement with the United States that followed was for decades the key issue of Icelandic foreign politics. Only in the 1980s and 90s has it been replaced by foreign trade issues and the relationship with Europe as the foreign policy issue of the day.

Following the war the European industrial base was in ruins. America however was in a good shape. In addition to a robust economy and industrial production, it was poised to export consumer goods and the American way of life.

As the war came to an end, Icelanders were flush with cash and turned to America. America also grew as an export market and in the 60s the U.S. bought over a quarter of all Icelandic exports, basically fish products.

Despite the war that paralyzed most of Europe, the European tendency was strong in Iceland. As the economies in Europe were slowly rebuilt in the post war era, Icelandic trade focus began to shift in that

direction again. The two most significant trade agreements Iceland has signed in the post war era were the European Free Trade Agreement in 1971 and the European Economic Area agreement in 1992. Nevertheless the relationship between Iceland and America that had been established and strengthened during the war and in the post war period, has continued to be one of the most important planks of Icelandic international relations, in trade as well as in other areas.

The United States is still Iceland's single most important trading partner, being over a quarter of the value of Iceland's foreign trade. In terms of export from Iceland, frozen fish is still the most important item, but more recently we have experienced a very fast growth in the export of fresh fish, flown daily to 3-4 destinations by Icelandair.

One of the most important and interesting trade developments between the two countries in the last 15 years has been the growth in tourism from North America to Iceland. Today more travelers enter Iceland from the United States than any other country. The number of tourists coming from USA to Iceland has more than doubled in 10 years.

This is very important, as tourism has been a key driver in the Icelandic economy over the past decade. The Institute of Economics at the University of Iceland stated in a report last year, that the growth in tourism to Iceland over the last ten years, which was more than twice the European average, was primarily the result of massive investments in capacity by Icelandair and the growth of the company's route network. This growth in tourism has made the travel industry the second largest currency earning industry in the country.

The strategy of Icelandair has focused on two main markets. The most important is the market to and from Iceland. That was however a very small market and in order to grow in this market the company decided it had to create capacity and flight frequency from both sides of the Atlantic to make Iceland more accessible to foreign tourists. To create the basis for growth, Icelandair took advantage of its mid-

Atlantic position and channeled a small part of the vast transatlantic market between Europe and America via its hub airport in Iceland. This worked. The growth in the number of passengers on routes to and from Iceland over a five-year period has been 66%.

The competition on the transatlantic market has become more and more difficult and the events on September 11th last year have made matters worse. There is still a growing market to Iceland. Icelandair is therefore increasing its focus on the tourist market from Europe and America to Iceland and at the same time withdrawing some of its capacity from the transatlantic market.

It is interesting to compare flight services between the United States and Iceland to the direct services between the United States and Scandinavia. There are now 4 flights a day between Iceland and the USA, That is more than the number of flights between between USA and Norway, Sweden and Finland combined. And it is worth bearing in mind that there are now no direct flights between the United States and Norway.

More than 75% of the Icelandair airline revenue comes from the international market and a third of that comes from the North American market. This strong dependency on the international market is a direct result of the small size of the Icelandic home market. This is a good example of how dependent Icelandic businesses in general are on foreign trade.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I dwell on aviation for two reasons. First of course I like to promote the airline. Everyone should fly Icelandair. Secondly, I do believe that good airline schedules, direct flights, high frequency and good selection of destinations has contributed greatly to successful relations between Iceland and America in other areas than travel and tourism.

The airline has provided the infrastructure needed to carry out business successfully. In my mind there is no doubt that this has also helped foster the political relationship, helped strengthen cultural ties and last but not least has been a key factor in an exceptionally strong educational rela-

tionship. In my mind, there is no doubt that it has for example greatly contributed to the fact that more Icelandic postgraduate students head for universities in the USA, than any other country.

Education is one of the key factors in making Iceland a viable community. To survive and prosper a small nation has to be efficient and adaptable, willing to take risks and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. It is therefore important to have diversity in education and to have access to some of the best academic institutions in the world.

For a long time, more than one third of Icelandic post-graduate students seeking education abroad have gone to America. There is no doubt that a strong North-American educational influence has made Iceland stronger and able to compete more successfully in the international market. There is no doubt that it has paved the way for new result - oriented thinking in Icelandic businesses and trade organizations.

You could probably claim that in no other field has Iceland benefited from the relationship with North American more than in education and the field of knowledge. You can see the results in new Icelandic companies in the fields of engineering, biotechnology, human genetics and information technology. An example of these ties is the relationship that has long existed between Iceland and the state of Minnesota. A large group of Icelandic students have come to universities in this state and received support and grants. It was therefore a great pleasure to witness earlier today the signing of a treaty reaffirming the relationship between the University of Iceland and the University of Minnesota.

Reflecting on the issue of education on a personal note, I had the privilege to attend one of the fine American educational institutions when I was a Fulbright MBA student at Wharton in Philadelphia from 1966 to 1968. What I took back from that experience undoubtedly helped shape my approach to my career, but also it helped shape my views on the possibilities of doing business with America.

My conclusion is really that Iceland

and North America have a relationship that cannot be measured only by trade statistics or what money can buy. It runs deeper than that. The Icelandic-American relationship has a strong ingredient of culture, education and the diffusion of knowledge. In addition there are powerful historical and emotional ties.

Therefore it is important to maintain and strengthen organizations such as the Icelandic Chamber of Commerce and the Icelandic National Leagues that have organized this event today. These are the kind of organizations that strengthen, develop and deepen the intangible part of the relationship between two great nations.

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My Old Home

An address by Rosa Stephansson Benediktson

edited by Stephan Benediktson

On looking back over my shoulder, so as to speak, I can still see my childhood home as it was in my earliest memories. That picture is identical to the photograph now in the Provincial Archives of Alberta, taken in August 1907. My father chose the location for the home when he picked the land soon after his arrival in the Markerville settlement in the spring of 1889. This land was actually taken as my paternal grandmother's homestead. Being a widow, she had the right to acquire a quarter section of land as well. After her husband died in North Dakota, Grandmother lived with my parents for the rest of her life.

Father chose hay land some three miles to the northeast of grandmother's land for his homestead and built a log house there where the family resided for a short period of time in 1900. That house was later moved down to the first location where it served for years as a horse barn and then a chicken house. The last vestiges of that house were only recently demolished.

In all likelihood my father first built the main log house with an upstairs, always referred to as the "Big Room". It had a front door and double windows facing south. Along the east side, the kitchen, with a small area partitioned off on the north side to serve as a pantry, was added. The kitchen had four windows to the east. A bedroom for the girls, the boys slept upstairs, was added south of the kitchen with one window to the south. North of the "Big Room" an addition was added exclusively for my grandmother. Here was her bedroom with a space partitioned off for her to do her handicrafts. A square iron heater kept those rooms warm. In grandmother's quarters there were two win-

dows, one facing west and one north, and two doors, one to the kitchen and one to the "Big Room."

The last addition to the house was my father's study or the "Small Room" as he called it, although it was a good sized room. It was built on the west side of the "Big Room" with an area partitioned off on the north end which served as my parents bedroom. The "Small Room" had double windows to the west and a bay window with three windows facing south. The room was well lit and the view to the west was a panorama of the Rocky Mountains with the Medicine River just below the house. In the ensuing years the forests have grown so tall that the mountain peaks are scarcely visible any longer from father's study.

A veranda was added on the south side over the front door and over the double windows. Lattice work decorations were installed on the top and the lower edge extending around the bay window. Fret work was installed on the posts for decoration and a half moon was placed over the upstairs window. No doubt my second oldest brother, Mundi, helped father building the additions as Mundi became a very skilled carpenter early in his life. The entire house was built of logs with the exception of father's study which was built of lumber. The interior was finished in the then popular vee joint with the exception of the kitchen and the "Big Room" which had linoleum installed on the walls. The linoleum is still there. The whole house was finished on the outside with siding painted off white with green trim.

Wild Alberta roses planted under the bay window bloomed profusely for years. One day mother brought home the root of



The Stephansson House has been restored by the Government of Alberta with assistance from the Farmers' Union of Iceland, the Icelandic National League and the Icelandic Association of Washington, D.C.

a hop climber and planted it beside the verandah where it grew to cover the entire front of the house. It even climbed onto the top of the roof of the house. Soon after the turn of the century a friend of our father's, a gardener in Duluth, Minnesota, sent some lilacs and shrubs which were planted and are still there testifying to their longevity. My father and brothers planted a large number of spruce trees along the west side of the lane leading to the road and around the house, leaving the views to the west open.

