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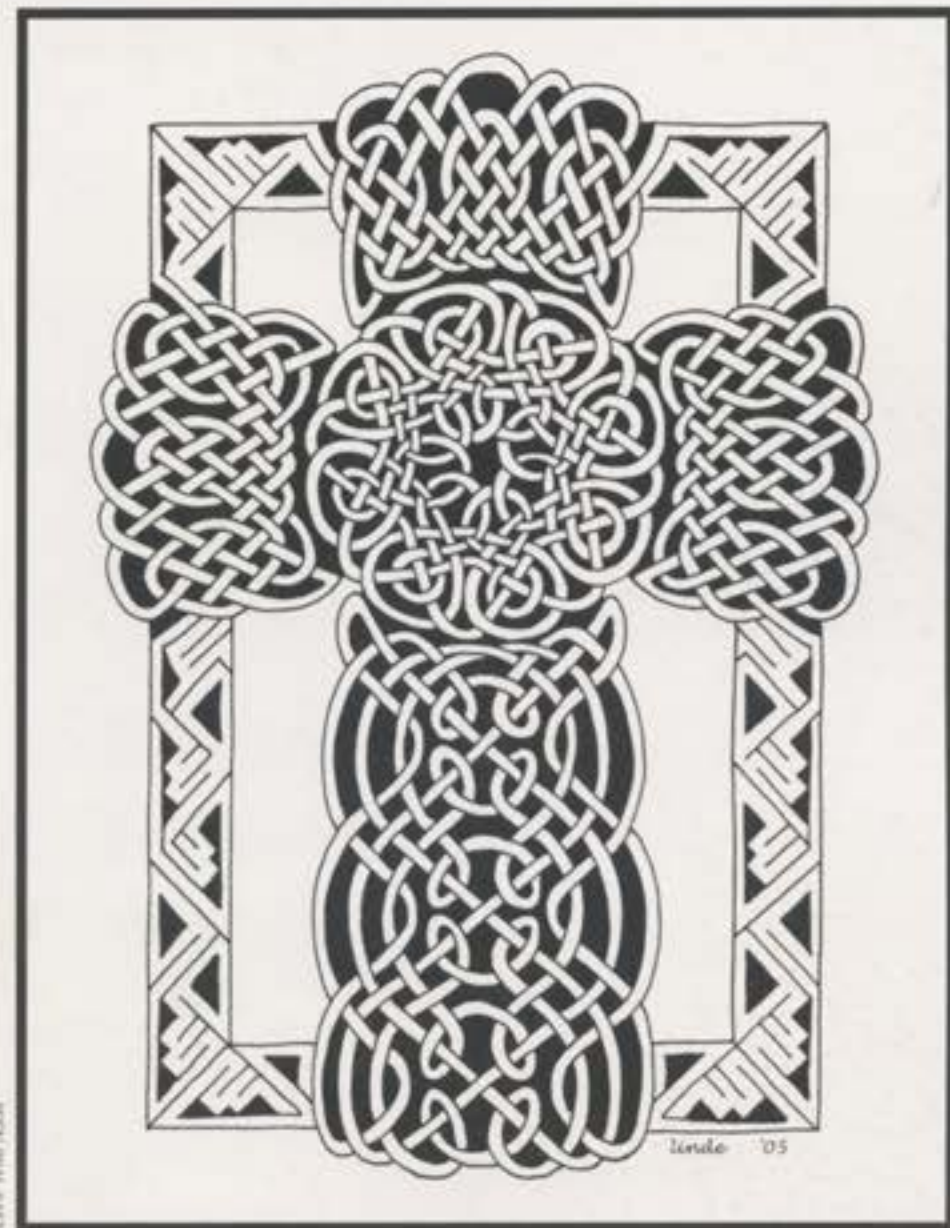
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On the Cover	131
Editorial - Tammy Axelsson	132
Linde Dunn Sigrid Stefanson	134
Eric's Saga Eric Olafson	136
A Great and Humble Man Tammy Axelsson	142
The Ferry Repossessed - Part Two of Three - Told by Erling Palsson, Gudjon Valgeirsson and Vakentinus Olason	145
Hofn of Vancouver Kristjana Magnusson Clark	148
Letters from Friðjón Friðriksson - translated by Sigurbjörg Stefansson	160
Poetry The Secret - Ronald Friesen	165
Book Reviews Thora - A Half-Mermaid Tale - Reviewed by Carole Mackintosh	166
Just A Matter of Time - Reviewed by Sharron Arksey	168
Contributors	171
The Back Page	172

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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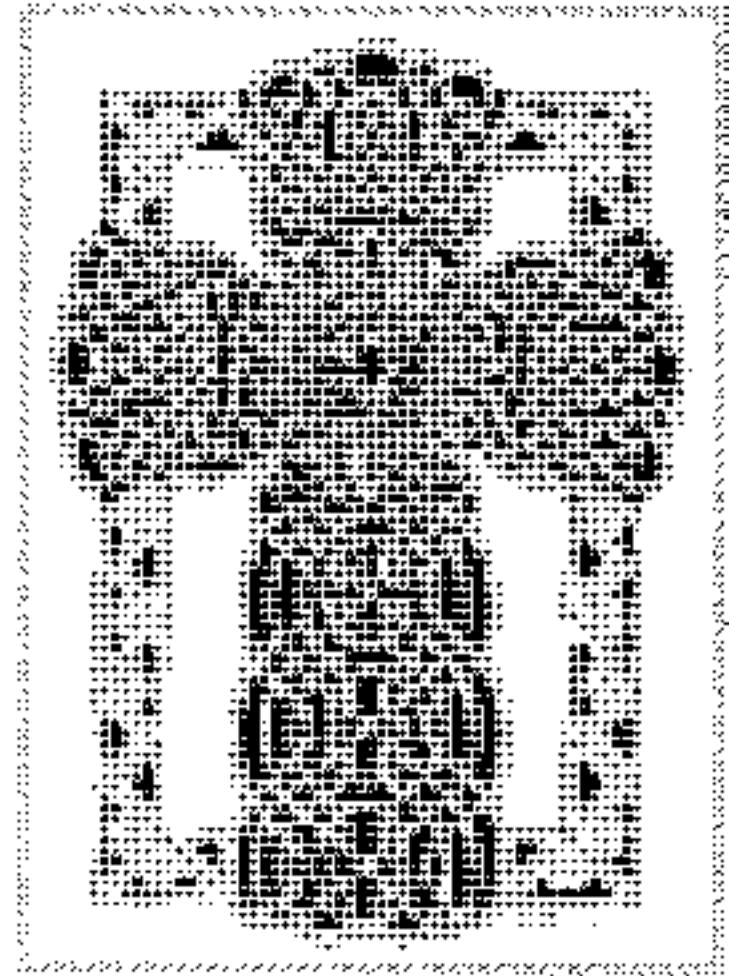
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On the Cover



Celtic Cross by Linde Dunn

Editorial

by Tammy Axelsson

October 21st, 2005 will mark 130 years since the arrival of the first Icelandic settlers on the shores of Willow Point, in Manitoba. I have often pondered on what it was like to come ashore, cold, tired and disheartened at having lost so many from among their small group on their journey from Iceland and Kinmount. Written accounts of their arrival tell of the strong north wind that made it unsafe to continue further north on Lake Winnipeg.

We who live here today, know those fall winds all too well. They are bitter and unforgiving and foretell the harsh winter months that lay ahead. As those settlers were unloading their belongings and hastily putting up tents that would provide little shelter against the elements, I wonder how many of them were questioning the wisdom of their decision to leave Iceland? Yet, they set about the task of making a new life in this new land, clinging to the hope that they had made the right decision, and determined never to forget where they came from.

They got through the first winter, the smallpox epidemic, and a division in the colony over religious differences. They printed a newspaper, built a school, fished, farmed and raised their families. They developed their own laws and constitution outside of the then postage stamp province that Manitoba was and so, New Iceland was established. This unique chapter in Canada's history has been recognized as an event of national historic significance by the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

There was a dogged determination among those early Icelandic settlers to maintain their language and culture and their ties with Iceland. It is a determination that was passed on to each subsequent generation and Icelandic-Canadians from coast to coast and from all walks of life,

continued to work tirelessly to maintain a rich variety of Icelandic customs and traditions.

The Icelandic Department at the University of Manitoba, the Icelandic National League of North America, with clubs and chapters across Canada and in the U.S., the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba, celebrating its 116th year, the New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli, the Icelandic-Canadian, the Lögberg-Heimskringla, the very successful Snorri Programs and the Gimli Film Festival – all play important roles in preserving a piece of the Icelandic presence in Canada. And with an Icelandic Embassy in Ottawa and the Icelandic Consul General in Winnipeg, the ties with Iceland could not be stronger.

As we work together to preserve our Icelandic heritage, our collective stories give us all a deeper understanding of the sacrifices made by the Icelanders when they chose to settle in a new country and how their presence here has contributed to the great multicultural nation that Canada has become. The culture and heritage of our Icelandic ancestors is alive and well here, and though our numbers are relatively few, our presence is known in each and every community where Icelandic-Canadians live. Ours are the stories of the trials, tribulations and triumphs of a people who made new lives for themselves in a new land.

So today, on this beautiful October day, with the temperature at 21 degrees Celsius, and the world shifting into magnificent colours of golden-brown, yellow, orange and crimson, I am feeling particularly grateful to those early settlers for all that we enjoy here in Canada.

I think they would be proud to know how well things have gone here for Canadians of Icelandic descent, and they would be prouder still of the all the time

and effort put in by so many individuals over the past 130 years to ensure the preservation of their language and culture. Because of the hard work and dedication of so many, the dream of the early Icelandic settlers of maintaining their language and culture and their ties with Iceland, will, without a doubt, continue to flourish in Canada for 130 years to come.

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Linde Dunn

by Sigríð Stefánsón



When asked about her childhood in Cold Lake, Alberta, Linde Dunn recalls only two seasons: endless summer and endless winter. Each had their own dramatic events, be it evening lightening storms or the Aurora Borealis. The Dunns would view these natural wonders from their front porch where the children could safely watch.

With a dreamy beginning, Linde was born in France close to New Year's Day but the family soon after moved to an Air Force base in Cold Lake. Her artist mother, Val Dunn, nurtured the artistic talent Linde expressed from a tender age. Unlike other children, Linde was truly encouraged to be an artist because in the Dunn family the children were allowed to follow their dreams.

Linde would hear her Icelandic mother speak proudly of the musicians, artists, and art historians in the family. It seemed a distinguished career to follow in their footsteps. In addition, Linde's upbringing exposed her to literature, art, and mythology.

While talented in many areas, Linde's great love is the writing and illustration of children's stories in which she uses Norse and Celtic mythology as well as fairy tales for inspiration. Growing up, Linde was aware of these stories and the elements of magic and mysticism always were of interest. In her adult work, she explores ordinary magic – the wondrous things that surround us all of the time.

Linde is also accomplished at weaving on her loom and laments that there is not enough time to satisfy all of her artistic desires. She has enjoyed creating original designs with Celtic Knotwork in recent years. She explains that Norse Knotwork is less constructed and delicate than the Celtic models. The Norse designs are traditionally more bold or fierce and feature animals or dragons.

Another artistic endeavor for Linde is to breathe new life into old objects by painting chairs, tables, shelves, and "anything else that stays still long enough." The items come from used furniture stores or garage sales and sometimes Linde will build something herself with found bits and pieces. Linde repairs, rebuilds, and essentially recreates these pieces with multi-patterned designs in bright colours. She loves the end result of a colourful, chaotic environment. When asked about her furniture she replied, "My philosophy about colour is that every colour 'goes' with every other colour and I do my best to prove this by my atypical selection of colour." Linde simply gets more pleasure out of making something out of nothing rather than buying something devoid of quirks or personality.

