THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

CANADA ICELAND FOUNDATION INC

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

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William Helgason
1836 Assiniboine Ave.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3J 0A1

Treasurer
Paul D. Olafson, CA
135 Irving Place
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2G 0K8

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CANADA ICELAND FOUNDATION INC.

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Scholarships of $500 each for students pursuing a post secondary education. who graduated from a high school in Evergreen School Division in Manitoba and who demonstrate scholastic ability.

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

The Unitarian Church/Aspire Threatre in Gimli, Manitoba.

Editorial

by Rev. Stefan M. Jonasson

Here we restore ancestral dreams,
Enshrined in floor and wall and beam,
A monument wherein we build
That their high purpose be fulfilled,
A tool to help our children prove
An earth of promise and of love.
- Kenneth L. Patton

For such a visible landmark, the Unitarian church in Gimli is one of the town's best kept secrets. Driving into town, the sign proclaiming the local churches' welcome betrays no evidence that there is a Unitarian church numbered among them, while stopping a local citizen on the street to inquire about its location is likely to draw a blank expression. Since the 1960s, the building has been better known for its tenants than for the religious society that built it in 1905 and which continues to own it and meet for worship within its hallowed walls. Call it the A-Spire Theatre if you will, the fact remains that it is a Unitarian church which traces its history back to the "Unitarian separation" of 1891, when hundreds of Icelanders followed Rev. Magnús Skaptason out of the Lutheran synod, proclaiming the oneness of God, the humanity of Jesus and the universality of salvation. Skaptason's followers organized themselves as a Unitarian church, to "promote liberality in religion and awaken and preserve, in our congregation, rational living and elevated religious conceptions, in love to God and service to humanity."

For more than a decade after the split, Lutherans and Unitarians shared Gimli's only church until the early years of the twentieth century, when each congregation erected its own building. The Unitarian church was dedicated with much fanfare on October 29, 1905. Architecturally, the church was about as ostentatious as such a small building could possibly be, with its high steeple, gothic windows, vaulted ceiling, raised chancel, and a choir loft which allowed choristers to look straight into the eyes of congregants seated across from them on the balcony. The sun shone in through leaded glass windows, the bevels of which glistened with the colours of the rainbow.

Located right in the centre of town, the church and its parish hall, which had been added in the 1920s, were the town's gathering place for decades. As the only multipurpose facility in town, the parish hall was the natural venue for countless dances, concerts, receptions and political meetings. The Red Cross used it for blood donor clinics and the Greenbergs rented it to show motion pictures before the Gimli Theatre was built next door. Even the Lutheran Ladies Aid rented the Unitarian hall for some of its events! The magistrate's court met on the campus of the Unitarian church, although it's not certain from the records whether the proceedings were held in the sanctuary or the parish hall. Either way, it can be said that one could be tried, convicted, sentenced – and presumably forgiven – all at the Unitarian church! In 1960, the parish hall was sold and the church, which had hitherto been on the corner of Centre Street and Second Avenue, was moved northward, closer to the middle of the block.

By the 1950s, the congregation was in serious decline. It's a complicated story, involving the "usual suspects" – conflicting opinions, internal politics, external pressures, demographic changes, leadership inertia and even a little sex – but that's another story. It's enough to note here that membership declined, services became increasingly sporadic and, in time, the congregation ceased to meet on a regular basis. After the retirement of the last permanent minister, Rev. Eyjólfur Melan, in 1953, the church was briefly served by a student minister from New York City before the Lake Winnipeg circuit ceased to have a resident minister of its own. For the next twenty-five years, Rev. Philip M. Petursson travelled from Winnipeg to conduct occasional services, with declining frequency. Mostly, he came to bury the dead.

A few faithful souls – mostly women – maintained the institutional structures and cared for the building itself. The church was rented to a conservative Christian congregation – something that would have been unthinkable to the founders, as neighbourly a thing as it was to do – and the building slowly deteriorated through neglect. Occasionally, someone would be married there or have a child christened under Unitarian auspices, but even memorial services shifted to the funeral home. In 1981, the ninetieth anniversary of Rev. Magnús Skaptason's "Easter Sermon" was marked with a special service at the church. By this time, the legal membership had reached single digits.