The house was heated with small heaters in each room, with the exception of father's room which had a large oval iron heater. I can recall how I liked to sit in the dark beside the heater on a winter night while my father sat in his big chair and chanted poetry in a low voice. My father had central heating installed later which was a great improvement although the kitchen still became cold on wintery nights as the central heating was fueled with wood which burned up very rapidly.

The house was roomy which was needed as the household was frequently quite large. The first school built in the district was constructed in 1892 just east of our house. Several young people that lived a long way from the school would stay at our house when trying to get a little education. When they first got married my two brothers, Baldur and Mundi, made their home with us until they could build their

own homes. I remember others who stayed with us when they were having difficulty for one reason or another. As we were close to the school a number of the school teachers boarded at our place. With so many young people around there always seemed to be a lot of gaiety and laughter at our home.

Our old home was always blessed with a lot of visitors. Neighbours would drop in often—coming or going to the village. They knew how pleased father was to get his mail and they always had time to stop and chat and of course mother was always there to serve coffee. Then there were the visitors from overseas that wanted to meet my father personally. For him it was a spiritually uplifting experience to meet new people and exchange ideas.

To me it is immeasurably satisfying to have these pleasant memories of my parental home. It was always so homelike and comfortable. I always felt so secure because my parents were always there. I consider myself very fortunate for having had this childhood and for having been brought up in that era. My father made a deep impact on our home life with his wisdom and steadfast equanimity. My mother was always at his side with her light heartedness and deep concern for home and family. Blessed be the memory of my parents and blessed be the memory of my parental home.

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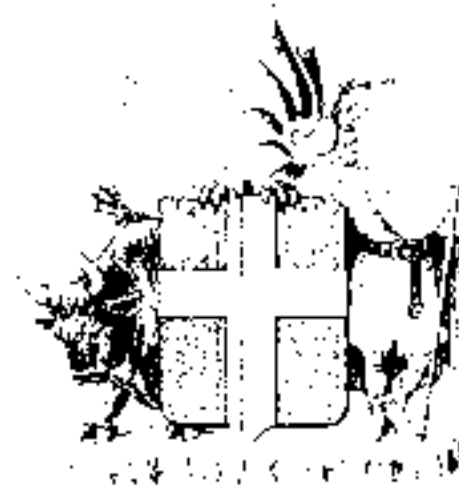
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Iceland's Coat of Arms

by Kristín Adalsteinsdóttir



On Iceland's coat of arms you can see four supporters. Those supporters are the guardians of Iceland mentioned in the passage in *Heimskringla* from the *Saga of Olav Tryggvason*.

The guardians are an eagle, a dragon, a giant and a bull and the story tells us that the King of Denmark intended to sail with his fleet to Iceland to avenge an insult. In advance the king asked a warlock to go to Iceland and tell him what he found.

The warlock went in a whale's shape. When he came to Iceland he tried to get ashore in the east but a big dragon came down the valley, followed by many serpents, toads, and adders that blew poison at him. He then turned to the north to try to get ashore but there flew against him a bird so large that its wings touched the mountains on either side of the fjord, and a multitude of other birds besides, both large and small.

He then swam to the west along the land and tried to get ashore in Breidafjörður. There came against him a big bull wading

out into the water and bellowing loudly. A multitude of land-wrights followed him. The warlock backed from there, swimming around Reykjanes, and intended to come ashore at Víkarsskeið. Then came against him a mountain giant with an iron bar in his hand, and his head was higher than the mountains, and many other giants were with him.

After this the warlock did not make any other attempts to come ashore in Iceland and returned to the king with the news. The King of Denmark decided to sail his fleet south along the land, and then back to Denmark.

Hello, Readers

by Heather Neale

Dear Readers:

I just returned from a two-month tour of England, Spain, France and Italy that proved just 'brilliant' as the Brits would say.

My diary is now full of chicken scratch written down on bumpy train rides through the Pyrenees, and dimly lit metro stops in the bowels of London. It's got overpriced train ticket stubs taped to the back of espresso-stained pages, and glossy brochures from places I never reached. It also reveals an extraordinary recipe for authentic Italian pizza crusts if you're interested.

The trip was an opportunity for my boyfriend David and I to practice our broken French and Spanish and to recover from four years of hard work at university. (I finally graduated this spring despite my strong resistance to hard work.) It also gave what had been a long distance relationship from its start over one year ago, a chance to sink or swim being thrown together for two months. (It swam!)

Here are some excerpts from my diary. (Coffee stains were removed for your convenience.)

Excerpt-

Tips for future trips:

Packing earplugs when traveling is not optional; it is essential. Despite my previously held beliefs, I am now hip to the fact that most people make strange noises when sleeping (myself excluded of course!)

Some snort every so often when their dreams seem to be getting good. Some make juicy bubbling noises through their nose, and others have adopted a nasal whistle that has the same effect on non-sleepers as a mosquito hovering around your eardrum or even a modified version of Chinese water torture. All of these asinine variations have come to my attention as I

sit here in the eleventh hour of a train ride to Barcelona from Paris, clutching a book after giving up entirely on the notion of sleep. The countryside here is a series of lush rolling hills with quaint Spanish style homes (red tiled roofs and white-stucco siding) nestled into the greenery. A woman rides by on a 'one-gear Pierre' bicycle as David calls them, a fresh baguette jutting out from inside her wicker basket as if it were leading the way.

This sleepy landscape is such a perfect contrast to the bustle of Paris. Don't get me wrong though, Paris is spectacular. A collage of high art culture and ancient gothic architecture, world famous wine and velvety brie cheese that melts on your tongue, it has become a staple location in the diet of North American tourists for quite some time and justly so. David and I visited the Louvre yesterday and after six hours of walking through it—our jaws hanging out on the floor. We had seen only a quarter of what it offered. We both stopped talking within the first 45 minutes or so after the realization that we had adopted the 'Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventures' vernacular. (Excellent? Amazing, totally unbelievable? Wow! We did have the tact to stop before words like 'bodacious' escaped.)

Excerpt~

Barcelona seems to be where it's at these days. After four hours of searching for a hostel, we are desperate for somewhere to stay. As the city is not really what you would call safe. We watched in shock as two police officers picked up a woman on the corner who had just been stabbed in the shoulder while our American friend Doug was being robbed of his camera. We are not into camping. (We did not retrieve the camera either.)

Later that day:

Well, we found a room in the Hostel



View from the castle in Ponferrada, Spain.

Morato. (We also lost at least five pounds in sweat hiking up and down the city's back streets in forty-degree weather.) It is one block away from the tourist drag, but seems to be a haven for cocaine dealers. There is only one room so Dave and I, and our five new friends from the United States are sharing a room with three single beds. Evidently the toilets are backed up at the moment so we will have to be creative. We have pushed the beds together so that five can sleep sideways across them and one of the Americans has agreed to sleep on the malfunctioning bathroom floor. Note to self - phone ahead when visiting Barcelona.

Excerpt—Northern Spain:

Dave and I are going on a pilgrimage! El Camino de Santiago (the way of James) it is called and it is a thirty-day hike across the Pyrenees and through northern Spain to the west coast. As the legend goes, St. James' bones were buried there in the first century AD. Since then thousands of people including well-known groups like the Moors and the Visigoths, Kings and Queens, and even the Templar knights (warrior-monks who acted as protectors for the pilgrims) have been making the journey. We are excited because it will give us a chance to commune with the beauty of the land? to meet interesting characters? and to spend time with each other.

Five days into the hike:

We rise before the sun and walk until it sets each day. When all you do is hike, eat

and sleep there is plenty of time to think and surprise yourself with revelations about your life and dreams (I have decided to quit this job, for instance, and go into medicine. One week later Dave was enrolled).

The rhythm of the pilgrims is so natural it will be hard to go back to forced late night cramming and the neurosis that accompanies city life. We stopped in a small town called Acebo today for breakfast. We had been hiking since 5:30 am and by 9:00 we were starved. An old man with a beret greeted us as we entered the one-street-long town? saying 'han llegado queridos mios? felicidades!' (You have arrived my dears, congratulations!) He recognized us as pilgrims by the small seashell symbol we wore on our hat, a symbol that represents the journey, (and by the layers of caked-on dust making our pasty white skin look bronzed). The man pointed us in the direction of the one restaurant in town. "Gasoline for the body over there," he laughed. (He must have heard the hungry buffalo stampeding through my stomach.)

After talking with him a while I learned he was a farmer who had lived in Acebo his whole life. "I was born here, and I will die here. It's all up to God really, but so far life has been so good to me. I am really blessed." The words from his mouth combined with the smile in his eyes reminded me of my Uncle Ron (from the Interlake) and I felt a strong tie to this man. So we bought him a coffee.