Linde is in the process of "ethnicizing" her name to reflect her Icelandic heritage. Born Linda Marie Dunn, she uses the Icelandic spelling Linde for Linda and her mother's name Svala to create Linde Svalasdóttir.

Her training in art began with lessons from her mother in Cold Lake and then she moved south to the Alberta College of Art in Calgary, Alberta. Over four and a half years Linde majored in textiles and minored in drawing. While that was twenty years ago, she still approaches new techniques with fresh eyes. Her style is continually recreated as her interests change or as she finds a new form in which to experiment.

Linde is currently a member of the Studio 28 Artisan's Guild of North-Central Alberta and also the Cold Lake Visual Arts Society. At present, she is working on upgrading her Diploma of Visual Art to a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree through the Alberta College of Art and Athabasca University.

Eric's Saga

by Eric Olafson

This year being Saskatchewan's 100th birthday, it seems only fitting to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Vatnabyggd settlement, too. I want to preface this article by saying that much of the material gathered here has been done by researching other writings. I am using my memory and the other resources that may or may not be factual. So this can be referred to as Eric's Saga. Now I will give you the Reader's Digest version of the history of the Icelanders in the western part of the Vatnabyggd settlement by using some of my family's histories.

In September 1905, my paternal afi, Bjarni Olafson homesteaded on the south western part of the settlement on NE-28-31-18. He had emigrated from Nupsdalstunga as a one-year-old with his family in 1887 and first settled at Gimli. He and his brother arrived at Sheho, the end of the train line and continued overland a distance of 60 miles to their homestead. Think about this for a moment. He was 19 years old with a 17-year-old brother. They set out across uninhabited land to south of Dafoe. They were part of a huge influx of Icelandic pioneers to settle this area. They chose to settle in the western part of the settlement since the land was more open and ready for the plough. The eastern part had more bush and sloughs. That choice at the time had merit as far as getting land broken quickly but it turned into a bit of a disaster when the drought of the '30's arrived. In 1914 he married Olgeirina Kjarval. Olga came to Canada in 1912 and met my afi when she was working as a hired girl at one of the neighbours. They had five children. Joe and Carl became farmers. They farmed in the area until death or retirement. Helgi and Norman became entrepreneurs and eventually were in business in British Columbia and Alberta. The youngest boy, Gestur, died at the age of two. Marino was born to Barney and his second wife,

Kirstine. He became a carpenter in British Columbia.

My maternal afi, Thorstein Gauti arrived in Wynard in 1914. He had originally homesteaded in North Dakota, moved to Lundar and Stuartburn, Manitoba, back to Pembina, North Dakota before coming to Wynard where he operated a dairy farm north of Wynard.

He married Áslaug Jonsdóttir from Myri and they raised ten children. They became teachers, hairdressers, homemakers, farmers, fishermen and stenographers. Three daughters stayed in the district and raised families on farms. The rest of the family dispersed to British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario.

My dad, Joe, was a farmer all his life except for a stint in the army in World War II. My mother, Nanna Gauti was a school-teacher. She met Dad when she was teaching at Mimer School. She was boarding at the Joe Josephson home, the big white house north of #16 Highway, west of Kandahar. Little did they know that in 1950 they would move to that home and raise their five children there. Joanne lives in Edmonton, Elaine lives in Canora, Edie in Saskatoon and myself on a farm 2 miles from where we were raised and Len, deceased, lived in Winnipeg.

Our family, I think is typical of the Icelandic Canadians in the Vatnabyggd area who originally came to homestead and raise families and then moved on to other pursuits. My cousin Arlan and I are the only descendants of the original pioneers to farm. This year I have finally got over my "farmeritis", as I call it, and have rented out my grainland. I still have a small herd of elk on the farm and work for the Provincial Government as a crop adjuster. Presently only one other cousin of our generation, Shirley Ann Laxdal, lives in the Vatnabyggd area. I married a young woman, Karen whose grandmother was an



PHOTO BY ERIC OLAFSON

Stefan and wife Karen holding baby Avery. Eric and Karen Olafson and daughter Marea (2004).

Einarson from Lariviere, Manitoba. We have two children, Marea and Stefan who are both schoolteachers. The Icelandic traditions of scholarly pursuits continue. Our son married another Karen. Their daughter Avery, is being raised having an Afi and an Amma.

Now back to that big white house on the north side of the highway. My wife Karen and I now operate this as a Bed & Breakfast, guesthouse called Amma's House. This home was built in 1919 by Icelandic carpenters that were here who were unable to work in Winnipeg during the Winnipeg General Strike. We have to remember that in that era, farming was a very profitable venture, so Joe Josephson was able to build a very elaborate dwelling at a time when many people lived in log cabins and small shacks. Unfortunately during the depression of the '30's, Joe was unable to keep the farm. This house has been designated a municipal heritage site because of its importance as an example of early architecture on the prairies and also its Icelandic heritage. It has been lived in continuously by Icelandic/Canadians since it was built. If the walls of that house could talk, I think it could tell us about the cycle of optimism and despair that has changed agriculture from small farms on each 1/4 section to our present day large holdings.

Enough about my family, they were just part of the bigger picture. The western part of the Vatnabyggd settlement is often referred to as the second settlement since it was not direct migration from Iceland but from existing settlements in North Dakota

and Manitoba.

Once in the area and their homestead rights had been proven, their thoughts turned to other things such as community schools and churches that had to be built. My Afi told me that originally they received their mail and supplies in the town of Quill Lake. He said it was easier getting the mail in the winter since they could ski across the frozen lake as opposed to walking around the lake in summertime.

The first post office in the new district was Sleipner, a store and post office located on H. J. Halldorson's homestead, NE-30-22-15. It was the hub of the community until it moved to the Wynard townsite in 1908. The Grandy school district has the distinction of being the first school district formed in 1906. Icelanders were instrumental in starting this school but interesting enough a Mr. Carl Schellinger of Hutchinson, Minnesota donated an acre of land for the school. S.S. Bergman, G. G. Goodman and E. E. Grandy were elected trustees and the first teacher was J. P. Palson, who in 1908 received wages of \$50.00 a month.

Nordra School was formed in 1907. The original petition to form the school district stated the population as 79 with 12 children between 5 and 16 years of age, and 13 children below the age of 5. The first teacher was Baldur Jonsson, a student at Wesley College in Winnipeg. Since the teacher taught during their own summer holidays, the first school terms were short. In the early years the teachers were Icelandic, as were most of the students. Carrying on in the Icelandic tradition,

Audrey Axdal, now Audrey Sheperd, was the last teacher to teach there in 1962.

Many of the Icelandic Canadians could only speak Icelandic when they started school and I recall my dad telling me about being teased since he did not know any English. Living on the western fringe of the Vatnabyggd settlement, most of his classmates were not Icelandic. I often think his experience in being unable to speak English when he started school led my parents to not teach us Icelandic. My cousins from Grandy could speak a bit of Icelandic. I think it was because there was much less of a stigma attached to it in the areas where Icelanders dominated the population. Another reason that my parents did not teach us Icelandic was that they could say things in Icelandic that we were not supposed to hear! In fact, in Nordra School a course in Icelandic was taught, since permission was granted by the North West Territory to teach any foreign language from 3-4 PM on any schooldays selected by the trustees.

The Vatnabyggd settlement originally had numerous schools when the rural population was large. As the rural population declined and better roads were constructed, the small schools were closed and were then centralized in small towns until presently all schools are located in Wynard and Foam Lake. Education was very important to the early settlers and continues to be to this day. Many of the original settlers were well educated. I have often heard that some of the Icelanders were much better poets and musicians than they were farmers. Imagine reading a book instead of ploughing a field or milking a cow! This notion of education and literacy can be traced back to our roots in Iceland, where a thousand years ago, illiteracy was abolished. Apparently, when Icelanders were packing to leave for Canada, if the choice was between tools or books, since space was limited, they chose books.

Like other pioneer communities, churches were also organized. Icelandic immigrants were brought up in the Lutheran State Church of Iceland, which was considered relatively liberal. All Iceland congregations in America were at

first patterned on this model. In 1885 the Icelandic Lutheran Synod was formed in Mountain, North Dakota which subscribed to the views of the church of Iceland and in a vote of 18 to 8 with one absent and 2 abstaining granted women equal rights with men. They were progressive. The Quill Lakes congregation in 1907 applied for membership and was accepted into the Lutheran Synod. In 1909 they withdrew their affiliation and kept in close touch with the state church of Iceland, whose views were more liberal and more in line with theirs. Over the years ministers from Iceland serviced the Quill Lakes Free Church congregation. Much turmoil was in the church until about 1920 when the Unitarian movement in Winnipeg organized in the First Federated Church of the Icelanders in Winnipeg. Consequently the Quill Lake congregation joined the Federated Church movement. On Main Street in Wynard still stands the Federated Church--A Provincial Heritage site. In the early years, since it was the biggest building in town, it was used extensively as a meeting place for large groups. As a child I remember going to services there that were strictly in Icelandic. When my sister's first child was baptised in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, my dad remarked that he didn't really enjoy the service since he couldn't understand a word of Ukrainian. Mom smiled and said now maybe you understand how non-Icelandic speaking folk felt at the Icelandic service in the Unitarian Church.


People from Argyle, Manitoba largely settled the Kandhar-Dafoe district. Most of these people had lived in the Argyle district for a considerable length of time and left only because they were attracted to the open spaces of the new district. The town of Dafoe on the western edge of the settlement was incorporated in 1920 as a village and there seems to have been little Icelandic/Canadian presence in the village except for a storekeeper named Bjorn Bjornson who was in the hardware business for some years. In 1910, two men from Argyle, Torfi Steinson and Kristjan J. Hjalmarson started a general store in the hamlet of Kandahar. From that time on

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Icelanders have been in different kinds of businesses in what was for some years a thriving village.

By the turn of the century, the North Dakota colonies of Icelanders had become over populated. They heard about land in Saskatchewan and a delegation investigated in 1904. They selected the area south of Little Quill and east of Bill Quill Lake, which was slightly higher and not as open as the land farther west and therefore better suited for mixed farming. They stopped at Yorkton and filed homesteads for themselves and by proxy for a number of friends and relatives in North Dakota. This exodus from North Dakota was in 1905 and 1906. Special trains were engaged for this purpose. In May 1905 the first train, consisting of two coaches filled with people and thirty-six box cars loaded with livestock and other effects arrived in Wadena, the nearest railway station at the time. The second train arrived in 1906 at Quill Lake then these people travelled south between the two lakes. Settlers kept flocking in, and by 1907 most of the better land open for homesteading had been taken up. The CPR reached Wynyard in 1908. Because of its strategic location, Wynyard attracted a number of non-Icelandic businesses and professional men. As a result, the Icelandic element has always been in a minority, but yet the Icelanders exercised their full share of influence in the town and district.

One of the first men to arrive in Mozart district was John S. Laxdal. He had homesteaded in the Morden, Manitoba area and bought a half section just west of Birch Creek in 1903. This area became the Gardar district and soon after the railroad was built in 1908, merged with the larger Mozart district. Mozart quickly became very community minded and is known for that to this day. It is the only community that I know of that has held a 1st Day of Summer celebration every year since 1912.

In 1903, five settlers arrived in the Elfros district. In 1905 about 15 more families arrived and most of the rest of the settlers came within the next two years. In Elfros the two main groups were either Scottish Presbyterians or Icelandic Lutherans. Neither group could afford a



PHOTO BY ERIC OLAFSON

Amma's House Bed & Breakfast.

church so they joined forces and built the Union Church. It was consecrated at a joint ceremony under the auspices of the two synods. The two groups got along very well. Eric Stephanson, a founder of Vatnabyggd Club of the Icelandic National League was a resident and mayor of Elfros. In Elfros today there stands a statue depicting our early Icelandic pioneers. The Vatnabyggd Club commissioned this statue and Hans Holtkamp sculpted it.