When the church's fundamentalist tenants vacated the building in 1992, its fate was uncertain. Some feared the building would crumble into dust, while others imagined selling it, recognizing that it would likely become a bistro or pizzeria if that happened. Still others felt that the building should be used for some community purpose, so the trustees made the church available to the Gimli Theatre Association as a home for the A-Spire Theatre. Around this same time, the few remaining Unitarians in the area were audacious enough to imagine holding regular services again! We planned three services during the summer of 1994 to see if there was any realistic hope of revival. In doubt about the reception we might receive, we recruited a dozen or so outsiders to make sure we had a "congregation" on the first Sunday. To our surprise and delight, sixty-one people showed up for the service, which featured a sermon based on the parable of the man who built his house upon sand. Amidst the shifting sands of fate, perhaps there was still a little outcropping of bedrock upon which we might rebuild.

Buoyed by the response from local residents and cottagers, some members began to dream of restoring the church to its original splendour, whereas, only months before, there had been fears it might be demolished. The restoration of the nearby Gimli Public School was nearing completion and members of the Gimli Heritage Committee expressed interest in undertaking work on the church as their next project. Inspired by the success of the public school project, work began on the church in 1996, guided by members of the Heritage Committee with support from church members and the Gimli Theatre Association. The congregation dipped into its reserve funds, which had accumulated over many years of modest revenue and limited expenses, and generous grants were received from the Province of Manitoba's cultural affairs department and the Thomas Sill Foundation.

While the exterior of the church was restored as closely as possible to how it looked a century ago (albeit with improved accessibility), the interior was remodelled to meet the needs of the building's dual purpose as both a house of worship and a community theatre. The chancel and choir loft gave way to a stage, the pews were milled into ceiling beams and replaced with comfortable upholstered chairs, the balcony became the light and sound booth for the theatre company and the pulpit became a moving pedestal – doubling as the "box office" for theatre events. The church's use as a theatre is fully in keeping with its history. From its earliest years, the church was home to Gimli's Menningarfélag, or Cultural Society, which hosted plays and concerts, socials and a reading club. The promotion of cultural pursuits has ever been part of the mission of the Unitarian church.

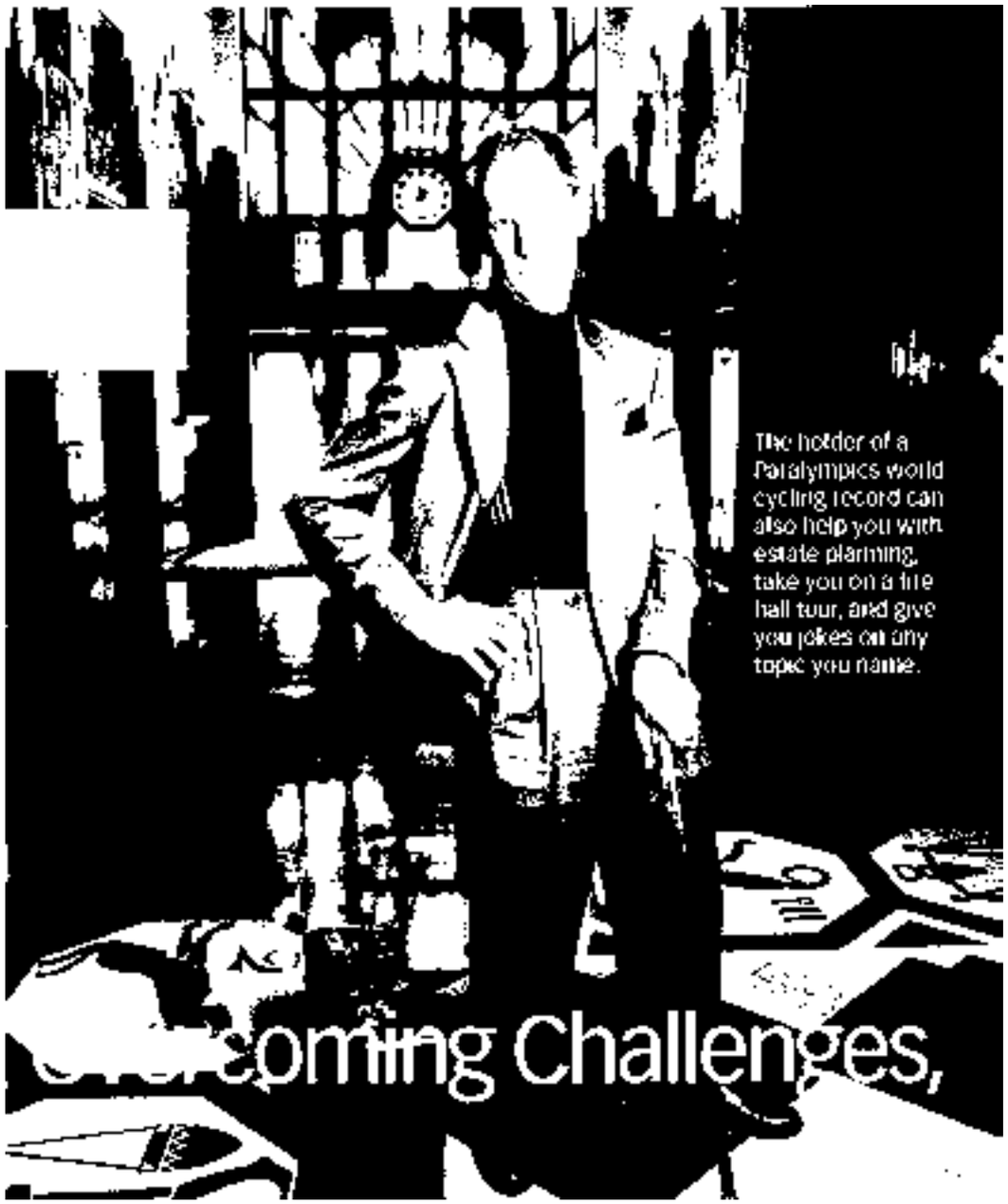
Summer services at the Gimli Unitarian Church are now entering their thirteenth season. The sanctuary is comfortably full on the "odd" Sundays of the summer months when the congregation meets for worship and it seems likely that future years will see an expansion of the season and an increase in frequency. The congregation is an eclectic and partly tran-