Excerpt~ On vegetarianism:

Vegetarianism in Spain is like getting the chills in Tahiti. It's just not really done. Attempting to eat that way as you travel will result in one of three scenarios: 1) weight loss by default (starvation) due to the lack of readily available vegetarian options, 2) a conversion to meat because after all, ham and cheese bocadillos (sandwiches on baguettes) really do taste like a little piece of heaven after a five hour hike, or 3) severe bloating as you are forced to replace meals with chocolate bars, croissants, cheese and flaky pastries, all of which are hardly diet food. Note to self: just convert to meat.

Excerpt—On language:

We have taken to practicing French again now that we are back in Paris. The only problem is no one here wants to speak it with us. Upon entering restaurants, the verbal exchange usually goes something like this:

Us: (smiling) Bonjour!

Them: (not smiling) Hi.

Us: (still smiling) Nous voudrions un menu s'il vous plait.

Them: (huge rolling of the eyes as if to say? "your French sucks" so I will have to come down to your level?) Ok? here you go.

Us: (frustrated that they have come down to our level. Continue in French; how else will we learn after all?) Tres bien? est-ce que c'est possible utiliser la salle de bain?

Them: (glare, perturbed that we will not just give it up already) Yeah, it's over there.

Us: (satisfied that we didn't back down and switch to English, huge smiles plastered on our faces.)

Merci beaucoup. Deux cafes aussi! Merci.

For the record? our French got good enough over the course of a few weeks that the waiters started answering us in French!

P.S. Nothing I have seen in Europe so far looks like I had seen it in photos. There is something indescribably surreal about standing at the top of the Eiffel tower (souvenir vendors circling like sharks below waiting for our descent before springing on us with

plastic replicas) or picnicking in Trafalgar Square (pigeons dive-bombing us hoping for a bite of that chutney sandwich) that no travel guide can possibly capture without whisking you away from home and plopping you down in front of it.

Last entry:

We are on the plane home to Canada now. This will not be the last time I visit Europe, or even the second to last time. The flight attendant hands me a coffee with cream and sugar. She is from the United States, and addresses me as dear. Already I miss the short espressos they serve in Europe and the way it seems to taste different in another language. The man beside us is from Toronto. he leans over and says. "Man, it'll be great to get back to Canadian money and not have to deal with the pound anymore eh?"

Eh.

I missed that. Yeah? it'll be good to get home.

Until my next trip, kindest regards to you all.

John Harvard, MP

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Askja's Tremors

by Christine Sunley



In the winter of 1864, the infant who would one day become known as the revered Nyja Ísland Skáld – Poet of New Iceland – was born in a turf-roofed farmhouse in the east of Iceland with two teeth cutting through his gums.

“Skáldgemma!” cried the baby’s grandmother, who was also the midwife. She held the squalling newborn close to her daughter’s face and bared his upper lip so the mother could witness the tiny nubs. Outside the wind rose up, adding its high-pitched squeal to the baby’s lusty howling. The lamp, lit by the oil of a whale that had beached in the East Fjords that summer, flickered but remained lit. And the mother, pale and limp and barely conscious, smiled: a skáldgemma, a child born with teeth, was destined to become a poet.

Later, as the baby suckled, nascent teeth grinding his mother’s breast, the two women decided to name him Bragi, after the god of poetry and also, more importantly, in honour of his maternal grandfather, who was not only a skáld himself but descended from a long line of poets, some distinguished, others not.

But Pétur, the baby’s father, forbid the name Bragi. Not, he insisted, because there was anything wrong with the name itself, but because of the superstitious basis on which the name was chosen.

“This boy is a child of God,” he intoned – as if from the pulpit, though his audience consisted only of wife, mother-in-law, and a day-old infant – “and God has no tolerance for superstition.”

The baby’s mother acquiesced, but his grandmother said nothing. Everyone knew that children born with teeth became poets, just as a woman who stared at the northern lights while pregnant would give birth to a cross-eyed child. But why give that pompous Pétur the satisfaction of an argu-

ment? There was nothing he loved more.

Pétur named the boy Ólafur – called Óli – and as if to ward off future superstitious influences he moved his new family to a farm far from Brekka, the homestead of his wife’s family where the birth had taken place. The first farm they inhabited was Jorvik, in the East Fjords. Óli had no memory of Jorvik – they abandoned it when he was two – which is just as well, since they nearly starved there. Over the next nine years Pétur attempted three more farms – Surtssstaðir, Klypsstaðir, and Gunnarsstaðir – all of them failures. True, times were bad all over Iceland. Also true, Pétur made a miserable farmer. He had set out to be a minister and attended seminary in Reykjavik, but at the end of his first year he’d joined in with a group of students who rebelled against the Danish masters. The school was briefly closed, and Pétur returned to the East, having abandoned his calling. Eleven years and four farms after Óli’s birth, Pétur accepted the humiliating offer to return to Brekka, now run by his wife’s brother Páll. For Pétur, the move was a step down, an admission of failure. For his wife it was a glorious homecoming to her elderly parents and beloved brother. For Óli, now a gangly boy of eleven with two younger brothers trailing behind him, life at Brekka was nothing less than a glorious dream.

Brekka was built in close proximity to several forces of nature that in other lands might seem extreme but which were and are merely commonplace in Iceland: the farm clung to the base of a monstrosly sheer cliff wall, faced the bank of a fierce glacial river, and was not far from the volcano Askja. The cliff was steep but easy enough to climb if you were nimble in your sharkskin shoes and followed the sheep trails and were careful not to trip in the

deep cracks formed by the footsteps of a ferocious troll. From the top Óli could command a dazzling view over the river valley toward the mountains and the fjords beyond, or glance dizzingly down to the turf-roofed buildings of Brekka itself. The farm consisted of five small wooden structures built in a row, sandwiched together by thick columns of stone and connected by an earthen passageway running along the back. Each building was faced with a pair of six-paned windows; every other one had its own front door. In summer, tall grasses and wildflowers topped the roofs; in winter, lids of snow. Compared to some of the farms Óli had visited in the district, hovels constructed of earth and stone, damp as caves, Brekka was well-to-do, but it was certainly not grand.

A grand farm was Valþjofstaðir, the home of Óli's father's parents, further south along the river. Valþjofstaðir was a highly religious household, with much singing of hymns in the evenings. The sermons of Óli's grandfather, minister of the Valþjofstaðir church, made Óli's brain feel like a handful of uncarded wool, spongy and formless. The truth was that by the age of eleven Óli had taken to avoiding religion as much as possible. He reasoned that the less he thought about God, the less God would think about him, and since he was a moody child prone to mischief, often in trouble, he believed it best not to call divine attention to himself. There were plenty of people right there on earth to scold him (his father, constantly; the servants, frequently; his mother, rarely), without call-

ing down the wrath of God.

For despite his father's certainty that he would become a minister – and, increasingly, in spite of it – Óli had other plans, having early shown signs of the fate his grandmother predicted for him. There was nothing he loved more than the feel of a good rhyme rolling off his tongue, frisky as two lambs butting heads on a summer morning, tangy as the skyr the servant Þórbjörg prepared from sheep's milk, or gloomy as dark clouds smothering the peaks of distant mountains. Of course, there was nothing to prevent a priest from writing poetry. Many did. But Óli wanted simply to be a farmer and a poet, in the tradition of his mother's people. And here lay the secret of Brekka's charm for Óli: Brekka was the place to be for a boy who aspired to making the verse.

First of all there was Óli's afi, his mother's father – the Bragi of Óli's would-be namesake. Long ago, before his grandfather's back hunched over like a tuft of lava and his knees buckled when mounting a horse, before his moss green eyes crinkled into slits, Bragi had been a rímamaður, one of the last. A rímamaður was a "rhyming man," an itinerant poet, a travelling entertainer who wandered the district chanting the ancient rímur, poems sung in eerie tunes, in exchange for a meal or even a cup of coffee. In addition to his fame as a rímamaður, Bragi had also earned distinction as a talandiskáld, a "talking skald." A talandiskáld had the remarkable ability to compose verse off the tip of his tongue, an art Bragi practiced still. Óli heard him once challenge his wife to a contest:

Komdu til að kveðast á
Let's exchange verses,
kerling ef þú getur,
Old lady, if you can,
láttu ganga ljóðaskrá
Let flow a catalogue of poems
lengst í allan vetur.
All through the winter.

Then there was Bragi's son Páll, his mother's favourite brother and the greatest living poet of Northeast Iceland. Uncle Páll's work had even been published in

Reykjavik, and Óli had yet to encounter a farmer in the district who could not recite Páll's verses from memory. To be related to such a poet was an honour; to be trained by him a dream. Each afternoon, Páll stole a few minutes to show Óli a new poem, or listen to one of the boy's. Most of Óli's poems weren't even written down – paper was too scarce on this treeless island – so Óli would recite his latest effort from memory. Páll listened thoughtfully, then helped the boy correct the metre.