From *The Saskatchewan Icelander; A Strand of the Canadian Fabric* by Valdimar Lindal, "Thus there was great variety in the lakes settlement. In the east, around Foam Lake, there was quiet assurance, based on the wealth of experience in the district itself. In the centre, people had gathered from different areas, not in large numbers from any one. Here progress has been slower because of the brushwood and sloughs; mixed farming with its toil had to be chosen. Then there was the dash of the west part of the settlement. In the Wynyard district were men who felt that in North Dakota they had greatly benefited from contacts with people in a State that was part of a large rapidly advancing country. Slightly farther west were young farmers from Argyle, which for years had been regarded as "the finest Icelandic agricultural district." They sought quick returns from the expanse of the prairie soil and did not hesitate to limit themselves to the production of grain. These diverse elements of the east and west of one Icelandic settlement when blended, created an amalgam with qualities far beyond what the individ-

ual or the group had anticipated, qualities which provided needed strength and unity in the years that lay ahead."

This area has a rich history in the arts, entertainment and sports, literature, poetry, music and live theatre. All were very important to the original settlers. The Vatnabyggd area developed many excellent sports teams, friendly and not so friendly rivalries quickly developed.

Our Icelandic ties are still strong. My nephew, Ryan Leier has spent the last two years in Iceland playing basketball for a club team. He brought me back an Icelandic hockey sweater which has a tiny maple leaf at the bottom of the crest. This is in honour of the Winnipeg Falcons, the Canadian team that won the first ever hockey gold medal in France in 1920. The Falcons were an all-Icelandic team, except for the goalie, that was formed since no one else would play the "goulies". Canada has had excellent success over the years in International hockey, but the Winnipeg Falcons were the first. Typical of Icelanders, it didn't matter that the Falcons were in Winnipeg, we considered them our team and still do.

Ties to Iceland are many and varied. For example, in 1913, Paul Bjarnason, a car dealer and realtor in Wynyard bought a Ford car and shipped it to Iceland and so began the era of the automobile in Iceland.

The Vatnabyggd area could be seen as a microcosm of our Saskatchewan Province. Originally it was homesteaded and heavily populated in the rural areas. As time has gone on, rural villages, and hamlets have declined and larger trading centres with some industry have developed. Today in the west of the area, Dafoe and Kandahar have all but disappeared. But Wynyard continues to thrive and prosper. Saskatchewan's most important export and contribution to the rest of Canada have been our people. The Vatnabyggd area is no different. Some of the ideas and beliefs that were developed in this area contributed to a society that values co-operative achievement of my fellow countrymen and compare them with those of other people, I cannot but reach the conclusion that Icelanders are a step ahead of others in

community activities.

Icelanders in the area were movers and shakers in the early community as farmers, merchants, entrepreneurs, professionals, artists and poets. They continue to be so to this day. H. J. Halldorson wrote in 1948 about the Vatnabyggd residents, "From my own experience I can bear witness to it that from the time of settlement in this community, especially from the spring of 1905, it may be said that there has been general well-being among people all through and probably is so yet, according to reliable reports."

I believe that in all of us we have an inheritant innate subconscious knowledge passed on by our forefathers. I can imagine that the open prairie and wide open skies of the Vatnabyggd area against the shores of the Lakes appealed to our pioneers deep in their souls and made them feel at home.

What did I learn as an Icelandic/Canadian growing up and living in the Vatnabyggd area?

Christopher Columbus as a "Johnny come lately" by a few hundred years.


Other kids had grandparents, I had Afis and Ammas.

Skyr is good but hardfish is better

Where is Winnipeg? Just south of Gimli!

It is hard to explain, but I always knew that being Icelandic was special. Being proud of who you are and where you came from is something I was taught from the day that I was born.

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Leo Kristjanson

A great and humble man

by *Tammy Axelsson*

When I returned with my family to my hometown of Gimli in 1995, I was fortunate to have met Leo Kristjanson. At that time, it would have been difficult not to have met him as he was everywhere and involved in everything and anything that was a good and worthy cause.

Leo had returned home to Gimli with his wife Jean, just a few years earlier. In 1989, he stepped down as president of the University of Saskatchewan, just one year before the end of his second five-year term due to health issues related to Parkinson's disease. Leo was awarded the Order of Canada, for the incredible impact he had on life at the University during his time there. He also received other notable honours for his leadership and vision, among them are the Lieutenant-Governor's medal of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Winnipeg and he was installed in the Saskatchewan Agriculture Hall of Fame.

Getting to know Leo, and his brother Larry, has been an education for me. Watching them in action over the years, with whatever project they may have been working on at the time, was like watching artists with a canvas. They set about a task with single minded determination and systematically make it happen.

In my eyes, Leo was forever the teacher. He overcame the obstacles of Parkinson's disease in a way that was aweinspiring. The thought of giving in never seemed to cross his mind, and if it did, he never let on. I remember watching him at work with a power drill, seeing him climb the tiny spiral staircase to add finishing touches to the Huldufolk attic and then hopping into his truck and driving to the lumberyard for more supplies. Simple tasks for those of us fortunate enough to be able bodied, but each one was a feat of

sheer willpower for Leo. The lesson he taught every time he came out to greet a new day, was one of strength, hope, patience and boundless courage. Through it all, his sense of humour was ever present. I saw people who were at times taken aback by his sheer presence, this very tall, kind, man with Parkinson's, disguised as a carpenter. He would tell them he was the only real "mover and shaker" in this town. He always knew what to say to make others feel at ease.

He loved his Icelandic heritage, the language, folklore, history and stories of this area and its people. He set out to ensure that this rich and unique history would always be proudly preserved and presented to residents, former-residents and visitors to Manitoba, and at that he has succeeded. His influence can be seen throughout our community, in the preservation of the "Old School", in the giant chess board at the Leo Kristjanson Friendship Garden, in the story of the Huldufolk and their attic home he so meticulously created. The Lake Winnipeg Visitor Centre, the restoration of the Unitarian Church, the New Iceland Heritage Museum and the designation of the Gimli Park Pavilion as a municipal heritage building, the list goes on and on. It was at Leo's initiative that the event of the establishment of New Iceland was recognized federally as a National Historic Event.

He strongly supported the arts in the schools and in the community. He was a driving force in the establishment of the Evergreen Band Boosters, a committee organized to ensure the continuation of the school music program in Gimli and Winnipeg Beach when it was at risk of being eliminated. The results of these efforts speak volumes, the band program is thriving and now has 250 students. The



Leo in the 1960s.

Band Boosters committee has raised over \$100,000 for the purchase of instruments and music scholarships so that all students have equal opportunity to discover the joy of music.

The Gimli Public Art Committee was another project dear to his heart. The formation of this committee will ensure that Gimli has a public art collection for future generations to enjoy. And yet, with all of these accomplishments, he never sought to be in the limelight, rather he was content to let others shine with the success of the undertakings he spearheaded. He quietly advised and encouraged those around him. He wanted them to discover their own potential. He brought out the best in peo-

ple and he took quiet pleasure in the achievements of those he mentored. Forever the teacher.

Over the last ten years, Leo has been a constant for me, he was always there. When I was unsure of myself or the path I should take at work or personally, I could always talk to Leo. He was never judgmental, he would patiently listen and then calmly reply with sage advice. He was a friend and a confidant and it has been my privilege to know this great and humble man.

Editor's Note: We deeply regret the passing of Leo Kristjanson. The committee had been working on an interview with Leo for an upcoming magazine. It is not our policy to print obituaries but we felt that we still wanted to address Leo's stature and his commitment to our community.

Þjóðræknisfélag Íslendinga í Vesturheimi



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The Ferry Repossessed

Final instalment

Told by Erling Palsson, Gudjon Valgeirsson and Valentinus Olason at Akranes, Iceland

The conclusion of the adventures of three Icelandic men who have themselves been involved in an international scheme to salvage a ferry boat out of Greece. Will they be caught?

Leaving Messina

On Monday morning the Turks left us. Johan did well with them, paid them a large fee and travel costs. They had never in their lives received so much money for their work. We said goodbye to them with regret, for they had become good friends of ours. They took a ferry to Italy and then a train to Rome, where they went on a plane to Istanbul.

Now we needed to provide oil, water, provisions, chart and other things to continue our trip. We didn't have much luck. All doors seemed to be closed. No service available. Finally we met a shipbroker that took on our case. At last things started to happen and we got everything we needed. The chart we got was inaccurate, there was no information on lighthouses. Erling and Valentinus visited a Russian ship that was in the harbour where they got the charts we needed.

At 17.00 hrs on Monday, 13 June, we sailed out of the harbour in Messina. We were as pleased to leave there as we had been to get there the day before. We sailed north from the Channel of Messina and headed for the island of Stromboli. Just after midnight we were close by the island.

Erling was in the bridge and Gudjon down in the engine room, but Erling and Valentinus took turns at the bridge. Gudjon came upstairs and told Erling that he had seen a gleam of light in the distance behind the ship. They looked out for it, but didn't see anything, so Gudjon went back down below. Erling kept on watching out

for something unusual. All of a sudden he saw an enormous, red flame towards Sicily, like from an explosive eruption. That was very impressive to see in the dark. Later we heard that the volcano Etna had erupted at that time. That explained the flame.

Drug Search

From Stromboli we headed for Bonifacio Channel between Corsica and Sardina. Things were quiet on the way there but when we got to the channel we heard a storm warning on the radio. From our earlier experience we decided to sail to harbour. We didn't dare go through another storm on the ferry if we could avoid it.

The nearest harbour was Bonifacio on south Corsica. We called there and asked for permission to land. The answer was that we could come in if we thought we were able to get into the harbour, which was very narrow and could be difficult to sail into on such a big ship.

After getting information on the harbour and how to approach, we decided to attempt to sail in. The waves were getting bigger and the storm was obviously about to hit. The pilot wouldn't sail out to us because of the waves. We waited for a while, but then a ferry from Sardinia came



along and we followed it in to the harbour. We managed that easily and just after noon on Wednesday, 15 June we landed.

Bonifacio is one of the most beautiful places we had ever seen. The harbour is a kind of a crevice into the land around 200-300 meters above sea level. It first lies straight in but then turns along side the shore to the east. Therefore it is well defended and safe once in and it is very popular among yachtmen. The town itself lies around 200 meters above the harbour on a mountainside, surrounded by old scarps. On the seaside the houses are built straight up from a 300 meter high cliff, 5-6 levels. Down by the harbour is a row of houses built by the root of the cliff, mostly restaurants and hotels.

Gerne, our ferry, was the biggest ship ever to land there, so it got a lot of attention as could be expected, especially because it sailed under a Turkish flag. When we had finished preparing everything and were about to go on land, the customs came on board. They had just finished inspecting the ferry from Sardinia. They seemed surprised to see the crew, a Belgian, Frenchman and three Icelanders. We had plenty of beer, wine and food. We offered them refreshments and they accepted some beer. They inspected the ship and found it particularly sound. Then they said goodbye and left the ship.

At that time most of the excitement we had felt during the journey was evaporating. The further we got the more difference we found in people's manners and how much easier it was to get what we needed.



In a way it felt like a burden had been thrown off our shoulders. In Sicily we were always alert and never felt safe. Therefore, we felt good when we wandered to land, sat down in the nearest cafe and ordered a beer. We had only been sitting there for a short while when a police car came down the street and stopped by us. The chief of police in Bonifacio was in the car. He called Philippe and asked him to go with them.