sient mix of souls, including old-timers from the town, cottagers from the various communities along the lake, and visitors from Winnipeg and points beyond. Increasingly, there is something of a "homecoming" feeling at these Sunday morning gatherings, as former Manitobans return each year, from places as distant as Ohio and Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and even Africa, making a stop at the Unitarian church part of their annual pilgrimage home. Every summer, one of the services, at least, pays homage to Icelandic roots of the church, but the congregation has branched out far beyond its roots. We celebrate our past but we do not dwell in it.

Over time, some of the institutions that were first established by Icelandic immigrants or their descendents have become part of the heritage of the larger community. Íslendingadagurinn is a good example of this: what was once a distinctly Icelandic celebration has become a festival cherished by people of all backgrounds, which leads participants to exclaim, "We are all Icelanders!" Our literary heritage is another case in point: Stephan G. Stephansson and Lara Goodman Salverson are loved by readers across ethnic groups and languages, for their words speak to the immigrant experience of all those Canadians and Americans who have come from other places. And the Icelandic churches are yet another example: Unitarians and Lutherans alike have reached across the ethnic divide to welcome a diversity of people from various backgrounds into their pews, while remembering those Icelandic pioneers who first established their congregations.

The experience of the Gimli Unitarian Church reminds us that we need to reinvent our cherished institutions in each successive generation – or risk losing them. There is nothing on earth that will not perish without careful tending. There is no institution that can survive on the legacy of its founders only, without adding to that legacy in each successive generation. Likewise, there is nothing that cannot be rejuvenated through the efforts of imaginative people who have a vision for the future to match their love of the past.

Editor's Note: Kenneth L. Patton, the author of the verse at the beginning of this article, was a prominent Unitarian Universalist minister in the United States who was an occasional visitor to the Hnausa Unitarian Camp, where he led camp programs in the 1940s and 1950s, while taking time to write poetry and prose there.



Halldor Bjarnason
From Poster Child to Super Hero

by Angela Maida

Geography found me as the likely candidate to track down and interview Halldor Bjarnason. I have been given the scarcest details: Halldor Bjarnason (unable to dodge the Icelandic hereditary police) was spotted on National News rappelling a 16 storey Vancouver office tower clad in a spiderman costume to raise money for charity. (Rapelling for the uninitiated means one is attached by a mere string, clipped into a harness, flung over the edge of something higher than a step ladder, then with grace and dignity must lower oneself to the ground). For the thrill junkies the higher the better!