As long as Óli kept up with his religious studies Pétur made no objection to the poetry lessons. It was, after all, Páll's homestead. Here it was all Pétur could do to prevent his sons from believing every ghost, troll, and elf story by which their grandmother frightened them to sleep each night. And even Pétur could see that by the end of Óli's first year at Brekka he was less prone to tantrums, less in need of punishment, even, most of the time, more willing to apply himself to the course of religious study his father prepared for him each week.

As far as Óli was concerned, Brekka was meant to be his home. It was the place he was born and he would be happy to never leave it again.

Mt. Askja, however, had other things in mind.

Askja's first tremors reached Brekka on a winter day like any other, if day it could be called: a few scant hours of light, most of it obscured by falling snow. Now it was four o'clock in an afternoon that

looked like midnight. Outside, the wind shrieked and flailed as if it had lost its mind. Inside, the household gathered around the fire and waited for the vaka – the evening reading – to begin, to take them through the long dark night. Vaka means to wake; in Iceland in winter words took the place of light.

In a mood as black as the sky, Óli stood at the window, palm to glass, melting clear a circle in the frost. It was long past time for the vaka to start, but the others were too preoccupied to notice. From where Óli stood he could watch the entire household, gathered in a rough circle around the fire. In one corner, straddling a wooden stool, his grandfather carved a toy horse from the bone of a whale that had beached in the East Fjords this past spring, the meat of which the family ate for months, its fat melted to oil that lit the room this evening. Despite Afi's swollen knuckles his fingers were deft, and flakes of bone flew from knife to floor like snow. In another corner, Óli's Amma, his mother's mother who had pulled him into this world, sat astride the spinning wheel whirring sheeps wool into yarn. On the floor between their grandparents knelt Óli's two younger brothers, Stefán and Magnús, each sailing a seashell – warring Viking ships – over the floorboards. Across from Amma was Óli's mother, gazing into the fire as if the steady click of her knitting needles had thrown her into a trance. Óli admired the chestnut brown hair coiled on her head, the exact shade of the mane of his horse, Sleipnir. Next to his mother the ser-

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vant Þórbjörg carded wool, and at the back of the room two farmhands mended fishing nets shredded in last April's storm.

The only ones doing nothing useful were Óli's father and his Uncle Páll. On the far side of the room they faced each other across opposite sides of the dining table, sipping coffee through sugar cubes held clenched in between their teeth and arguing no less fiercely than a pair of Glíma wrestlers. Tonight's vaka could not start until they stopped. The two men looked alike, with their bristling beards and bushy mustaches, their high-domed foreheads, but their opinions bore about as much resemblance to each other as fish to sheep. In the rare moments when their minds threatened to converge, Pétur was quick to veer his thinking in the most opposite direction possible. Sometimes Páll and Pétur argued for hours, as if there were no one else in the room.

Óli had no patience for these debates, which ranged from the price of wool in

Denmark to obscure tenets of Lutheran theology, but he knew better than to interrupt. Finally he heard the scrape of wood on wood: Páll stood up and was pushing his chair back under the table. "Enough, Pétur. There are some questions only God Himself can answer."

Pétur opened his bible and began flipping its pages, searching for one last rebuttal, but the argument was over. Páll had conceded to Pétur, as everyone eventually did, for lack of stamina if nothing else. Óli followed Páll to the bookshelf to see what he would choose for the evening's reading. Gilt titles gleamed in the firelight. Páll chose *Eirik the Red*, the chronicle of the Vikings' attempt to settle North America. It was one of Óli's favourites. He sat by the bookshelf, lightly tracing the leather spines of the books as his uncle prepared to read.

"*The Saga of Eirik the Red*," Páll began. Or almost began, because then he could not help but add, "Since some of our people are foolish enough to try again." Óli knew he was referring to those Icelanders who had emigrated to America in the past three years, nearly five hundred of them. It was a topic of much debate.

Unable to let such a remark go unchallenged, Pétur crossed his arms across his chest, tugged his beard, and cleared his throat. "And can you truly blame them? People are starving. The sheep are dying of scabies, and for the last two winters we've stayed frozen until May. Meanwhile the Danes wrap their greedy fingers round Iceland's neck, choking our ability to trade."

"And that is a reason to give up?" Páll countered. "Now is precisely the time to fight for independence. Look at France. And there have always been bad winters, diseases of sheep. We've survived worse. But how can we survive as a people if we abandon our island, our history?"

"When people are starving history offers little sustenance."

A long silence followed, in which it became clear that Páll would not reply. So Pétur – never one to let an argument die – added, "And what about your own brother?"

"Jón is an utlagi," Páll said bitterly. An

outlaw. "The Danes forced him to leave. Banishment is not the same as emigration!"

"That may be true," Pétur answered. "But now Jón wants all of Iceland to follow him. What do you think of that?"

For writing his poem of independence, "Íslandingabragur," Jón had been jailed by the Danes. Now he was in North America; according to the letter they'd received several months earlier, he'd successfully petitioned President Grant to allow a group of Icelanders to survey Alaska for the purpose of determining whether the territory would make a suitable site for a New Iceland. And not a mere colony either: Jón had proposed that the entire population of Iceland be transported to Alaska.

"Jón's plan is misguided," Páll said. "I don't think it will work. You cannot simply sail a culture across an ocean. When Norwegians settled Iceland, they were no longer Norwegians. They became something else – Icelanders! And when the Icelanders settled Greenland, they could no longer be called Icelanders. They became Greenlanders. If the Icelanders go to America, they will become Americans. The culture of a people is tied to their homeland. Can you separate the mind and heart from the body?"

"A fine metaphor," Pétur replied. "But no metaphor has ever filled a hungry stomach."

"I don't see your name on any ship's waiting list."

"By the grace of God, my family isn't starving," Pétur glanced around the room as if to reassure himself. "Nor am I advocating emigration. I'm simply saying you cannot fault people for seeking a better life."

"And I'm simply saying that the only better life we will find must be created here."

The room filled with the thrum of the spinning wheel, the click of knitting needles. Óli bristled with impatience.

"Now let's turn our attention to a real utlagi," Páll said. "Eirik the Red." And finally, finally, he began to read.

In the middle of the tenth century Eirik the Red was banished from Norway for some killings and so fled to Iceland. But

soon he was banished from Iceland, too, for a few more killings, and set off to start a settlement of his own on an island he named Greenland. (People would be tempted to go there, he reasoned, if he gave it an attractive name.) His next plan was to begin a settlement in North America, which the Norse knew as Vinland, but on the way to board the ship he fell from his horse: a bad omen. He was too old, he decided, for any more voyages, so his son Leif Eiriksson lead the venture on his own. Leif stayed in Vinland only long enough to gather grapes and timber. It was a man named Karlsefni who made the first real attempt to settle Vinland.

All of this Óli knew, and by heart; he wished Páll would skip directly to the exciting parts: the battles with the skrælings. It was these natives, with their spears and skin-boats, who drove the Norse from Vinland for good. Leaning up against the bookshelf, head propped on his knees, Óli dozed while he waited for the saga to catch up with him. Astride their stocky Icelandic horses he and his Uncle Jón and the American President Ulysses S. Grant were fording a river in Alaska. Skraelings appeared and began shooting at them from their skin-boats. A rain of spears clattered onto his head – and suddenly Óli was awake, throwing up his arms to protect himself. Not spears – books! An avalanche of books that nearly buried him. It was only when the floor steadied again that he realized it had been shaking.

"Jardskjálfti!" Afi cried, rushing to pull Óli from the pile of books. Earthquake.

The spinning wheel had toppled over, a coffee cup jumped off the table and shattered, Magnús cried for the next half hour, and Óli grew a lump the size of a small potato on the back of his head. That was the extent of Askja's damage, for now.

There was a time in Iceland when women known as völvas dressed in catskins, chanted themselves into trances, and gazed far into the future. If Óli had lived in such a time and come upon such a völva, she might have told him this: that in three months Askja will erupt again, and



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violently. And that Óli himself will wake one morning to a sky so thick with ash he can't see his own hand in front of his face. Askja's lava, she'd predict, will never reach his family's farm, but the ash – so voluminous it will drift halfway around the world – is to fall so thickly that it will block the sun for weeks and destroy much of the farmland in East Iceland. The sheep will have nothing to graze on, and die in droves. Óli's family, she would continue, will flee amongst hundreds of others not only their own poisoned farm but Iceland itself, following in the path of Leif the Lucky and Karlsefni to the New World, where they will settle on the marshy shore of Lake Winnipeg in a place they'll name New Iceland. Óli himself, the völvu would foresee, will successfully avoid seminary and instead become his people's beloved Nyja Ísland Skáld – but never will he lay eyes on Brekka or his people again.