The rest of us stayed. We were quite calm and expected them back in a short while, but time passed and we were getting restless. What kept Philippe? To tell the truth, we didn't expect any inquiries at that point, but you never know. After some discussion and consideration we decided to check on things, so we went back to the pier. When we got there an unpleasant sight awaited us. A large group of customs and police officers were getting off the ship. They had searched all over, turned everything around and inspected the luggage. At first we were surprised by all this, but then we realized what the purpose of such extensive inspection was. They were of course looking for drugs, which were being smuggled everywhere. Gudjon had a handbag with a double bottom, which obviously was considered suspicious. It was examined very carefully and literally x-rayed. We had no idea what could be hidden in the ship, so we were relieved, when all this was over.

This particular ship and the inspection brought attention to us and people obviously watched our steps closely. Johan meant to sell the ferry, in fact he had tried to do so in Sicily without success. Here he got in contact with a dis-cotheque owner that was interested in the case. Further discussions were planned for the evening at his dis-cotheque. We were all invited there with Johan. When we got there we were shown to a table in the corner. They offered us whiskey, but Johan, Philippe and the owner went aside to dis-

cuss business matters.

We were offered unlimited amount of whiskey and that got us drowsy, because we were very tired after staying awake standing on our feet and from the excitement of the last few days. This was a pleasant evening with gentle music and relaxation. Late in the night Johan came and told us that the sale would not go through, because the price offered was not high enough. Later he regretted not having sold the ship for the price he could get for it there.

We stayed in Bonifacio all Thursday and were well taken care of. Now we could all call home and talk to our families without risk of being captured. That was a great relief. Staying in this beautiful town was very pleasant.

By noon on Friday, 17 June we left Bonifacio and headed for the last part of the journey, to Toulon, France. Sailing there doesn't take long we got there without any problems in beautiful weather. We landed in Toulon early Saturday morning, 18 June.

At Last

Once again Johan asked us to take the ferry further. He said that he wanted to take it to another harbour for storage. But now he couldn't persuade us anymore. We were determined that this was enough, as we figured we had fully kept our part of the agreement. To tell the truth we were exhausted, both physically and mentally after all this. At the end of the trip we had cramps and pains in our legs from standing on the bridge by the wheel for many hours at a time.

Now was the time to leave. We got everything done that was needed on board, and then took the first train to Marseilles. From there we took the express train to Paris.

We arrived there on Saturday night after a wearying train trip. We went by car to Belgium to Johan's home. We got a fantastic welcome there and stayed there for a few days. We were well taken care of. We also visited friends we have in Belgium, France and Luxembourg.

Everything has an ending, and so did

those good days. We flew home from Luxembourg on Friday, 24 June. By then we had been away from home for three weeks on a journey that was supposed to take one week. We were very happy to meet our families and friends back home. It was good to be with them again.

The ferry was moved from Toulon to the harbour of Portle Cat on the south coast of France. There it lay for two years. Many people showed interest in buying the ship, but it never sold. In spring of 1986, Johan handed it over to its controller in Portle Cat. As far as we know it was finally sold as scrap iron. That surely was a sad ending after all the trouble Johan went through. He would have been better off taking the low offer in Bonifacio.

When reading this story one can't help but wonder about a few things. For example, why didn't the Turkish military command in Famagusta do anything about the ferry being taken away? Rumour said that it had been used for smuggling and moving military equipment between Turkey and Cyprus.

But what are Erling, Gudjon and Valentinus's final words on this adventure? Are they ready to go another one?

They don't want to say anything about that, but point out that when they agreed to this assignment, it was supposed to be one week's cruise on the Mediterranean. They thought the trip was going to be comfortable and legal in every way. This proves that you can never tell what the next day may bring.

(Written in May 1987)

Rev. Stefan Jonasson

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Hofn of Vancouver

by Kristjana Magnusson Clark

It was an emotional day of remembering Hofn and all it had stood for, when members of the Icelandic Hofn Society Board, Solskin members, family staff members and people in the Icelandic community around Vancouver gathered together at Hofn on May 15, 2005 for an Anniversary Celebration. With the imminent closure and demolition of Hofn as an Icelandic Care Home, to be replaced by a new Assisted Living facility, all who attended had many and varied memories of Hofn. For so many years it had been a gathering place for the Icelandic community; it had been the last home for many parents and loved ones; it had resounded with music whenever the Solskin Ladies hosted parties for the residents and it had been the meeting place for the Hofn Society Board members whose objective at all time was the well being of the residents in this haven of care.

The dream of establishing an Icelandic Old Folks Home in the Vancouver area began in 1944 when a group of Icelanders met to discuss the matter. Twelve people from this core group were selected to devise methods of raising money for this project as well as to approach the Betel Foundation for financial help. In 1946 a letter was received from the Betel Foundation, promising \$10,000 towards an Old Folks Home. At this time Solskin donated \$1,000 towards the Home fund, in addition to the \$500 they had the previous year. All the Icelandic groups in Vancouver area, among them the Falcon, Strondin and Ljomalind, held fundraising events such as tombolas and concerts. The Solskin Ladies walked the streets of Vancouver with the battle cry "Help us to furnish a room for our Home". The dream of establishing an Old Folks Home was shaping up to become a reality.

In 1946 the first meeting of the

Icelandic Home Society was held at the home of Carl Frederickson and the first draft of a Constitution was drawn up by H. F. Halldorson. Each Icelandic organization was asked to appoint a delegate to the new Icelandic Home Board. All meetings would be conducted in Icelandic. Through fundraising events the Icelandic Home Society opened up with a bank account of \$1,164. Negotiations were in place with the Lutheran Synod who had promised \$10,000 provided the Board could match that amount. Solskin promised another \$1,000 and a government grant of \$3,600 would be available. With these funding arrangements in place the Constitution for the Icelandic Home was drawn up on April 29, 1947 and plans were underway to purchase property for a Home for the elderly.

That year a stately mansion at 3498 Osler Street in Vancouver came on the market and was purchased by the Icelandic Home Society for \$36,000. This residence had been owned by Mr. Frank Buckley who had named it the "Iowa" in memory of his birthplace. It was a majestic building that had hosted numerous elegant parties for diplomats and dignitaries. In 1937 it had been leased to the Vancouver Hotel and renamed the Shaughnessy Hotel. During the second World War it had operated as an Annex for military and diplomatic personnel in Vancouver. In 1947 this beautiful home became the Icelandic Old Folks Home and was officially opened as such on October 5, 1947. The Solskin ladies hosted an Open House, Tea and Concert on this auspicious day.

To walk into this stately mansion gave one a feeling of awe at its beauty; the magnificent reception hall, panelled in white oak; the charming living room in rich, red mahogany, with its mahogany fireplace which had been carved by a Scottish craftsman with the words "East-West, Hame's



PHOTO COURTESY OF KRISTJANA MAGNUSSON CLARK

Original mansion on Osler St., Vancouver, British Columbia

Best," the beautiful stained and leaded glass windows and the numerous fireplaces throughout the house. This Osler Home, as it was so often referred to, had twenty-two rooms, as well as a suite in the basement for the caretaker and a sitting room in the attic, which served as the maids' quarters.

The first Matron of this Icelandic Old Folks Home was Bjorg Thompson, who received a salary of \$100 per month. Kristina Skordal was the first cook at a salary of \$50 per month. That first year there were twenty-one residents in the Home and their payments were \$30 per month. One of the residents listed was not old enough for the pension so she worked at the Old Folks Home until such time as she received her pension. All the residents were Icelandic so Icelandic was always spoken and the church services were held in Icelandic.

The first Christmas party at the Osler Home was held on December 21, 1947. Olof Eyford, whose husband, Herman Eyford would later serve on the Icelandic Home Society Board, remembers attending that party;

"It was an exciting time as it was the first Christmas party at Osler Home. To enter this beautiful Home gave you a feeling of "ah-h-h". It was an elegant old structure, all decked with Christmas decorations and resounding with festive carol music. It was a wonderful welcome for the Seniors. Special for them was the enjoyment they got from seeing the little children, here and there throughout the house. Noi Bergman, dressed up as Santa Claus, handed out presents to all the residents and conducted everyone in singing around the Christmas tree."

That first Christmas the Icelandic tradition of serving *sukkulad* (hot chocolate) to the residents started and this was kept up through Hofn's history. Mr. Thorlacius donated the Christmas tree and continued to do so for many years. People in the Icelandic community donated fresh fruit, vegetables and fish, as well as furnishings for the Home.

Solskin members would gather at Osler Home to make quilts and to mend and sew items for the Home; some gath-

ered to clean up whatever needed cleaning. It became a community endeavour to show pride in their Old Folks Home on Osler.

By January of 1948 there were twenty four residents in the Osler Home and only \$10,000 was owed on it. In June of 1948 the name Hofn, which means haven or harbour, was selected as the name of the Old Folks Home although many still referred to it as the Osler Home. Some alterations were made to the Home to accommodate the new residents and a large room on the main floor became the sick bay. Entertainment for the residents was provided by the various Icelandic clubs in the area. The Osler home had become a wonderful gathering place for the Icelandic community as well as a comfortable haven for the elderly residents.

In October of 1957 there was a 10th Anniversary Celebration at Osler home, sponsored by the Solskin Ladies. Thora Orr wrote about the refreshment served on that day; "We made skyr from thirty gallons of buttermilk and served it by dish and by carton. A large number of people gathered at Hofn that day and kept our Solskin members busy, dishing up skyr and other Icelandic delicacies. The rooms were decorated with numerous vases of autumn flowers supplied by the Solskin Ladies."

During the 1950s more Icelandic residents required accommodation. It became apparent to the Icelandic Home Society that Osler Home would need to be enlarged or else property secured to build a new Icelandic Home. By 1960 plans were underway to build a new Icelandic Home. At that time the Icelandic Hofn Society had assets of \$37,739. The City of Vancouver had opened up an area on South Marine Drive for Senior Citizens Homes. The Hofn Board placed a bid on property in that area. While these plans were underway the Lands Department requested a letter from Solskin Ladies who had been great supporters of Hofn, stating that they would continue to support the future Icelandic Home Hofn. The Solskin Ladies agreed to this and they sent letters out to all Icelanders in the area. This resulted in additional funds of \$10,000 towards the Home Building Fund. Through the efforts of the

building committee of J. S. Johnson, Oscar Howardson, Chris Eyford, Geir Zoge, Leo Sigurdson and Victor Thorson, as well as the support of the Icelandic community, the dream of building an Icelandic Home became a reality.

On September 24, 1961, President Asgeirsson of Iceland was present to break the sod for the new building, which henceforth would become known as Hofn on Harrison Drive. It was a proud day indeed for the Icelandic community to see their dream evolving. A reception was held at the Hofn Home on Osler for the President of Iceland, as well as for those who were involved in this venture.

Over the next two years the Icelandic community groups continued to canvas for the Hofn Building Fund, when the Hofn Society asked for support in taking up a loan of \$50,000 in order to complete the exterior and some of the interior of the first two wings of the new Hofn. As more funds would become available another wing would be added so that Hofn could accommodate sixty residents as well as the Matron and staff of six. During these various stages of building the Icelandic community rallied to the need for help, both financially and physically, providing hours of time, talent and energy. An inventory was taken of all the supplies at Osler House and people in the Icelandic community donated numerous items to the new Home, including a stove from Oscar and Helga Howardson, a television set from Olive Chambers; a Curlo Board and games table from Mervyn Chambers and Wayne Johnson; luggage and blankets from Bjorg Indridason; forty cups and saucers from Chrissie Anderson; tables for the recreation room from Leonard Thorson; a pool table from Dr. Steinson; numerous items from the homes of Matta Frederickson and Lil Summers; a television set from Dr. Thorleifson; jewellery from Mrs Fjeldsted and garden furniture from Solskin. The official opening of Hofn on Harrison drive showcased the generosity and hopes of the Icelandic community.