The other significant piece of data supplied to me was that Halldor has a physical disability. The connection between these facts peaked my interest. I contact Halldor, who being the good sport that he is, readily submits to an interview. We get off to a hard start when our arranged meeting place turns out to be mere cinders, factor in a wet October evening in Vancouver where rain is at maximum velocity, comes down horizontally and can take a swift turn up ones' umbrella. We are soaked when we finally settle on an alternate location. Halldor accepts all the last minute changes and climatic challenges with apparent ease. Halldor is impeccably dressed, he exudes happiness and his great sense of humour is immediately obvious. I am quickly at ease in his company and blissfully unaware of the list of accomplishments this interview is about to expose.

Halldor, 42 has been living in Vancouver since 1991 and is currently working as a lawyer with the Access Law Group. He has found his niche specializing in estate planning for families with disabled dependants. A role he cherishes in that it feeds his admitted desire to" irritate bureaucrats." Halldor has successfully circumvented existing estate laws to ensure that disabled dependents continue to receive disability benefits in the event of their parent's death. He loves his work, which he finds challenging and mentally stimulating. It fosters his need for a creative outlet and most importantly he is thrilled to be able to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Halldor was born with athetoid cerebral palsy, the apparent result of which is slurred speech and impaired movement. Halldor's struggles seem not to reside with the disability itself rather from the misconceptions he must face from the those who live their lives without the challenge of cerebral palsy or any other disability. Halldor is resigned but not bitter about the times in his life where opportunities were denied, it is obvious that these prejudices fueled him to arrive where he has, ultimately driving him towards his success.

Halldor has a winning attitude and was fortunate enough to be raised by parents unwilling to see obstacles but rather surmountable challenges. When Halldor was a child, his parents Kenneth and Mildred Bjarnason became involved with the Society for Crippled Children. The expectation was that Halldor would receive his education through the Societies schools designed to meet the needs of the disabled. Mildred investigated their classroom settings and did not feel as though the calibre of the education offered by the Society for Crippled Children was the same offered in the public school system. She decided the right place for Halldor was in their local school, Isaac Brocke. The one setback she felt she needed to overcome was that at the age of four Halldor was still being pushed in a stroller. Mildred felt that if her son was

to attend kindergarten he should arrive as all the other children do: by foot. The July before his September start day she began a methodical approach to teach Halldor to walk. He would walk unassisted, one house per day until he was capable of walking the distance between their home and the school. By the end of July, Halldor was steady enough to make the journey to school and began kindergarten with the distinguished honour of the Society for Crippled Children's first mainstreamed child.

In 1977, Halldor was selected to be the Manitoba Easter Seal poster child, his mother speculates this was because Halldor was such a warm and personable child. His role as poster child was an honour that came with many perks, which they were able to enjoy as a family. The Easter seal programme is most well known for its camp programmes, which Halldor was able to attend.

Halldor acknowledges that by grade 3 he had settled on law as a profession, prior to that Halldor had a fascination with becoming a firefighter, which ultimately has evolved into a lifelong fascination. His mother took him to visit every fire station in Winnipeg, never discouraging him from his desire to become a firefighter. In an interview with the Benchers Bulletin, 2004 Halldor notes that he eventually realized that fire fighting wasn't a practical vocation and the only other job he could think of where he would be allowed to wear suspenders as firefighters do, was a lawyer. Halldor did not let his interest in the fire department end, indeed it has become a lifelong passion. Recently he completed a book on the History of the Winnipeg Fire Department, which will be published shortly. Halldor is reportedly a walking encyclopedia of the Winnipeg Fire Department and is connected with many other fire departments.

Halldor has had a rather circuitous route to find himself practicing law with the Access Law group. He began his post secondary education in Winnipeg completing an Honours Degree in Political Science then continuing to Queens University where he graduated with his Bachelor of Law degree. Halldor articled in Toronto with Smith Lyons (now Gowlings), however he speculates that conservative hiring practices saw him passed up for a permanent position. Halldor then decided to come to Vancouver in 1991. Upon arriving in Vancouver Halldor knew he was home, he immediately loved the backdrop of the mountains, became accustomed to Vancouver's climate and pace.