And then, the völvu would conclude, more than a hundred years later his granddaughter Freya will find her way back to Iceland. She will stand on the bank of the milky blue glacial river where Óli himself once played, and wander among the mossy stones of Brekka's crumbled remains.

But there were of course no völvus in Iceland to tell Óli this or anything. They'd been banished for nearly a thousand years, since the coming of Christianity. And so Óli lay in bed that night, shaken by the earthquake yet unaware of his future.

Around him slept his family members in their tiny wooden beds, his mother and father in one, his Amma and Afi in another, Magnús and Stefán in a third. Óli alone in the fourth. He lay awake rubbing the lump on the top of his head – could he have been killed? – and thinking about the trickster god Loki. According to Óli's Afi, who told many stories from the old myths, it was by one of Loki's most artful tricks that he brought about the tragic death of the shining and beautiful god Baldur. After a long hunt during which Loki hid himself as a salmon in a waterfall, the other gods finally captured and punished him for the evil deed. They forced Loki into a cave, bound him to three rocks, and strung a live snake above his head. Forever after, Loki's wife Sigyn remains by his side, holding a bucket to catch the snake's dripping poison. But whenever she rises to empty the pail the venom drips onto Loki's face, and Loki jerks to avoid the poison. It is this movement that people call earthquakes.

But if Loki, as Óli knew, was nothing but myth, then what was it that caused the earth to shake? God stamping his feet in anger? Óli's father said God wishes no harm on His people, that earthquakes are a force of nature. But who controls nature if not God? And if God were so kind why did He banish people to hell for their sins?

There was no one to ask. In the midst of an unusually long and earnest prayer Óli too slipped into dream.

Letters from Friðjón Friðriksson

Translated by Sigurbjörg Stefánsdóttir



Letter # 4 - To Jon Bjarnason
Kinmount, June 15, 1875

Dear Friend: (Jon Bjarnason)

Thank you for your postcard, which I received on the 10th of this month, and which brought me a lot of happiness. My negligence in writing to you, last winter and spring can hardly be excused. Many times I was on the verge of beginning to write to you, but I kept on putting it off for various reasons about which I shall tell you:

The latest news which you got of Icelanders in Canada, more precisely here in Kinmount, probably included the facts, firstly, that we were looking for a school teacher, secondly, that all had gotten permanent jobs at the Victorian railroad and were hoping to be able to settle down where they, at that time, found themselves,

but much has happened since then. When it became evident that you could not come here - which, by the way, I think was for the best - I responded to the Icelanders' request about moving to Kinmount and became a manager for the trade or shop centre which Sigtryggur Jonasson, the Icelandic interpreter, had established here in Kinmount last fall, but he became a school teacher, teaching in a schoolhouse which the regional government had built for these purposes. The teaching began early last March and it is still going on to a great benefit for the children and the teenagers. The teacher's salaries have not been settled yet, but the Missionary Society is going to provide \$200 and an equal sum can be expected from the English Church association here.

Early last winter Icelanders here started to become discontented. They found the work at the railroad hard, they found the salaries low (a dollar a day) and there were many more grievances, some reasonable, but others were pure imagination as a result of deadly false ideas about America which Icelanders both here and in Iceland possess. For instance, they think that every puddle here is full of various kinds of fish and all they have to do is to choose which fish to grab for their next meal. They think that the forests are full of birds and wild animals which can be caught whenever one needs food. Furthermore, they expect to be able to keep their jobs even if they only show up for work 2 or 3 days a week. When these hopes turned out to be illusions, many Icelanders became desperate. They thought that the Government of Ontario had brought them to a miserable place, and they wanted to get away. One day Johannes Arngrimsson, who you know from Milwaukee joined the Icelanders. He was supposed to be an interpreter for the Icelanders against the Government of

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Ontario and to direct their thoughts towards Nova Scotia because the Government there was interested in getting Icelanders to Nova Scotia. Icelanders now became so overly excited that they took up money collection in order to finance the trip for Johann to Halifax. He left, along with three or four others, for Halifax for the purposes of asking the Government to finance the transfer of Icelanders from Ontario to Nova Scotia. This request was turned down, naturally, because it is most unbecoming for union states to compete with one another in this way.

Then Johannes and his companions started to write praises about Nova Scotia to their followers, most of which had no foundation in reality but revealed utter stupidity and hostility towards those who opposed his plan.

On March the 15th, the work at the railroad was discontinued and the Icelanders consequently lost their jobs and started to move away, but instead of looking for jobs in other places throughout the state they sat idle in Lindsey and waited for new special laws - concerning Icelandic emigrants moving to Nova Scotia - to be passed.

Finally in May those - 42 in all - who were the best off financially, spent their last cent to move to Nova Scotia. According to reports they have been well received, they have either been given money or they have been able to borrow money in order to sustain themselves for the time being. They have been promised land, 30 miles from the shore, and they have been promised work in road building in the vicinity. Incidentally, because their letters include such an overwhelming amount of nonsense, it is difficult to know what is true in their writing. Johannes is now in Iceland to try to get Icelanders to move to Nova Scotia. People here have started to lose interest in Nova Scotia for the time being but they wonder how things are going to turn out.

There are still approximately 160 Icelanders in Kinmount, of these two farmers have bought land and three have leased land for one year and many others have started to grow potatoes in various places

and therefore consider themselves settled, at least until next fall.

Our main problem here is unemployment; there are no jobs available in the vicinity. Throughout the spring we were hoping for the railroad work to begin, but all in vain, because the railroad company has financial problems.

The Government is not responding to the company's request for assistance because there are so many other railroads under construction and the various companies are all asking for "bonuses" from the Government. However, most hope that the railroad to Kinmount will be built next fall - bringing an enormous prosperity to our district.

More than 20 Icelanders accepted "Free-Grant" land this spring - most of it 4 to 10 miles from Kinmount. They say it is a good land, covered with forest, but because of poverty they have no means of working it this summer.

Therefore, they are bound to seek jobs far away - if the railroad construction does not begin in the immediate future. Some have already gone leaving their families behind. In general terms, lack of employment and depression is worse than usual throughout the State of Ontario - and salaries are extremely low.

Since late winter (this year) we have had church services every other Sunday in the Icelandic schoolhouse. The minister, Frederick Burt (Episcopalian) reads the epistle of the day, says a prayer and gives a little sermon and Sigtryggur Jonasson translates it. We also sing Icelandic hymns each Sunday. Furthermore, every Sunday, Sigtryggur Jonasson assisted by the most prosperous of the Icelanders, has a Sunday School for children. I hope that these things will be beneficial. Many are hoping strongly to get an Icelandic minister. Attempts will be made to meet that need if we settle down here for good.

We, here in Kinmount, like many other Icelanders, are hoping very strongly for the establishment of a united Icelandic colony. However, even though this district seems to be fairly suitable for such a colony, we realize that it would not be satisfactory because the land available is not

large enough for us to be able to be separated from the original inhabitants, forcing us to mingle with these aboriginals to such a degree that it would be impossible for us to preserve those traits of our own culture which are worthwhile keeping: our language and our religion.

Some time ago we had a meeting where we discussed this matter and we reached the conclusion that the best thing to do for the time being were to send some representatives to the State of Manitoba because there are a lot of possibilities in that State not to be found elsewhere. There is, for instance, spacious land very suitable for farming (both for growing corn, etc. and for animal farming) and hopefully the Government is willing to provide Icelanders with some of this land. We selected two Icelanders for this mission, Sigtryggur Jonasson and Einar Jonasson (who is from the western part of Iceland) and an old gentleman by the name of John Taylor is going to join them. We also sent the Government of the Union States an appeal to finance the journey (for these three men) and we are hopeful that this request will be granted. If the land turns out to be good one more colony of Icelanders will be available in addition to those which until now have been in the making.

This winter I was collecting lists of names (of Icelanders). I have obtained them all, long ago, but it was a troublesome work because of the people were spread over such a large district and always on the move. I postponed sending you the lists because the majority of Icelanders do not have any one permanent place of living.

What I had in mind was to wait for a while and see where the different individuals settled down and then add their addresses to the list - which, by the way, is still only a draft. If you want to get this report at once I can send it to you, but then I shall leave the addresses out.

I do not think that much can be done concerning the Icelandic Association for the time being. The board of directors and the representatives should, however, try to obtain all possible information about the Icelanders because therein can lie the root of the prosperity of the association in the future. I shall do whatever I can in this matter, but as things are right now I do not see any sense in trying to get new members because there is such a lack of general enthusiasm since things are in such a chaotic state here.