It was indeed a great day when the residents were moved from the Osler Home Hofn, to the new Icelandic Home Hofn on

Harrison drive. The official opening took place on April 28, 1963, with Sig Sigmundson officiating and with Emily Thorson, who had served as Hofn Society Board and Solskin Treasurer for many years, cutting the ribbon. Consul John Sigurdson and several government officials attended this momentous occasion. Sigurbjorn Sigurdson directed the male voice choir with musical selections.

Over the years the Hofn Board members worked tirelessly at serving on several committees involved in the operation of Hofn. In 1968 the federal government requested that a beneficiary be named in the event that the current Hofn Board of Directors ceased to function. In 1968 a motion was passed that Solskin be incorporated under the Societies Act in order to be named as beneficiary to Hofn. This was finalized and passed in April of 1969.

By late 1969 eight new rooms, as well as additions to the kitchen and recreation room had been completed. Donations to Hofn continued to come in: Icelandic



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books from established Icelandic clubs, \$6,000 from the Albright Society, garden plants and trees from Ocean Park Nurseries owned by the Sam Johnson family. Christmas trees from Walter Menne whose mother was a resident at Hofn, money from C.P. Air Employees Fund, estate funds from Cecilia Reid and families who had parents as residents at Hofn.

All in all, Hofn became a repository of the the generosity of Icelandic families and other groups as well.

Special gifts to Hofn have included the Icelandic flag flown at Hofn, donated by Sella Baldwinson in memory of her husband Fusi, a World War I veteran, to whom a flag had always been an important symbol. Another special gift was a curio cabinet from Bertha Jones who was a resident at Hofn. This became known as Aunt Bertha's Curio Cabinet and housed various memorabilia. People would ask Bertha, who was born in Iceland, how she came by the name Jones. When she had gone through immigration she was asked what her name was and replied, "Bertha Jonsdottir." At this the immigration officer looked nonplussed and asked, "Jones?" and thenceforth she became known as Bertha Jones.

Another lasting gift to Hofn was a beautiful, polished Grandfathers Clock, donated by Lil Summers in memory of her husband Leifur, who had served as President of the Hofn Society Board at one time. The clock had been his retirement gift from co-workers at Eaton's in Winnipeg. One of the Hofn residents, Mrs. Gladys Screeton, donated \$31,000 towards the

purchase of a bus for tours and outings, with the balance of the bus cost financed by Solskin.

By the late 1970s numerous Old Folks Homes in the Vancouver area were coming under the Government Medical Plan. The Scandinavian Homes, including Hofn, were opposed to this, as a group, but by 1981 further renovations were required at Hofn to allow for Extended Care. In 1983 Hofn officially became a long-term care facility, under government subsidy for sixty four residents and an increased staff. Now social workers and activity co-ordinators looked after entertainment for the residents. For a while it looked as if Solskin's role of holding birthday parties and entertainment for the residents had become redundant. Fortunately, this did not happen as the Solskin Ladies hosted innumerable events at Hofn, such as a Luncheon reception for President Kristjan Eldjarn of Iceland and his entourage in 1975 and an afternoon reception when President

Vigdis Finnbogadottir visited Vancouver. In fact, Solskin continued to provide entertainment for the residents parties as well as donating funds through casinos, for numerous costly projects at Hofn.

A special event took place at Hofn in August of 1976 when residents Clara Mathilda Balcombe and Earl Batstone were married at Hofn, with a B.C. Television camera crew on hand to film this noteworthy event which was shown on television. On another day, a sunny, spring morning in 1979, the residents at Hofn heard the



Icelandic Care Home, Hofn, on Harrison Drive (approx. 1963).

stirring music of the bagpipes as centenarian Elizabeth McIntyre followed a tartan-clad Scottish piper to her 100th birthday breakfast. Scottish dancers provided entertainment at this special birthday celebration at Hofn.

During the early 1980s the cost per resident was \$40.87 per day. Alterations were needed at Hofn to bring it up to government standards as a Personal Care Home facility. At a cost of \$1,000,000 these alterations included an elevator, handicapped bathrooms and additional staff as care was extended to Intermediate Care and Extended Care. A Residents' Council was formed at Hofn and over the years, with the help of recreation staff members like Frances Johnson and Christine Buttkus, the residents put out a monthly Newsletter, which showcased the numerous activities such as gardening, singing and day trips enjoyed by the residents.

It is interesting to note that Ted Neely, who had been maintenance man at Hofn for many years, left his job there to attend a Theological School. After he graduated he would come back sometimes on Sundays to conduct a religious service there. In 1986 a resident of Hofn, Mrs. Maude Ross, celebrated her 103rd birthday.

The Icelandic Care Home Hofn had a reputation as a caring and well kept facility for its residents. It was kept scrupulously clean and well maintained under the effi-

cient Administrator Marlene Wynes and her staff of Business Manager Albert Teng, Director of Care Rosemarie Ang and General Maintenance Jerry Chiasson. In 1989 Hofn was awarded the Best Practice Award in acknowledgement of outstanding contribution in improving the quality of life of the older person.

Over the years the residents coming into Hofn were more disabled as the elderly were moving into Care Homes at a later stage in their lives, than in previous years. By that time many were in need of more personal care so more staff was needed as well as more volunteers to provide activities to stimulate and enhance their lives. Wait lists at Hofn declined, due to shared rooms as all the newer Homes had single rooms. At this time Hofn had twenty two single rooms and twenty one shared rooms. Prospective clients or families would come and look at the Hofn Home. They loved the fine quality of the common areas such as the dining room, the rec room and the beautiful Solskin Garden but the drawback was the lack of single rooms.

In the mid 1990s major changes were occurring in the province of British Columbia regarding the future of Boards of non profit Societies. This became a big concern of the Scandinavian Boards, including the Hofn Society Board, all of whom had dedicated years of time and energy to create a haven of care for their elderly. The Scandinavian Group Societies discussed

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measures as to how they could help one another in the event of failure of one of their Societies. Each Society had been asked to work under a common umbrella.

The Icelandic Society Board felt their facility needed another storey to allow for more single rooms to be added or else a new facility would have to be built, at a cost of \$6.4 million. They were informed that funds would not be available. The Regional Health Board's position was that the direction of Long Term Care would be to provide support the elderly in their own homes and that the last area of support would be for facility living. Their three year plan for long term care facilities stressed that Care Homes must do more with less money. A facility like Hofn would become a Service Provider with residents now coming in directly from hospitals and that Albert Teng would then have the position of Service Provider.

By 2003 Vancouver Coastal Health authority presented their plan of Assisted Living Concept and stated that the Icelandic Care Home Society could apply, along with British Columbia Housing and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority to build 75 to 125 new Independent Living units which would be available to Seniors of low or moderate income. As part of the partnership Hofn Society would provide the land, B.C. Housing would hold the mortgage and Vancouver Coastal Health authority would provide funding for the services seniors would need.

The Icelandic Care Home Hofn Society had to go through a great deal of soul searching and debate regarding this matter. The Hofn Home faced imminent closure as it no longer met building codes and needs of new residents. At a general meeting of the Hofn Society Board and members at large it was unanimously



Osler Home Hofn Board Executive 1948

Back row, left to right: Armann Bjornson, Halldor Halldorson, Gunnar Gudmundson, Oli Johnson, Eric Hall, Einar Harolds.

Front row, left to right: Alice LeMessurier, Dr. P.B. Guttormson, Gudmundur Gislason, Thora Orr.

decided that the existing building would be demolished, staff would be laid off and a new facility housing Independent Living units, designated as Assisted Living, would be built. The Administrator's position would be replaced by Albert Teng, who would become the Chief Executive Officer of the new facility. This new facility would work in conjunction with the Finnish Home next door, as stated in Administrator Marlene Wynes' remarks, given at her last meeting as Administrator of Hofn:

"This past year has been exciting and sad. We are excited about the prospect of the Icelandic Assisted Living project. We are excited about our partnership with the Finnish Home next door, where we will work together to form a Campus of Care in this area. This Campus of Care will mean sharing of resources and services wherever we can, benefiting each Society financially. The tenants of the Finnish Apartments will have the option to move to the Icelandic Assisted Living units if their need for support increases. In Assisted Living there will be staff to meet the tenants needs twenty four hours, seven days a week. Conversely, should the tenants in the Assisted Living units need more care they will have the option to move to the Finnish Residential Care Home where twenty four hour nursing staff is available. This is the Campus of Care."

Albert Teng, the only employee of the Hofn Society Board during and after closure of the Hofn Home, has provided the following detail on the projected new facility;

"The indestructible foundation on which we stand is our history, tradition, pride and commitment. This tradition will continue in our new Assisted Living Residence. There will be seventy-seven one bedroom units under Independent Living British Columbia without any private units strictly for Icelanders. Anyone, including Icelanders, who meet the health requirements and have lived in British Columbia for one year, will be eligible to live in our Assisted Living Residence. The admission process is based on a chronological list of applicants. The projected date of opening is

April 1, 2007. I look forward to the challenge ahead and I am excited about our new project because we can continue to improve the lives of our Seniors. Our tradition continues."

Over the years Hofn has been a showcase of generosity by the Icelandic community and by so many other dedicated people. The Hofn Society Board members have worked tirelessly, to the benefit of the residents in their care, under the capable leadership of the following Presidents: Carl Frederickson, G. F. Gislason, Leifur Summers, Sig Sigmundson, J. S. Johnson, Oscar Howardson, Chris Eyford, Franklin Eyford, Walter Thorfinnsson, Pall Johannesson, Ed Johnson, Pete Jonasson, Gwen Dowding, Erling Bjarnason, Herman Eyford, Bob Leeson, Ron Matthews and Brian Bjarnason. The numerous volunteers have been there to help with the residents on their Solskin bus outings and parties at Hofn. The Matrons/Administrators have capably maintained a caring home atmosphere for the residents.

These Matrons/Administrators have included; Bjorg Thompson, Mrs. Isaacs, Matta Frederickson, Mrs. S. Sigmar, May Stevens, Mrs. McDowell, Bina Sveinson, Winnie Krinky, Rene Johannesson, Angie Berg, Norma Kelsey and Marlene Wynes.

The Solskin Ladies have, from the very beginning of Hofn in 1947, to Solskin's dissolution in 2002, played an important role at Hofn in providing entertainment, love and innumerable gifts to the Icelandic Home. The following are brief recollections of Hofn by some of the Solskin members. Recollections of Hofn:

"I was glad to be invited to a barbeque party held at Hofn on May 15, 2005, but I must say I went with mixed feelings. As always, I was delighted to spend time with my dear friends, the Solskin Ladies, who are like my sisters. It was wonderful to see the staff members who have been so loyal to Hofn over many years and to see once again the families of people who have loved Hofn through all its phases of growth and change.

Needless to say, this was a very emo-

tional time because of the memories of the dreams, wonderful celebrations and hard work. I have so many memories of Hofn, where Solskin friends met at luncheon meetings, set up Christman trees and bought gifts for all the residents, baked for and served at birthday parties, bazaars and Teas. Hofn was a gathering place for the Icelandic community for so many years. It is hard for me to imagine that the building will close on June 30th, through no fault of any of us but rather, because of the changing times.

I am pleased that the name Hofn will live on and that the Hofn Society wants to build a new harbour for the elderly people needing Assisted Living. I am glad to hear that some of our cherished Icelandic artifacts will be preserved and the Solskin name will be kept. Even so, I feel a sadness that what was glorious and good has come

to an end. I hope in the future there will be sunshine again.”

- Helga Howardson.

“My husband Emil and I attended the opening of Hofn in April of 1963. We were both really impressed with that beautiful building, especially so with the high ceiled dining room, with its windows overlooking a spectacular view.