Circumstances conspired against Halldor when he arrived in Vancouver, different provincial regulations meant he had to re-article, Halldor struggled to find a firm willing to take on a disabled articling student. He eventually took a job with the Federal Department Secretary of State as a community development officer helping non-profits to develop community-based programmes. He did eventually find a firm to article with but was discharged when halfway through articling, laws changed no longer requiring him to repeat his previous articles. His articles were no longer necessary and the firm decided not to convert him to a staff lawyer. Subsequently Halldor landed a contract, which would last two and a half years with the BC Labour Relations Board.

In addition to his successful law practice Halldor is currently the Chair of the Law Society of BC's Disabled Advisory Committee and has been since its inception in 1995. He is a member of the Law Society of BC's Equity and Diversity Committee. He is a legal advisor to the BC Sports Medicine Counsel. Halldor is active on many boards and is currently sitting on the Board of the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, The Coast Foundation and The First Baptist Foundation. Halldor also finds himself in the role of educator doing teaching engagements at UBC, West Coast School of Massage and Langara College where he speaks to second year Nursing students about attitudes and perceptions of the disabled.

Halldor's list of scholarships and awards are numerous. He is modest about his achievements, some of which include:

Coast Mental Health Foundation, Courage to Come Back Award for Inspirational Achievement

Governor General Medal
Terry Fox Humanitarian Award
The Community Service Award
Jon Sigurdsson Chapter IODE

Halldor also set a world record, claiming a gold medal in the 1988 Seoul Paralympics in the 1500 metre tricycle event. In 1992 Halldor competed in the Paralympics in Barcelona, Spain. This was in fact a better day for Halldor in that he was able to beat his previous time, unfortunately he was out of the medal range in that race, placing fourth.

Halldor is candid and humble about his accomplishments, he feels he is fortunate to have arrived where he has in life and has a strong sense that he must give back. He is a person who loves a challenge and never seems to steer away from one when it presents itself. I was grateful for the opportunity to meet him.

Overcoming Challenges

by Toni Armanno

6:00 a.m.

It may be a brilliant summer morning with a light breeze or dark midwinter with icy rain. Whatever the weather, Halldor Bjarnason is seated on his Joachim 12-speed, prepared to cycle his daily nineteen kilometres.

"My doctor told me that when you're nearing forty," says Bjarnason, who is thirty-nine, "it's important to keep fit." So in addition to cycling, he is in the gym three times a week, hoisting weights. He also hikes the North Shore mountains and skis cross-country. If getting into a wet suit wasn't a problem he'd still be scuba diving, as well. An impressive, disciplined regimen for anyone, but perhaps even more so for Bjarnason, who has cerebral palsy.

On the other hand, this is a man who has competed in six international games, and at the 1988 Seoul Paralympics set a world record in the 1500 metre tricycle sprint.

Cerebral palsy: "cerebral" refers to the brain, specifically the cerebrum, the upper part of the organ and the director of conscious mental processes; "palsy" can signify paralysis, but more usually is associated with uncontrollable tremors.

Cerebral palsy is the result of damage to the brain's motor centres before, during or shortly after birth. It is believed to occur in one of every 1,000 deliveries. Often cerebra palsyis the result of anoxia (extreme lack of oxygen), but can be caused also through trauma or infection.The effects range from mild to severe, but most noticeable are incoordination of movements and difficulty in speaking. The authors of "Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing" write "a major goal is to foster in the child with cerebral palsy a positive self-image—motivation to learn, development of independence, need to socialize and be accepted.

In an autobiographical sketch, Bjarnason writes "Halldor arrived in the world on Hallowe'en-undetermined whether delivered by bats, goblins or natural processes. Parents were happy, rest of the world cringed. Went to school, causing great havoc—the public school system was not used to dealing with a participant who walked funny." This is typical of Bjarnason, who has made part of his living supplying jokes to public speakers.

Bjarnason's grandfather emigrated from Reykjavik to Brandon, joining a large Icelandic community in Manitoba.

Bjarnason grew up in Winnipeg, where his parents, Kenneth and Mildred, "never set limits. I was raised to seize opportunities, to have an absolutely full life.

"When I was really small, I wanted to be a firefighter. My parents didn't tell me I couldn't, but my mother took me to every fire hall in the city; and we talked to the firefighters. I came to realize it wasn't a very practical vocation for me."