None here belongs to the Icelandic Literary Association and none cares to join because people do not know where their future homes are going to be. Personally I am interested in joining and hereby ask you to accept me as member, provide me with books and tell me where to send my subscription fee. Furthermore, I would like to ask you to send me the World History by Pall Meldsted. Still I have not received the Alaska-Description from Niles. If you write to him (i.e. Niles) would you please remind him of sending this book to me.

What news can you tell me about Olafur Olafsson? News of him would be most welcome. We were good friends even though we didn't always agree about the various issues.

I wonder if Jon Olafsson still keeps those religious beliefs which he got during

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the Alaskan journey. Learning's - from his letter which I received last winter - that his (i.e. Jon Olafson's) religious beliefs have changed for the better, certainly made me happy. It is a pity that such an intelligent and good man, like Jon, is so fickle (or inconstant).

I got a letter from the northern part of Iceland telling about the same things one could read in the *Nordanfari* (a periodical). Furthermore, the interest in emigrating to America has decreased considerably even though both economy and eruptions make life difficult. But then I think that it is all for the best that the emigration slows down somewhat - at least until we Icelanders in this country have become more prosperous than is the case at present.

My personal conditions are relatively good. I and my wife are both in good health. We lease a small house, leading a private and simple life. I mentioned before that I am in charge of Sigtryggur's business. It (the business) came into being as Sigtryggur and a Canadian - named Wilson formed a company last fall. The latter financed this business. Last December, however, their co-operation came to an end. By then the business had secured enough creditors in order to be able to continue. Upon losing their jobs at the railroad, Icelanders failed to be able to pay their debts. The Government responded to

this problem by giving food - worth \$300 - to those who were the worst off. Nevertheless, we were forced to lend some others food from our shop making our credit \$5-600.00. In spite of all this we (i.e. the shop) have still been able to keep our creditability. The business is still in the name of Sigtryggur. He does not, however, work in it at all, since he is busy teaching school. I am his representative (agent), my salaries consist of food and housing and 50% of the profits of the business, when there are any. However, it is impossible to know how much the profits are going to be while the credits stand as they do now.

I sincerely wish that you would become our minister here, if our colony comes of age, but the future seems uncertain. Icelanders here are fickle, resulting in their failure to prosper in America.

I think I had better bring this letter to an end, and ask you to pardon its faults so far.

Best wishes from me and my wife to you and your wife.

Your forever true friend,
Fridjon Fridriksson

When I reread this rubbish I am stunned by seeing how poorly it is written. However, I hope that you will write to me so we can continue our correspondence.

Profile: Sigurbjorg Stefansson

by Borga Jakobson

Sigurbjörg Stefansson was born on Nov. 13th, 1895 at Mountain, North Dakota. Her parents were Helgi Stefansson and Thuridur Jonsdottir.

In May 1905 the family moved to Quill Lake district of Assiniboia, close to present-day Wynyard, Saskatchewan.

In an article published by Nordra School District # 1947 (Sask.) Miss Stefansson wrote about her family and described their first experiences in Canada. "The first while we lived in a tent.... The cookstove was placed close to some nearby bushes and all cooking was done in the open. For some years to come our main food was a tasty stew of grouse or rabbit for which father hunted frequently... Father set about felling, trimming and hauling trees and constructed a one room log cabin dug up to the windowsills into the hill on the west side, roofed with saplings, straw and clay and chinked with moss. He had brought enough lumber for a floor with a trap-door leading to an earth-cellar below."

She goes on to say, "(Father) earned his full homestead rights, added a living room and bedroom of lumber to the log cabin, and a stone and timber barn with hen house added."

Of her mother she says, "All the special dishes of Iceland appeared on the table... She held subscriptions to needlecraft and flower growing magazines. Father fenced off a plot by the house for her flowers, and new ones were tried every year.... While the days were filled with work, the evenings, at least in winter, were for the mind and soul. My parents were both fond of reading and had books in Icelandic, Danish and Norwegian, besides weeklies in both Icelandic and English."

Her pioneer experience explains her prevailing interest in Icelandic culture and history and explains also her empathy and

respect for immigrants from other ethnic backgrounds.

She says her father worked with others founding the Nordra School and was influential in having a course in Icelandic taught there.

The family lived in Wynyard for eleven years. Her father died in 1916 after a lengthy illness. Shortly after that the widowed mother and daughter were visited by Mrs. Sigridur Bjerring, a relative, who helped the two women to make a move to Winnipeg and encouraged Sigurbjorg to apply for admission to Wesley College. At the college there Sigurbjorg distinguished herself as an excellent student.

Early in life, Miss Stefansson chose teaching as her career. She taught first in one-room rural schools. Then she joined the staff of the Gimli School, where she served until her retirement.

The Gimli Women's Institute presented a beautiful portrait of Miss Stefansson to the school that bears her name and the dedication that goes with the portrait reads as follows:

"Miss Sigurbjorg Stefansson came to Gimli in 1922, to teach in the former two-room high school section of the Gimli Public School. She taught here for more than forty years, specializing in English, French, Latin and Icelandic. Miss Stefansson's knowledge of her work, her firm method of conducting her classes and her outstanding character have influenced several generations of Gimli students to attain their highest potential both academically and in the development of good citizenship. The esteem with which Miss Stefansson has always been held by the school children was made evident in a competition to name the schools held by the Gimli Women's Institute in 1967 when the most popular name for the former Collegiate in which she had taught was the

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'Sigurbjorg Stefansson School.'

Miss Stefansson has been a member of the Gimli Women's Institute for nearly fifty years during which time she has made many important contributions and for which she was made an honorary life member of the Manitoba Women's Institute. She was the first secretary of the Evergreen Regional Library Association and in recognition of her service she was made an honorary member of the Manitoba Library Association. She received honorary life membership in the Manitoba Teachers' Society and a citizenship award from the Manitoba Historical Society in 1970. She has also been a long-standing member of the Icelandic National League which honored her with a life membership..."

Her interest and concern for the students who passed through her classes won her continued respect and gratitude in the community.

She passed away in 1985 but in 1996 she was given a posthumous award. Her name was entered in the school division's 'Hall of Fame'. The inscription on the plaque there sums up the story of her career: "The Evergreen Foundation of Manitoba honors Sigurbjorg Stefansson for outstanding contributions to education in the Evergreen School Division."

She translated the first edition of Framfari, the first newspaper in New

Iceland, for Col. Jim Dunlop of C.F.B Gimli. He decided to use the name of that first newspaper as the name of the station publication. She was later recognized by the Station with a medal for community service.

Miss Stefansson donated the lot where the Evergreen Regional Library Building is located. The establishment of the Library was, in many ways, a "dream come true" for her. Her special input and her gifts to that institution are of continuing benefit.

Her early training in Icelandic history and literature fostered a lifetime interest in these subjects. Her work in translating and compiling pioneer history and anecdotes added much to the edition of Gimli Saga. Her assistance was sought by many students of Icelandic-Canadian literature. She was respected for her knowledge and interpretation and for dedicated research when that was required.

Shortly after Miss Stefansson's death Ethel Howard wrote about her friend in an article which was entitled "A Tribute to a Great Person." Her final sentence bears repeating here: Miss Stefansson "has (so) many memorials, in the school, the community, the library, Gimli Saga, and in the hearts and memories of all who knew her."

Mushroom Joe

by Darrell Gudmundson

As told by Norman and Barney (Bjorn) Arngrimson and Tobba (Arngrimson) Gudmundson

It was in the early thirties, and the great depression was in full swing. The stranger's name was Joe Hunfjord, and he came from somewhere to the East, in Manitoba. He may have ridden the rails into Elfros, Saskatchewan, as that was the common mode of transport in that era. He was of Icelandic origin, and Elfros was the centre of a prairie Icelandic settlement, Vatnabyggd (the water settlement), which surrounded the Quill Lakes, and other lakes in that chain. It was not surprising that he should seek to stop there.

He needed a place to stay, and it was very common in Elfros to give directions to Siggie Arngrimson's place, one mile west of the town, especially for townspeople who either had nothing much to spare, or who sometimes couldn't be bothered to help. At least farmers usually had food. Siggie and his bride Lizzie were noted for never saying "No" when someone was needy. They agreed to take Joe in, and accommodations were prepared for him in the Arngrimson basement.

Joe was rather tall, skinny and slightly hunchbacked, looking none too healthy. He was a poet, writing continually in Icelandic, sending manuscripts back East to professor Watson Kirkconnell in Nova Scotia, who apparently published them in some appropriate forum, sometimes with English translation.

Joe was also a would-be entrepreneur, and upon that hangs this story.