The Icelandic community was very generous with donations of money and a great deal of their time in helping to get the Home finished. I remember that we took sacks of vegetables from our garden to the Icelandic Home that fall. Someone else brought salmon from their fish boat in Steveston. In those day gifts like that were accepted by the Icelandic Home. The following year, 1964, I joined Solskin and over the years I have enjoyed the wonder-

ful fellowship and companionship of the Solskin Ladies who worked towards the betterment of the Icelandic Home, Hofn.

- Thordis Wilson.

“I always looked forward to the birthday parties, the music and the wonderful togetherness of our Solskin group whenever we got together at Hofn.”

- Anna Penway.

“When my friend Kristjana asked me to give some impressions of the Icelandic Care Home Hofn in Vancouver, she cautioned me the emphasis was to be on Hofn, not Solskin. To separate the Solskin Ladies from Hofn seemed rather daunting as my interaction with Hofn was through being a Solskin member. Those caring, dedicated ladies’ main objective was to enhance the lives of the residents at Hofn and this they continued to accomplish for the fifty-eight years of Hofn’s existence as an Icelandic Care Home.

Hofn sat high, overlooking the Fraser River. The view from the dining room was spectacular, a well chosen site by the Icelandic community so many years ago. It was scrupulously clean and well maintained. Sadly, it had many deficiencies such as wiring, plumbing and lack of proper earthquake protection; the halls were narrow and some bedrooms had to be shared, which did not sit well with prospective residents. More ambience was sought after, making Hofn, in later years, the target for the highest care patients, putting more strain on the caregivers and staff. The Administrator Marlene Wynes, was a capable woman who ran the Home for countless years with grace and professionalism, along with a good staff, some of whom had stayed on for twenty years or more.

The Hofn Society Board dedicated years of unwavering support to the Hofn Home. The final blow came when it was announced that the government would be withdrawing financial aid for upgrading and it was determined that Hofn would be torn down. It was a sad day for the Board and the Icelandic community. It will be replaced by an Assisted Living facility. Hopefully, the new home will be graced by

some of the affection and loyalty that was accorded Hofn in its fifty eight years of existence.”

- Sylvia Sigurdson.

“There has always been a feeling of welcome and warmth in the Icelandic Care Home Hofn.”

- Fjola Edge.

“One time back in 1981 Inga Skaftfeld asked me to go to a Solskin meeting with her. I enjoyed the meeting very much; the Solskin Ladies were all so welcoming and seemed so happy to be together to plan activities that would bring joy and comfort to the residents at Hofn. When they invited me to become a member it was easy to say yes and I hoped that I would become as industrious as they were.

It was very rewarding to work with the Solskin Ladies at our Bazaars, birthday and seasonal parties for the residents at Hofn. We all felt it was heartwarming and worthwhile to come to Hofn and work towards helping the residents. It was a labour of love for our Hofn.”

- Thelma Erlendson.

“There has always been a special spot in my heart for our Hofn Home, where love and caring prevailed.”

- Sylvia Wetten.

“Hofn will always be connected in my mind with our wonderful Solskin group, who have been like a second family, united in a bond of friendship and love.

Thoughts of Hofn remind me of the feeling of cleanliness as it always smelled fresh and well cared for. I loved the sunny dining room with its huge windows overlooking the Fraser River. I enjoyed the charming room which Marlene Wynes and her staff provided for our meetings, with the tables and chairs all in place; the pink tablecloths and the smell of the coffee perking as we entered the room for our Solskin meetings. My memories of Hofn are happy memories; memories of doing something to enrich the lives of the residents at Hofn and in the process enriching our own lives.”

- Kristjana Magnusson Clark.

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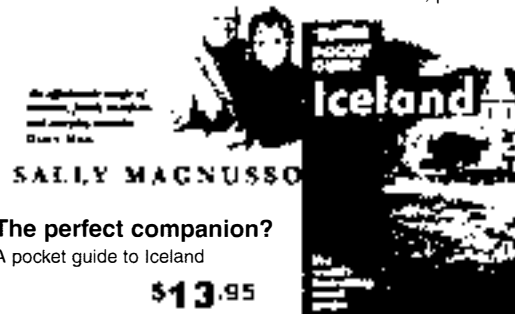
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"I joined Soskin in 1969 and enjoyed my years as a member working to enhance the lives of the residents at Hofn. Our bazaars there, held twice a year, involved work, but it was always so nice to meet people there and enjoy the companionship of the Solskin Ladies. Even today, we get together for lunch and a lot of happy and friendly talk."

- Olga Holm.

"While I sat in the Solskin Garden on May 15, 2005 my thoughts struggled with the loss that was coming up within the next few months. I was sitting with so many caring friends as we thought back to the many years of being Solskin members. This would be the last Anniversary party at Hofn, the last cake eaten there and the last barbeque enjoyed there.

My first thought was, "Why did the founding committee choose the word Hofn for the building they had in mind?" Hofn means harbour or refuge from imminent danger. Icelanders have, in the main, historically been sailors or in some way connected to the sea. From the old laws of Iceland the sick, elderly and the infirm have by law been allowed help and refuge. So perhaps harbour seems a very apt and realistic name, even for this day and age.

True to the high standards of the staff and personnel over the years Hofn has maintained its dignity and attained the highest accreditation every year. A credit to the Administrator and her staff. As this year ends the Solskin Ladies are saddened to lose the building Hofn, which has meant so much to them over so many years. This building has seen the loving care put into keeping it up; connecting with the residents with gifts, Christmas and birthday gifts and hosting parties. Hopefully the new facility will rise to meet a new set of government rules and regulations; hopefully, probably for a group with different needs, hopefully their needs will be met with the same patient loving care.

When I moved my husband Ivan from another Care Home to Hofn I did so with the sure knowledge that he would receive better and more personal care from all personnel. My feelings remain, as always, that

Hofn was indeed a refuge, a haven—Hofn."

- Geraldine Thorlakson.

As the Icelandic flag has been taken down, as the doors of Hofn have been closed for the last time and demolition takes place, the hopes and dreams that nurtured the Icelandic Care Home Hofn, will continue in another concept and place; the old Icelandic books from Hofn, some of which had come from Iceland in kofforts and the beautiful oak bookcases that housed them, now adorn the walls of the Icelandic Heritage Library at Iceland House; The Silver Tea Service and numerous cups and saucers, as well as other Solskin memorabilia are in use at Iceland House; the stove which Oscar and Helga Howardson donated to Hofn in 1963 now is used to make meals to needy people on Vancouver's East Side, due to the efforts of Aleck and Maria McKay, who are involved with the Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship Group. The upcoming Assisted Living facility will house Aunt Bertha's cabinet and memorabilia; the Hofn sign and Solskin Kitchen and Solskin Garden signs will become memorabilia; the grandfathers Clock will still chime at the new facility and Albert Teng's desk will still be in use; the Hofn Society Board will continue to play a role in the operation of the new facility. These will all be gentle reminders of the Icelandic presence, with its tradition of caring and compassion for all who are entrusted to their care.

The official groundbreaking ceremony for the Icelandic Assisted Living Residence took place on October 28, 2005, at 2020 Harrison Drive in Vancouver, with government dignitaries and a large crowd in attendance. This was the site of the Icelandic Care Home Hofn, which has now been demolished to make way for the new residence, slated to open in 2007.

Albert Teng, Executive Director of the Icelandic Care Home Hofn Society, acted as emcee, introducing dignitaries Honourable Ujjal Dosanjh, MP for Vancouver South and Minister of Health; Honourable Wally Oppal, MLA for

Vancouver-Fraserview and Attorney General. Heather Alda Ireland, Honorary Consul General for Iceland in British Columbia and the Yukon; Tim Stevenson, Councillor for the City of Vancouver; Maureen Whyte, Chief Operating Officer Vancouver Community, Vancouver Coastal Health; Brian Bjarnason, President of the Icelandic Care Home Hofn Society and Steven Peterson, a Potential Resident of the upcoming Assisted Living facility.

Following the Groundbreaking Ceremony lunch was served.

REFERENCES

Hofn Society Board Meetings, Reports and Minutes, 1947-2005

Solskin Memoirs, published 1992

Western Living Magazine October 1986 edition; an article on Osler House entitled *The Best Address* by Sandra MacKenzie

Robert Asgeirsson Photo Collection, Icelandic Archives of B.C.

POINT of INTEREST

In 1963 the Osler home was purchased by an Order of Nuns and used as a Nursing Home for several years. However, by that time strict regulations were in place and the nuns had to strip the walls of their panelling and also had to board up the fireplace in order to install regulatory fire walls. Thankfully, for the future owners, the nuns had carefully stored the panelling and beautiful fixtures in the basement, where

they were preserved. The next owner, Dr. Ernest Wong, who valued the beauty of this home, restored it to its original charm and elegance. Later it became the private and cherished residence of the Austin Hamilton family.

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Letters from Friðjón Friðriksson

Translated by Sigurbjörg Stefánsdóttir



Friðjón Friðriksson

Letter 22

Modruvellir, May 5, 1881

Dear Friends,

●nce again I turn my thoughts to you, and once again I ask God to bless you this summer and always. It is amazing how much I enjoy you, even if it is only possible through a letter. But why should I find this strange? Jonas Hallgrímsson's poem includes, after all, an absolute truth. Admittedly, he wrote it to a girl, but it applies just as well to men as it does to women.

Here comes a poem which I am not going to try to translate, but its theme is that close spiritual relationship does not need closeness in space.¹

Haa skilur hnetti
hímingeimur,
blá skiur bakka og egg;
en anda, sem unnast,
faer aldregi
eilífd að skilid

Spiritually, your company gave me a great satisfaction, and therefore my thoughts tend to wander to you. Letters sent on the first Icelandic mail boat this spring have not come yet, but then a lot of delays can be expected due to the mail boat's stranding around the middle of last winter. We learned about this accident in a letter that came from Reykjavík to Spain on a boat carrying salt. The ship that stranded was supposed to carry a letter to you from me. I have been very diligent in writing to you, and I hope that you have by now received many letters from me in spite of the initial difficulties. I cannot remember in detail what I told you in the lost letter, but I think it included a lot of information concerning people moving away from this settlement. Since then I have received a letter from Skapti. He reached his land in late March with his wife and their children, most of whom got there in good health. Travelling with Skapti were Sigurdur Kristofersson and Wm. Hearn (without their families). I expect to get more news from there little by little. I am very interested in following the new experiences of my friends, and I wish them all the best.

I have now been here at Icelandic River a little over a month. I like it here, even though I cannot make Gunnar of Hlidarendi's words mine: "Here I want to stay as long as I live." It is possible, nevertheless, that I will stay here until I die. At first my family and I stayed with Sigtryggur, but now we have taken over the household, and as usual we have "plenty of everything."

All of us who live in this house get along very well. Mrs. Holm (i.e. Torfhildur Holm) and I dispute a lot, each taking an opposite point of view, but the

outcome is always peaceful. She is very knowledgeable, sensible, and religious. We enjoy each other's company, but we are too different to become close friends. Rannveig is in good health and cheerful, but quiet. She is probably very reserved and single minded, but she is highly intelligent. At first she seems rather cold, but I am sure that she is warm-hearted. Since we came here she has been like the best of mothers to our children, and they love her like "uncle and aunt." My dear children develop nicely. I can see very clearly how their mental growth increases each day. My wife and I often wish that they could have the opportunity to see you once in a while. My brother Friðbjorn is staying with us, and we have a maid - so there are not too many people here yet, but we expect an engineer and a sawyer to work in the mill. These men will have their meals here, making it sort of crowded. That condition is not going to last long, though, since Mrs. Jonasson and Mrs. Holm move to Winnipeg soon after the two men come.

I dislike the fact that I only get mail and papers now and then. I certainly hope that the government grants a permit for mail delivery here to Modruvellir every two weeks. My father serves as a postmaster in Gimli for me.