But law was. Bjarnason earned a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) degree in political science at the University of Winnipeg (his thesis was on counterterrorism, but he also wrote a history of the Winnipeg Fire Department which the fire chief liked well enough to have copies printed for all 600 members of the department; ultimately this would lead to an invitation to write the department's official history).

Bjarnason studied law at Queen's University in Kingston. After articling with one of Toronto's prestigious Bay Street firms, he was called to the Bar of Ontario in 1991 (and, he notes, "I also went to the bar").

It was while he was at the University of Winnipeg that his competitive cycling career began. "I got a note in the mail in 1985 saying a group was starting the Manitoba Cerebral Palsy Sports Association. Being a bit cocky, I rode off to the meeting, which was taking place the same day I got the letter. I suggested this wasn't very well organized, but they asked me to have patience, said they were just starting, and then they invited me to go to the Alberta Games a couple of weeks later. So I went and raced, and watching was Doug Wilton, coach of the Canadian National Disabled Cycling Team. He told me “Stop screwing around and get serious.”

Bjarnason did, and went on to compete in World and CanAm games and Paralympics in Gits, Belgium; Hempstead, New York; Seoul, Korea; Assen, the Netherlands; and Barcelona, Spain, "Competition," he says, "is part of my philosophy of life. It forces me to improve my performance." He also became national president of the Canadian Cerebral Palsy Sports Association (1990-93) and the association's international representative (1991-95).

Meanwhile, his career was advancing in other areas. He worked as a program officer in the Secretary of State's BC/Yukon office, as a staff lawyer with the BC Labor Relllions Board, and as a freelance consultant, providing legal services related to non-profit society development and sport risk management (i.e. “how to run a sports program without casualties and/or law suits), doing research, and providing material to speakers. "People who give speeches and presentations love to spice them up with humor. I said, give me the topic, I'll come up with the jokes."

He was also collecting a number of honors, beginning with the Governor-General's Medal in 1982, and including the Terry Fox Humanitarian Award and the Community Service Award, presented by the BC Branch of the Canadian Bar Association. There has always been a lot of community service going on, including chairmanship of the Disability Advisory Committee of the Law Society of BC, and work with the Law Society's Equity & Diversity Committee, the Canadian Bar Association's National Equality Committee and Legal Research Section, the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, the Neil Squire Foundation Mentoring Program, Theatre Terrific Society; the BC Civil Liberties Association, and the BC Sports Medicine Council.

Bjarnason shares vintage oak-furnished offices on the eighteenth floor of the Marine Building with Emma Andrews, a chic, petite lawyer from Honduras who works in the areas of immigration, family law and civil litigation. They met in a Gastown office and found themselves working together more and more often. Out of that association was created Andrews, Bjarnason, Barristers &: Solicitors, Abogados (lawyers).

Here, Bjarnason—blue-eyed with spiky blonde hair, dressed in a conservative grey suit, white button-down shirt, neatly patterned maroon necktie, old-fashioned suspenders, and black lace-up brogues—is involved in the preparation of wills, establishment of trusts, and estate planning. His particular interest is assisting parents of children with disabilities.

Some forty times a year, he climbs behind the wheel of his silver grey 1997 Honda CRV and drives off to lead seminars with such organizations as the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, the Simon Fraser Society for Community Living, and the Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion. He has lectured also at UBC, the University of Winnipeg, and Langara College. Sometimes he addresses groups, other times he offers legal counselling to individuals or couples. All of his time is donated (although persons counselled later may engage his professional services).

People come from all over the province, especially areas with limited access to expertise on disability issues. They listen to Bjarnason intently, as he explains the legalities of property transfers, the structuring of discretionary and non-discretionary trusts, benefits available to persons with disabilities, and, ultimately, how parents can provide for children with disabilities through wills or trusts. Pat Tesan of the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, who has worked with Bjarnason for the past four years, says "He's taught me so much."