Joe got this idea, likely from a magazine, that he could make his fortune - growing mushrooms. Siggie's basement seemed the ideal place to launch this endeavor, and Joe sought permission. Once again, Siggie could not say no, and frames were built of scrap lumber, rotted manure



Johannes Hunfjord

was obtained (no shortage of that!) and the mushroom stock was sent for. Joe was in agreement that it was not entirely a sure bet to be successful, but he was very keen to try.

During this time my mother Tobba, Siggie and Lizzie's daughter, was going to high school, and her cousin Barney (Bjorn or Bjossi) Arngrimson was also staying with them to attend the Elfros school. Reflecting upon the mushroom venture, Barney recalls Joe with some amusement, a twinkle in his eye.

Barney's younger brother Norman Arngrimson recalls visiting and being frightened half to death at the very thought of a pale and slightly hunchbacked figure tending beds of fungus in the dark cellars of the Arngrimson house. It was Siggie's nature to do nothing to ease this apprehension, as he loved to tease. When Siggie was

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finished with them, young nephews ceased to even consider playing in the basement!

Joe went at it with a will, but with very little understanding of mushrooms and their needs. Warmth was indeed needed, and the furnace was handy. Joe kept it well fed. What Joe did not count on was the Saskatchewan climate - very dry. The warmer Joe made it, the dryer it got. No mushrooms were forthcoming. Weeks went by, with no results. Then came a rush of excitement, as something was seen pushing up through the soil. Joe saw success at hand! However, it proved to be a stray potato which had sprouted! The mushroom business was, after all, a bust.

Meanwhile however, as was the habit in those pioneer days, Joe's name had been permanently altered - albeit in the Icelandic tongue- to "Mushroom Joe" (Gracúli Jóí), throughout the Elfros District. His birth name was forgotten by many as the new label was adopted.

When a year had gone by, Joe dismantled his failed mushroom operation, and

left the community, presumably for his home somewhere in the Interlake district of Manitoba. He was not seen or heard from in Elfros again. I couldn't help but wonder if his poetry survived in some literary vault, perhaps a dank college basement.

Then a chance visit to my cousin Thordis Gutnick's place in Calgary revealed a small volume of poems by Johannes Hunfjord, published by Viking Press in 1933. From this old volume comes the photo which accompanies this article. The book, Ómar, is dedicated to Svein Thorvaldson of Riverton, Man.

There are many stories of hardship from the great depression, some sad, some strange—but many are tales of continuing hope in the face of hard times.. Such is the story of Johannes Hunfjord – Mushroom Joe.


Poetry

Shadows Dance On The Wall

I lie awake, watching shadows dance on the wall,
I hear his voice, his footsteps echo down the hall.
He wasn't always like this; he used to be my friend,
He used to really love me; then the violence began.
He would read me bedtime stories, with a twinkle in his eye,
Now he's gone out drinking while mommy sits and cries.
I didn't even know, what it was I did wrong,
Now the days' are painful and nights' are very long.
The bruises lighten, and cuts fade away,
But the words replay in my mind, day after day.
After he would hurt me, mom would pull me close
And say that when he hits me is when he loves me most
I didn't know what to do, I never asked why,
I assumed I was the bad one and I deserved to die
But finally I realized that I wasn't the one to blame,
He's the one that had to change, I could stay the same.

Now I'm 34 and I have my own kids,
I love them very much, and would never do what my father did.
I can hear them breathing from all the way down the hall,
But still I lie awake, watching shadows dance on the walls.

- Jenna Boholij



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Book Reviews



Culinary Saga of New Iceland

By Kristin Olafson-Jenkyns
 Coastline Publishing, 2001
 235 pp., \$32.95 CDN

Reviewed by Betty Jane Wylie

You might question the use of the word saga in connection with a cookbook, but it's actually pretty accurate. A saga, to remind you (quoting from the Encarta Dictionary), is a prose narrative dealing with the details of time and place (12th & 13th centuries; Iceland) and subject: the families that first settled Iceland and their descendants, with the myths and legends, or, a modern prose narrative that resembles a saga. So this modern prose collection of recipes is indeed a kind of saga, coming as it does from the people who settled New Iceland.

Kristin Olafson-Jenkyns, the compiler, editor and artist who put it all together, has

included some of the myths and legends of this transplanted world, as well as the innovations inspired by altered circumstances and different food.

It has been very much a family effort, Kristin tells me, and a labour of love. Her son Mac worked with her to produce it in a self-publishing effort that has led to other projects and full-time employment. They're working now on a new undertaking that's bound to sell well: The Ultimate Icelandic North American Directory. They probably wish they had it right now, to sell the cookbook. As it is, they're finding a welcome market within the Western Icelandic communities in North America as well as among broader audiences, people who love good food and good cookbooks.

As a writer of three cookbooks myself, I can tell you that there are several hazards involved in the creation of such a food guide. One is the recipe-testing. It's not only time-consuming, it's expensive, and it must be done carefully and accurately. Not being a professional cook with an industri-

al kitchen and a few sous-chefs to do the scut work, I found the cooking, adjusting, tasting and assessing to be much more onerous and tedious than the actual writing of the book. The other difficulty is the writing; the instructions must be crystal clear. I have heard that one of the most difficult jobs for a professional copywriter is to write simple directions for the side of a box. Take gelatin dessert. At one time a rival brand to the best-known one offered a taste bud to be melted and stirred into the hot water; this was supposed to ensure a zingy, fresh taste. I knew a neophyte cook who found it in the package, thought someone had given her a gumdrop to chew while she cooked, popped it into her mouth and ate it. Result: tasteless gelatin. Maybe that's an urban myth, but it illustrates what you're facing when you write directions for strangers. You won't be there to help them.

Kristin solved most of these problems by farming out her recipes. She wrote a letter to hundreds of Western Icelanders, women (mostly) whose ancestors had emigrated from Iceland to the shores of Lake Winnipeg. She had gathered recipes that needed to be tested and she asked for help with them, understandable when you consider the sources. They were family recipes, her own and others'; church cookbooks; little collections published as fund-raisers. Though some of the foods had the same name, there were many variations on a theme, different methods, different measurements, sometimes not even that, just a pinch of this, a dash of that, or directives such as "cook until done" and "season to taste."

There were also new ingredients in the new world, different food that had to be acknowledged and tested, for example, whitefish, as Kristin points out. Icelanders did not eat whitefish before they left Iceland. In fact, they ate more salt-water fish than fresh; the fishermen had to learn a new method of fishing, too. Accompanying the explanation of what she wanted was a recipe which she asked her correspondent to test. She asked for feedback and welcomed detailed comments, which she includes with the recipes in the

book. The hardest part was riding herd on her flock of testers, getting them to report on time to meet her deadline. Any way you look at it, it was a lot of work. This volume was well on its way to becoming a saga!


Kristin added myths and legends, plus historical food articles from the Icelandic newspaper, Framfari, published in the first early days of settlement. She studied Gudrun Jonsdottir's *Matreiðslubok*, an Icelandic cookery journal dating from the early 1900s. Then she underlaid and interlaced her generously-sized pages with historical photographs and reproductions of handwritten recipes, along with photographs of indigenous fish and their descriptions, as well as photographs and thumbnail histories of the fishing vessels used to catch them, and lots more. She offers a capsule history of the Icelandic immigration and an excerpt from Lord Dufferin's address when, as Governor-General, he officially welcomed the immigrants to New Iceland in September, 1877. Thus the book is a collage as well as a cookery book, and I haven't covered all it contains. It's a dipping book, almost a scrapbook, certainly a saga, and one that deserves to be passed down to future generations. In fact, every bride (or groom) with Icelandic roots should receive a copy as part of her dowry, with additional copies to be added for each child.

Cooks and readers familiar with Icelandic-Canadian food will welcome recipes for their favourites and be pleased and surprised to discover that there's a lot they don't know. Other broad-minded cooks will be intrigued to try out a few tastes new to them. Now, about that testing. Some people didn't take it as seriously as others. When a recipe doesn't turn out quite right, it has to be done again. Believe me, I know. . . A lot of the designated cooks were content to try it out, make some critical comments if it didn't turn out too well, and leave it at that, perhaps with a warning. On the other hand, the comments are very folksy and the suggestions could be useful. But if something turns out too soft, or too runny, or too tender (as in the case of a cake that falls apart), then it would help if the cook made it again, and, if necessary,

again, altering the proportions of the ingredients until it works. You probably won't mind. I am told that Edna Staebler, one of Canada's most famous and successful cooks and cookbook writers, simply welcomed corrections to her recipes and inserted them in subsequent editions. That never stopped her cookbooks from being best-sellers. This book is going to be in print for a long time; at least, I hope so. There'll be time to add any necessary corrections as time goes on. I hope, too, in subsequent editions, that a few of the pages might be made clearer. Some of them are hard to read because they're printed over reproductions of hand-written recipes or old photographs. It's a very small complaint for an enchanting cookbook. Before you start cooking from it and get it dirty, take it to bed and read it right through.