This winter has been very bad: snow, frost, and storms throughout the northern part of the U. S. A. resulting in great difficulties in some regions, especially concerning firewood. You have probably read about all this in the Norwegian papers. Bjornstjerne Bjornsson (i.e. a Norwegian writer) has been travelling there this winter. His countrymen have lost a lot of respect for him. It is a pity that the man is not a Christian. He has declared himself non-Christian.

The Printing Company of New Iceland is currently idle. The board of directors has been asked to sell the press or lease it to someone willing to publish a paper for Icelanders. Icelanders in America must not be without a paper. Many are realizing the truth of this opinion of mine. It is, however, doubtful that such a publication can be operated at a profit. Why don't you think about this matter, my

friend, and then tell me about your conclusion.

The weather is good these days. The temperature is 40 - 50 degrees F, and the earth is coming alive. This colony has not seen any food shortage this winter, but there has been a lack of hay. Many farmers are keeping many head of cattle, some of which are totally valueless, and some of which have starved to death. There is plenty of fish these days.

None seems to care too much about social activities - each one is just thinking of himself.

Dear friends, I ask that you pardon this insignificant note and please, think of us as often as you can. My wife sends you her best, and the children, say: "God owns our aunt and uncle." I ask God to give you peace and happiness forever.

Your friend,
Friðjón Friðriksson

1. This is famous verse from an equally famous poem called *Ferdalok* by Jonas Hallgrímsson.

Letter 23
Modruvellir, New Iceland
August 11, 1881

Dearest Friend:

I find myself sitting at your editorial desk at Modruvellir. Reminding me of many happy moments with you, their owner, the chair and desk vicariously bring me closer to you. Well, I have come here to Modruvellir of my own free will and governed by my common sense which is still the same as ever. I point this out to you, especially to you my dear friend, to prevent you from being worried about my having taken leave of my senses. I and my family like it here very much. I have never in my life been more happy. It is not that I have everything here, I am never in this life going to have everything, but here I certainly have a great deal. I can feel Almighty God watching over me, the Saviour often comes to me, God's sky is above me and all

around me nature is beautiful and forever young.

I live here peacefully with a lovely wife and wonderful children; here I have plenty to do, and I can easily meet all our needs in life. Admittedly there is not too much company here, nor is there a lot of sympathy, but this place is totally without stuck-up big shots as well as depraved mob. Here people are submissive, unsophisticated, and slow. Here I can be number one, and that is what I like best. I hope that I can make my life fruitful and improve the lives of others.

During my last years in Gimli, my financial situation had become somewhat difficult. I had invested a lot in real estate before my relatives from Iceland arrived, and even though I didn't have to spend much money on them I still didn't like having to deprive myself of anything. Then I invested in Victoria (a boat). My store gradually declined and eventually came to an end. The Vidines settlement almost disappeared altogether. My houses fell in value, and now they are vacant and I would only be too glad to be able to sell them for \$200.00 or \$300.00 even though I paid \$1000.00 for them. New Iceland was certainly deteriorating and everyone was going downhill, myself included. My debts were enormous, but my credit record was excellent and I always managed to pay my bills on time. A lot of people owed me money which I had difficulty collecting, especially since some of these people were my friends and I did not want to put too much pressure on them.

Well, this describes the situation as it was last year, and there is no denying that I had become worried and sad. The idea that I could not pay my debts was especially hard on me. Then I went on a trip to trade with the Indians and that turned out to be profitable. The operation of Victoria also proved profitable, resulting in some improvement in our financial situation. However, this progress did not prevent us from realizing that it was time to leave New Iceland and take up a new job in a new place. Therefore, we added a new member to our company, (i.e. Osenbrugge) and decided to build a sawmill on the Icelandic River. I was asked to manage its

construction. Everything is going very well. The mill is almost finished and it is excellently built, thanks to a carpenter from Ontario who has worked for me this summer. Later this month we will start sawing 7,000 logs which lie waiting in the river. The Victoria has transported boards from the mill to Winnipeg, bringing us a nice profit. In general, the business is successful. The initial difficulties - brought about by lack of money - are fading even though we still have to deal with some issues due to insufficient money. Our property expands itself rapidly, however, and I have managed to keep my reputation as an honest businessman. With the help of God I hope to be able to maintain that reputation as long as I live.

I am going to stay here up north as long as it takes me to get everything well organized. Later I might be able to find a good replacement for myself, and I might even sell my share. By no means do I intend to stay up here for long.

This letter has become too lengthy and I don't write about my life in detail to anyone but you. Most think that I don't have any difficulties and that Lady Luck hands me everything without any effort on my part. I don't mind people believing this, but I thank God for everything that he does for me. If I am granted a long life, I intend to use the money which He gives me in order to do good.

Right now I have in front of me two letters from you, written on March 18 and May 20. These letters came here in late May and early July. The reason I have not written for so long is that I was trading with the Indians in late June and early July. My latest letter to you was written either in late May or early June. Since then my family and I have been well.

There is not much happening in New Iceland these days. There are only some 80 households left here. Everyone has enough food, but there is little or no progress.

Lake Winnipeg rose so much this spring that many expected disastrous flooding would force them to flee. Those who decided to stay sowed less than usual and sought employment in Winnipeg where salaries are very high now: \$2.00 -

\$2.50 a day. Lake Winnipeg has overflowed as usual, but no serious floods have occurred. I cannot remember any summer dryer than this one, so hay making goes very well, potatoes grow well, but not much in the way of grain or vegetables was planted.

Progress and social activities are not even discussed in New Iceland. Most intend to stay here only a few years, then move to some other place better suited for Icelanders. Others (they are not as many) intend to live and die here. These only expect food and clothing. All hopes of a purely Icelandic settlement in America are dead. Icelandic bigotry and conceit is fading, stupidity, narrow-mindedness, superstition, and conservatism is disappearing, and common sense and liberalism - both in worldly and spiritual matters - are gaining ground. Never have I been more optimistic about the revival of Icelanders in America than right now, but first the old Icelandic Adam - along with all his sins and bad desires - must be drowned, and then the new American can emerge, admittedly possessing some negative traits, but endowed with a lot of positive qualities that outshine the negative ones.

The positive transformation of Icelanders in North America started with their arrival here, and it is proceeding steadily. By now they recognize their own imperfections and seek improvement. At this stage they are bound to win in a country like America.

In order to prove that my words are not empty, I would like to point out that Icelanders in Winnipeg have built a cultural centre. The main building is 20 x 20 feet and there is an addition to it measuring 14 x 18 feet - tastefully put together. The main building is not yet completed, but meetings are nevertheless frequently held there. I have attended a few meetings among the Icelanders this spring and summer, and I see clearly their improvement in sensibility and liberalism. Helgi Jonsson donated the property for the house, but the construction work was financed by collections. There is still a mortgage on this building.

Helgi, Jon Julius, and Magnus Palsson work together like brothers, aiming at

improving social activities and progress among Icelanders in Winnipeg. Helgi and Jon used to insult each other all the time, and Jon used to work hard at destroying cooperation and unity of any sort.

Many Icelanders in Winnipeg make hefty profits by buying lots for houses, and also by working at jobs that are now well paid. Some have made \$400 - \$600 this spring by buying and selling property, but in my opinion their improved way of thinking is of much more value. "The opening of the colony" - or in other words improving communication with other nationalities - is, as you said, "vital." Everyone will realize this before long.

Bjorn Jonsson is now in Winnipeg, employed as a day labourer. He manages but doesn't make any profits. The "Loyalists" (to use your word, dear friend) are content. The core of our group is following them, and more are bound to join them.

My father has come here and taken land. He is staying with Skafti for the time being. Bjorn will go west this spring. My brother Arni has come from Dakota for good. He is eager to sell his land as he felt he didn't belong there and the farm work didn't agree with him. My brother Olgeir is on a "cattle drive" for Penrose far west in N. W. T. Fridbjorn is staying with me. He is now married to Sigrídur, a good and rather promising young girl, the daughter of Jon Bergvinsson. I believe that Fridbjorn is going to be my first choice for an overseer here when the time comes that I don't care to stay any longer at Modruvellir.

Sigurdur, my father-in-law, and Fridsteinn live in Winnipeg, and Rebekka and her children also live there. I have certainly kept in touch by letter, but there is still much more to be said!

My dearest friends! One does not easily forget friends like you. I hope that some day we will live together in this country. I, for one, am not too dedicated to "the line", the Queen, or the President as she is growing old and he has not recovered yet from his shot wound. By the way, it doesn't help the U.S.A.'s image that their best presidents are shot at. Anyway, I hope that neither will you die in Iceland of old age nor I in



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New Iceland, but there is still plenty of time to discuss our future enterprises and decide where to settle together. Personally, I would rather not make a definite decision yet. News from the "Loyalists" territory tells me that their land is good, and I believe that I shall urge my people to move there, i.e. those who want to live off the land. I don't consider myself obligated to go with them. You asked me to buy some land for you next to mine once I decided where to settle after leaving New Iceland. Well, neither have I moved away nor have I decided where to settle, so instead of buying land I have put your money to use for myself - what self-interest! Please, forgive me for my uncivilized manners. Having your money invested for a while helps me a lot, and I am capable of paying you interest, but if you need it or if you want to use it in one way or another, it is yours immediately. Your money amounts to some \$130.00.

My wife and I think of you often, and we ask God to support you in your fight against Rev. Bjarni's illness. God bless you now and forever.

Even though this letter has become long enough, it seems insignificant when compared to the letters from you. Your letters are always so warm and enlightening. Pardon my not writing in detail. Hoping to be able to stay at home, I promise to send you a letter on each mail boat.

Can you describe for me the ritual of provisional christening? I believe that people here want me to serve as their minister. I wish I had the ability to preach and pray and enlighten people, but, alas, I cannot do this. Not only am I lacking in education and spirituality, but I also lack the courage and determination. My spiritual poverty makes me both sad and embarrassed. If I only were close to you, dear friends, listening to you talking about our Heavenly Father and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

My wife sends her very best wishes and thanks you for your cordiality. I, myself, wish that God bless you now and forever.

Your friend,
Fridjon Fredriksson

Poetry

The Secret

by Ronald Friesen

It is not the voice of reason
I hear calling from behind me
It's something less provocative
Distraction if I give its name
My verse becomes dry prairie grass
Before its hungry flame

That flame is always near it seems
Hungry to devour any
Thought of rhyme or simple reason
I might happen to embrace
Seldom simple is this passion
To discover verse with grace

As in nature comes a moment
Often with a glass of wine
A quiet voice in atmosphere
Revealing simple rhyme
Knowing I am fool for finish
One to squander precious time

Time that could be given to
Companions and completion
So many worthy tasks will wait
For one more set of wistful verse
I could see if just obsession
Blind desire makes it worse
And so, once more I steal the time
Away from worldly task and matter
To contemplate cerebral seeds
Nurture them to health and growing
Smithing form from shapeless phrase
Into some worthy thing near knowing

I have not will to quell this passion
It is not what I'd have found
If left alone in blackened vacuum
This is not the task I'd choose
The voice, though, says the secret is
Too much for me to lose.

Book Reviews



A Half-Mermaid Tale

Thora A Half-Mermaid Tale

By Gillian Johnson

*Reviewed by Carole Mackintosh
Harper Trophy Canada,
ISBN9780006393863
Soft cover, \$15.99*

Mermaid – n. (in folklore) a female marine creature having the head, torso and arms of a woman and the tail of a fish.

Thora, a Half-Mermaid Tale written and illustrated by Gillian Johnson is a whimsical, fun-filled adventure story, set in

Grimli, a seaside town. A delightful prologue poem sets the stage.

“If you produce a child
Half of the land and sea
It will have to live on both
In order to be free.”