Bjarnason's History of the Winnipeg Fire Department—a fascination he has never lost—is en route to publication now. It won't be his first work in print. With Lynda Cannell, he wrote Organizing Events, published in 1999 by Canada Law Books. In preparation is his Emergency Services Encyclopedia. In addition, he has written articles and chapters on planned giving and estate planning, sport and sports therapy liability, human rights and disability issues, and Canadian firefighting history. Recognizing these accomplishments, a writer asks Bjarnason what his greatest challenge has been. "Overcoming other people's attitudes," he immediately responds. "I can figure out how to overcome any physical challenge, but in other people's perceptions, I may be considered ‘retarded' or 'incompetent' or not a real person. A few years ago, going to New York for a weekend, I was passing through customs and the officer asked all the usual questions. But then he asked "Where are you going to stay? How will you pay for that? Who'll take care of you?" He took my wallet, counted all the cash, looked at the credit cards, and started the questions over again. “Where do you live in Vancouver?” And finally, “Who baby-sits you?” I took out my business card, slapped it down in front of him, and said “I'm a lawyer. And I'm not impressed.” There were ten seconds of dead silence. Then he said “Oh. Okay. Have a good trip.”

Besides cycling, hiking, weightlifting and his various professional and volunteer activities, Bjamason may occupy himself with photography, his collections of firefighting memorabilia and more than 4,800 pins and buttons from around the globe, or cataloguing jokes, on any subject from taxidermy to terpsichore.

Asked his advice to parents who have children with disabilities, he says, “Try to get over the urge to be overprotective. It's natural to want to protect children, but allow them to develop their full potential, to participate in the world." And his advice to children who find they have been born with what society regards as disabilities: "Try everything. You'll find things you can be great at."

Olina Benson (mother), Allie, Stoney Jonson, Sylvia Bjarnason (Minister's daughter), Bennetta Benson. This photo was taken in 1931 at the family home at 49 3rd Ave., opposite the Lutheran church.

Growing up Unitarian

A recollection of the past 90 years

by Allie Benson Pascoe

I am in the Unitarian Church and the buzzing of the crowd has stopped as I reflect on the saddest day of my life. I shimmied up the back window of the church. In my bag I carry a powder puff, a comb and a screwdriver. I want to make sure Benna's hair is in place and knew she never liked a shiny nose. With the screwdriver I jimmy up the lid of the wooden box that contained her coffin. I raised the lid of her coffin. Her hair was in perfect order and her nose was not shiny. My oldest sister was dead of spinal meningitis at age 20. I left the church as I entered. The next day, the church was packed to overflowing. Then I recalled a happier memory as my sister Kristine, 'Buddie' was married here and again the church was full, with school children leaning over the little balcony.

"No, I am not going to the cemetery." My oldest sister Benna replies, "Yes you are. He was a member of our family who has brought disgrace upon our good name." The three Benson girls and their cousin Helen Benson trekked the mile from their home opposite the Lutheran church to the cemetery on highway nine. The cemetery was now one as some Unitarian lads after partaking of copious amounts of 'Brenavine' or home brew had poured gas on the fence, which divided the graves of the Lutherans from those of the Unitarians. The fence burned. Would we go to two different parts of Heaven?

After arriving at the grave site of Benedict Freemanson, Benna proceeded to give forth a resounding tirade of displeasure in that the newly departed had written a letter to his brother-in-law and other members of the community as to his views of them and their actions. This was read out at the gravesite. The missive was so long that the sun had begun to set and a lantern had to be requested. My older sister, Kristine who we called Buddie followed Benna. Then Benna directed that we all spit on his grave. She spat, Buddie spat, as did Helen. I refused. Benna told me I was part of the family and I must spit. At age five, my efforts at spitting were not acceptable and I was told to do it properly.

That night, I stuck as close to my mother as possible following her every step. At bedtime I tried to say the numerous prayers taught to me by my very Lutheran Amma. I was unable to get through them, as I was unable to recall them. I called for my Amma who was hard of hearing "What damn word comes after Jesus' name? That brought her in and I was told to say an extra prayer for using a blasphemous word. I finally fell asleep and was relieved that the morning sun did rise and I had not been consumed by fire in the night. Whenever I visited the cemetery, I skirted around the desecrated grave.

Gimli had two Jewish families, the Greenbergs. I was about seven years old and Benny Greenberg was a grade ahead of me. As I was coming out of the church after Sunday school, he proceeded to tell me that Jesus was a Jew. I said he was crazy as everyone knows that Jesus was Icelandic. We had just had a story about him and we sang about him all in Icelandic. I went home and indignantly shared the stupidity of Benny Greenberg with my mother. I was dumbfounded when she confirmed that in fact Jesus was a Jew! He was not even a Unitarian. Well, I was never going to speak to him again. My mother lectured me that I was lucky to have such a friend as Benny Greenberg and that we should be grateful we could choose our friends

regardless of their faith. There had been enough division of friendships over religion in this town. It is difficult to hide in a small town such as Gimli in 1924. My grandmother who did not speak English forgot to inform me that Jesus was neither Icelandic nor a Unitarian. Benny continued to recount this story well into our 80's.