Editor's Note: Kristin Olafson-Jenkyns won two awards at this year's Northern Bounty conference for Cuisine Canada for her book The Culinary Saga of New Iceland. Culinary Book awards are presented annually in three categories for cookbooks published in Canada during the previous year. The awards were a Gold Award, Special Interest Food & Beverage Category, and a Silver Award, Canada Food Culture Category. The awards were presented at a gala dinner in Guelph, Ontario, for the 2002 Cuisine Canada Culinary Book Awards. The "Best of the Best" was the evening's menu, using recipes taken from each of last year's winning cookbooks, matched with some of Canada's finest wines.

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Errand Boy in the Mooseland Hills

By Johann Magnus Bjarnason
Halifax, NS: Formac Publishing Co., 2001
184p.

Translation of Vornatur í Elgsheidum,
2d. ed., 1970, by Borga Jakobson.

Reviewed by lillian vilborg

There are fourteen stories in this collection. They all take place in Nova Scotia around 1880, and are told from the point of view of a young boy in his early teens. "That was in the summer of 1880, and I was fourteen years old," the storyteller says in "Sighvatur."

Johann Magnus tells these stories in an informal "when I was young ..." manner. He begins "Boy Burns" saying "For eight months in 1880, I boarded with Icelandic miners who worked ... in Tangier, Nova Scotia." In the story called "Abraham Burt" he says "I would like to say a few

words about a man I knew briefly when I was a boy in Nova Scotia ..."

Each tale centres on a person, usually Icelandic, but not always, who has some interesting quirk to his character, or an unusual twist to his story. The characters are often "lone wolves" living separate from the Icelandic community. Sometimes, as in "Bessi," an act of heroism endears the Icelander to the "foreign" family. The errand boy hears Mr. Balfour say of the young man who stayed with him, "Eyvindur Atli is a fine young man. If you do anything for him, he does more than thank you with words." Hákon Farmann received great kindness and caring from Duncan Campbell. Indeed the young man saved his life. In return Hákon saved Duncan from financial disaster. In exchange Hákon had a home for life. In some of the stories, the characters return to Iceland, in others, as in the Hákon Farmann story, something gets in the way of their returning. In "An Old Sea Wolf"

Hrómundur Bórdarson exhibits other worldly strength and determination which endears him to the locals. The characters tend to be fatalistic about their circumstances in a very stoic, accepting way.

There is an innocence to these stories. The innocence of the youthful storyteller. There is also a very observant eye, one which makes it possible for the storyteller to describe in detail the surroundings and the appearance of the people he encounters.

The stories seem like they are renderings of real events, because of the way the errand boy says things, such as "I have never heard of him since," and "Mr. and Mrs. Oswald were always kind to me," and "When I arrived in Winnipeg in 1882, Eyvindur had left to go to the United States," and "The week before Whitsunday in the spring of 1882 I said my last goodbye to Mooseland Hills, Nova Scotia and set out for Winnipeg."


These stories were first published in the Almanack (1907-10), Tímarit (1932-44) and Vornatur á Elgsheidum (1910). This book is a translation of the second edition of Vornatur á Elgsheidum, published in Akureyri in 1970.

Borga Jakobson's translation is flawless. The English edition reads smoothly, without any of the usual bumps found in translation from Icelandic to English. She has also opted to use the full range of letters in the Icelandic alphabet, which, for this reader at least, makes reading the names easier. In the Introduction, she provides an account of Johann Magnus' life. I would have liked to have had, in addition, a map of the area of Nova Scotia, so that I could follow the errand boy's long walks.

Born in the East of Iceland in 1866 (there is a memorial cairn to him near Egilsstaðir), Johann Magnus Bjarnason emigrated to Nova Scotia with his parents as a young boy. He attended school there, but also worked as an errand boy. He later worked, studied and taught in Winnipeg and environs and retired to Elfros, SK. He wrote throughout his life, novels, plays and stories. It is through his works that many Icelanders gained their understanding of the immigrant experience in Canada. On his seventieth birthday, he received the

Order of the Falcon from the Icelandic government. He was also named an Honorary Member of the Icelandic National League of North America in recognition of his work.

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Contributors

KRISTÍN AÐALSTEINSDÓTTIR was born in Þórunnarseli, Kelduhverfi, and she has lived in Iceland, except for several years of studies in Norway and the UK. She is an Assistant Professor in Education at the University of Akureyri. As far as she knows, none of her close relatives immigrated to Canada or the USA, which is uncommon for most Icelandic people.

STEPHAN VIBERG BENEDIKTSON is a grandson of the poet Stephan G Stephansson. After graduating with a degree in engineering from the University of Alberta in 1962, Stephan worked in the oil industry in Australia, the Far East, the Middle East, South America as well as Canada and the USA. He served as the Honorary Consul for Iceland for Southern Alberta from 1997 until he retired to live in Mexico in 2001.

JENNA BOHOLIJ has been writing poetry and short stories since she was 13 and continues to produce pieces for the Icelandic Festival writing contest, and several other writing competitions. Jenna enjoys writing about Gimli, and loves visiting her family members who live there. She hopes to further her writing career and looks forward to more of her work being published.

BORGA JAKOBSON is the author of *Errand Boy* in the Mooseland Hills, translations of Johann Magnus Bjarnason's story in Nova Scotia. Borga was born in Geysir, a graduate of the U of Manitoba and has contributed in many ways to the Icelandic Canadian community.

DARRELL GUDMUNDSON is a Professional Engineer, Planner, Marketer, and Writer. He is owner of GFW Publishers. He lives in Saskatoon, and can be reached by e-mail at this address: jd.gudmundson@sasktel.net

HEATHER NEALE is granddaughter of Herdis Eyolfson Maddin, and daughter of Janet (Maddin) Neale, has spent all of her summers in Gimli over the years. Born and raised in Winnipeg, she currently works in Vancouver as a freelance writer and travels whenever possible. Her next trip, she hopes, will be to Iceland.

HORÐUR SIGURGETSSON (1938). He graduated from the Commercial College in Reykjavik in 1958, received a degree in Business Administration and Economics from the University of Iceland in 1965, and further a MBA degree from the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, where he studied from 1966 - 1968.

SIGURBJORG STEFANSSON was a highly respected teacher. A school in Gimli bears her name. She was instrumental in establishing the libraries at Gimli, Riverton and Arborg. She had a great pride in her Icelandic heritage. Delving into the history led her to translating the letters so that they could be shared.

CHRISTINA SUNLEY is the granddaughter of one of the original New Iceland settlers, Dr. Olafur Bjornson, and his wife, Sigríður Brandson; her mother is Edith Bjornson, originally of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Christina's fiction has been published in a variety of literary journals.

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

BETTY JANE WYLIE is a prolific writer and playwright. She is a very strong supporter of her Icelandic roots. *Letters to Icelanders, Exploring the Northern Soul* reveals her love for the Nordic spirit. She recently received an honorary doctorate of letters from the University of Manitoba.

The back page

The statue on the next page was created by Hans Holtkamp of Saskatoon. He has a Winnie the Pooh in the London Zoo. The design was created during a Vatnabyggd meeting that Hans attended. The models were Stella and Eric Stephansson's son, Scott, and Nanna Olafson's grand daughter, Lisa.

The statue was unveiled officially on July 11, 1998, in the midst of a massive thunder storm. We had about 600 people for the unveiling, including TV coverage from Iceland.

As well as the statue, the site contains an information board designed to be representative of a settler's home. One side of the three-panel board features a map of the Vatnabyggd area, pin pointing the schools and towns influenced by early Icelandic settlements, and the names of about 350 of the early pioneers. That list is by no means complete.

The reverse side is a three-panel mural by Kevin Meers of Wishart. From the east, the panels show Iceland in the late 1800s, the volcanoes and the voyage to Canada and the train across the country, and a collage of Vatnabyggd then and now. The murals were officially unveiled during the June 17, 2002 Independence Day picnic in Elfros.

All the money for the project was raised in Saskatchewan and all of it was spent on Saskatchewan artists. The calligraphy of the names was done by B.J. Wunder of Foam Lake. Eddie Gudmundson of our Club designed and built the information board. Signage around the statue was done by a little foundry in Saskatchewan. The concrete was poured and finished by an Elfros artisan. The entire project cost about \$60,000.

When Hans met us, incidentally, he said groups usually spent years raising money which they gave to a sculptor who then went away to create something they would all hate for the rest of their lives. Such was not the case with the Vatnabyggd memorial to Icelandic pioneers.



The back page

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