How will Halla the mermaid, Thora’s mother, fulfill this order? Will Frooty de Mare, the local entrepreneur, be able to buy the Allbent Cinema owned by the three Greenberg sisters, Lottie, Dottie and Flossie? Will he buy the lease on the Loki, the last remaining lease at the pier? Will his new Tooty Frooty Hotel & Seafood Emporium and the Mermaid Cinema (with a surprise feature) force the Greenberg sisters and their arty-farty theatre out of town?

Johnson has created marvelous characters like Frooty de Mare, his daughter Holly, Mrs. Honey Grubb, Mr. and Mrs. Rukle and their children Ricky and Lynne, Mr. Walters, the Greenberg sisters, Mr. Mason, Cosmos the pet peacock, Halla and Thora – good and evil. Frooty de Mare is a ruthless schemer and overall baddie. The Mayor’s wife, Mrs. Honey Grubb wearing her yellow pantsuit, rubber gloves and a surgical mask is a meanie. Mr. Rukle, the foster parent, is a bully. Then there are the warm and caring Greenberg sisters. They provide milk for the non-fish eating infant Thora, a soft gray and yellow blanket, an ancient-looking blue bunny rabbit and a silver rattle. Why do the Greenberg sisters have these baby things? The sisters are a quiet yet powerful force in the novel. Jack Walters “sailor, swimmer, coach, poet, journalist and cricket commentator becomes Thora’s Guardian Angel”. Thora is a perfectly fitting half-mermaid with scales on her legs and purple toes rather than a tail and a blowhole on the top of her

head. To the young reader she is perfectly believable.

Halla tells Mr. Walters the Sea Shrew’s further prophesy:

“If she can live between worlds for ten years, This daughter of hers can live.

Otherwise, mother and daughter will go the way of the human husband...”

Mr. Walters has a unique solution to the prophecy.

To prepare Thora for life on shore, Halla fashions Thora’s hair into a ponytail to hide her blowhole, a wet suit to hide her scales and wind-surfing slippers to hide her purple feet. Improbable? Not to the young reader. One of the key themes in the novel is friendship. Ricky and Lynne Rukle and Holly de Mare join in Thora’s Grimli adventures. They accept her half-mermaid features and enjoy her tales from her adventures around the world. None of them have ever been out of Grimli.

Gillian Johnson has written a cleverly illustrated, very humorous novel geared for the 8- 12 age group. Thora’s misuse and misspelling of words is delightful – Thora wants to do “inner decorating” so she picks out “wall paper” wall-to-wall carpeting to place on her walls. A sign in town reads, “Trespassers will be prosletsed”. Thora sees an “arrow plane” in the sky and talks about her “frosted” family. She walks along the “bored” walk in Grimli. Young readers will also identify with the reference to Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone in the school office. Thora wonders if this book is about Mr. Walter’s friend, a hairy potter from Cape Town? Having read Anne of Green Gables, Thora asks if students will get a slate to write on. Thora has never been to school. Thora mixes her new friends a tonic water drink. “She stirred in scoops of vanilla ice cream to remove the bitterness and brightened the whole thing up with slices of canned beetroot” In the supermarket Holly points out fish fingers. Thora’s response is “But fish don’t have fingers...and if they did, I certainly wouldn’t want to eat them! And look over there. Rock cakes. Yuk!”

There are local references to the New Iceland town of Gimli, Manitoba that add

interest but still keep the story universal. The Allbent Cinema that the Greenberg sisters own is in an old Lutheran church. On the map of Grimli the reader finds the “bored” walk, Viking Motel, To Airport sign and Viking statue. The local policeman is on horseback dressed in his red serge.

Johnson’s illustrations are excellent. They tell a story by themselves and define the suitable short chapters for emergent readers. Thora a Half Mermaid Tale is Gillian Johnson’s first chapter book. She has written and illustrated the following picture books: My Sister Gracie (2000) and Gracie’s Baby Chub Chop (2004). Johnson is also the illustrator of Bun Bun’s Birthday (2001), Princess Bun Bun, (2002), The Cat and the Wizard (2003), Eugene’s Story (2004) and James the Dancing Dog (2004). Coming soon is another chapter book about Thora entitled Thora and the Green Sea Unicorn.

Gillian Johnson grew up in Winnipeg and now lives in England and Tasmania, Australia with her husband Nicholas Shakespeare and their two sons Max and Benedict.

Rev. Stefan Jonasson

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Just a Matter of Time A grassroots look at Canada's cattle industry in the aftermath of BSE

By Karen Emilson

Reviewed by Sharron Arksey
Nordheim Books

ISBN0968124224

Soft cover, 384 pages, photos \$24.99

Author Karen Emilson says that the research and writing of her new book *Just a Matter of Time* was a "challenging, emotionally draining project." I can well imagine.

The book takes a wide-ranging look at the effects of the recent BSE crisis on individuals and families from British Columbia to Ontario, with brief mention of one Montana family as well.

The geography alone is challenging. This project required a great deal of leg-work.

The 'emotionally draining' component no doubt comes from the fact that Emilson, while writing about the American border closing that affected so many in the Canadian cattle industry, was living the experience at the same time. As a farm wife and partner, she was both a character and a commentator in her own book.

The book's title comes from a comment made several years ago by Roy McNabb, assistant manager of the Canadian Cattleman's Association. McNabb told those present at a semi-annual meeting in B.C. that someday Canada would need to trace back to the herd of origin. It was, he said, "just a matter of time".

The rest, as they say, is history.

Emilson's first two best-selling books *Where Children Run* and *When Memories Remain* chronicled the lives of child-abuse victims David and Dennis Pischke. Although non-fiction, each of these books reads like a novel with a chronological story line.

This third book reads much differently. In many ways it is a diary of Emilson's travels through five provinces and into one American state. The families we meet are seen through her eyes.

Along the way she inserts brief commentaries on farm life and cattle ranching and spliced throughout are excerpts from her own personal life.

The most powerful section of the book – for me, at least – was a detailed description of Emilson's successful attempts to break the amniotic sac and rub life back into the limbs of a newborn calf early one winter morning.

While outwardly this may have little to do with BSE and the closure of the American border to Canadian beef, the story graphically underscores the life-giving link between the rancher and his/her cattle.

That, I think, is at the heart of the book, which undertakes to confront the emotional and psychological damage created by BSE as well as its more obvious economic and political implications.

Emilson has done an excellent job of researching and her drive and passion for the project cannot be faulted. She has inter-

viewed a wide range of individuals from cow-calf to feedlot operators, politicians to lobbyists, veterinarians to truckers. She has spoken to commercial producers, purebred producers and dairy farmers. She aptly demonstrates the varying attitudes and biases of each of these groups, as well as showcasing the geographic differences that affect size and style of operations.

But it's a bit like going on a whirlwind tour with brief stays at each destination. Sometimes you'd like to stop and sit awhile before getting back on the bus.

The reopening of the border in July 2005 forced Emilson to rewrite the conclusion to this book. That in itself is not a bad thing, since it gives the book a happier ending than it might otherwise have had. But the book, like the real-life response of Canadian producers, shows that the relief was tempered with caution. This could happen again unless producers take steps to protect themselves.

As a reader, I am what you might call "the converted" to whom Emilson is preaching. I am a cattle producer's wife. I have 'been there, done that'. Her discussions about farm and family life, and the stories about farm families coping as well as they can with a situation beyond their control, strike a chord. I know there will be many readers out there who respond in the same way.

I am making the assumption that Emilson hopes to reach not only the segment of the population that has lived this story from start to finish, but also that segment which knows little beyond they read occasionally in the newspapers. Certainly those consumers saw no evidence of a price decrease at the supermarket meat counters, despite the freefall in prices received by beef producers.

What will help her in reaching that goal are the strength of such passages as the newborn calf story and her obvious commitment to the lifestyle and the people it supports, not to mention the wealth of rich and well-researched detail.

What may detract from her purpose are the occasional detours from chronological order that are sometimes disconcerting and the technical references that may not

always be understood by non-farm readers. Some sections would have benefited from more scrupulous editing.

Many people will want to read this book, partly because of its subject matter and partly because of Emilson's earlier writing success.

I hope that that readership will bridge the rural/urban gap and create better understanding of the forces that drive the Canadian cattle industry and the people who make their livelihoods within it. That would be a good thing.

Information on purchasing the book can be obtained from Emilson's website at www.karenemilson.com

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volcana icelandic panorama

Guest curator Kevin Kelly explores metamorphic traces of Iceland's culture, mythology, and mystique in the work of five female artists dividing their lives between Reykjavik and New York. From installation and painting to woven textiles and braided hair sculpture, their work collectively blends aspects of craft, tradition, and folk culture with aesthetic experimentation and provocative technique.

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Contributors

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TAMMY AXELSSON was raised in Gimli, Manitoba and is the daughter of the late Daniel and Lillian Sigmundson. After studying Icelandic at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik and living for a number of years in Abbotsford, B.C., Tammy returned to Gimli with her husband Jón Grétar and two children Daniel and Fiona. Tammy is the Executive Director of the New Iceland Heritage Museum and Honorary Consul of Iceland in Gimli, Manitoba

KRISTJANA MAGNUSSON CLARK has written four family history books on family members, as well as a series of articles and poetry which have been published in numerous magazines and periodicals. She has recently been involved in writing up some biographies of Icelandic people in British Columbia, for the Icelandic Archives of British Columbia. Kristjana resides in the White Rock area of B.C. with her husband Alder Clark.

RON FRIESEN is a writer/musician from Winnipeg now living in Vancouver where he married into the Viking tradition through Janice Groom, daughter of Anna Louise Groom and granddaughter of Hilda and Arni Johannson of Langruth, Manitoba. Contact: ron@ideadrum.com

CAROLE MACKINTOSH is an alumnus of the University of Manitoba and a Teacher-Librarian. She is an avid reader and former executive member of the Winnipeg Children's Literature Roundtable. Currently, Carole is Co-Convener of the University Women's Club Contemporary Literature Group. She and her husband Joe now reside in Gimli Manitoba.

ERIC OLAFSON is a second generation Icelandic/Canadian who has lived and farmed west of Wynard, Saskatchewan and now employed as an adjuster with the Crop Insurance for the Province of Saskatchewan. He and his wife operate the Bed & Breakfast, Amma's House. He also guides American bird hunters in the fall. His passion was playing hockey but the body has decided he should rather be playing golf, hunting or being a spectator at hockey and football games.

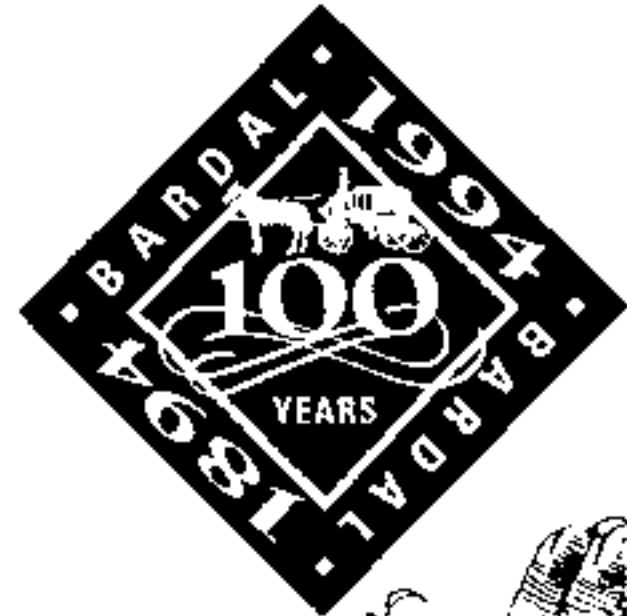
SIGRID STEFANSON was born in Gimli, Manitoba and has lived in Calgary for seven years. She is studying nursing at the University of Calgary but comes home when she can for her Afi's ponnukokurr.

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.



The back page

This rock lies along the shores of Hecla Island was split in two when struck by lightning.



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