One morning I went visiting with my mother to visit her friend Thora Jonsson. There sat another visitor with beautiful dark hair who smiled at me. She reached out her hand and asked me in Icelandic 'What is your name?' I reached out my hand and I told her. When I asked her what her name was and she replied 'Anna Solmundson'. With that I jerked my hand out of hers and said 'Oh, you are the bad lady'. I had no idea why she was called 'bad' but I had heard my friends Ola and Kardi Solmundson referred to her as 'bad'. Kardi told me that every night he hid his shoes under his bed to make sure his father did not steal them. None of the women spoke but my mother stood up and said that it was time to go. On the way home I asked why we had not stayed for coffee and she replied that she remembered she had chores to do at home.

Years later when I was about twelve, my friend Ola told me her mother had divorced her father, the Reverend Mr. Solmundson the minister of our Unitarian church as Anna had stolen her father from their family.

One fall I was returning home from visiting my Amma Benson. It was almost dark and there were no streetlights. We were used to traveling in the dark. A gentleman was emerging from a doorway that looked like Mr. Thorsteinson, a family friend. I said good evening and he replied 'Good Evening' in a deep voice that I had heard before. He was Ola's father. 'Excuse me sir; I thought you were Mr. Thorsteinson. I never would have said Good Evening to you." When I was with Ola and saw him coming, we always crossed the street to avoid him.

My sisters and I were the mainstays of the Unitarian choir. Frank Olson played the organ for choir practices and all services on Sunday. I couldn't read Icelandic so I needed to memorize the verses. Anyone who has ever sung in a church choir knows that the choir loft is a wonderful vantage point to examine the congregation assembled below. However, it didn't occur to me that the congregation had an excellent view of us. One Sunday, during the sermon I noticed that Ingibjorg Peterson had brought her granddaughter Carrie to church. There was no running water in the town and the toilet facilities for the church as well as home was an outhouse. Mrs. Peterson seemed not to be aware that Carrie needed to go to the bathroom as she continued to squirm in the pew. Her Amma finally knew what the child needed and proceeded to flip up the child's coat and dress, undid the trap door to her underwear while never breaking her gaze on the minister. Holding all this above her

waist, Carrie proceeded out the door. My sister Buddie began to shake, holding back the laughter. I followed suit attempting to cover my face with my handkerchief. Then I noticed Mrs. Knutson, one of my Amma Bensons best friends, sitting in the third row. She was staring at me with those piercing brown eyes and a most disgusted look on her face. I knew this would be reported to my Amma as soon as she left the Lutheran service. The differences in their religious beliefs did not inhibit their friendship. However, families were often divided.

Amma Benson paid a call on my mother to report on our terrible behaviour. Mother told her that we were just children and they had not laughed out loud.

Frank Olson played the organ for many years. He had an old car that seemed to know its way around town with little or no effort from Frank. Many years later after choir practice, on a hot Friday evening when I was about eighteen, Frank offered my friend Inga Nordal and I a drive in the country. Frank was off to see his favorite bootlegger for a few beers. We drove north of town and then turned off on the Fraserwood road and then north again. Frank stopped the car and blew the horn, three short and one long. A woman emerged from the bushes swaying from side to side wearing a long dress and several aprons that covered her ample body. Her head was covered with a babushka. As she strode toward the car, bells went off on in my head. This was my mother's butter lady who frequently complained to my mother that she was kept awake at night, as her neighbor was a bootlegger. My mother, Mrs. Chiswell and the Lutheran Minister, the Reverend Mr. Bjarnason were the sole members of the Good Templars, an anti liquor group. I said to Frank, "Your in the wrong place, this is my mother's butter lady." Frank replied, "I don't care what she sells your mother, she is my favorite bootlegger and I come here every weekend." I averted my head as Frank ordered his beer and handed her some money. She returned shortly to the car with the beer and handed them to Frank. As he bid her good evening, I turned my head and said "Good evening Mrs. Dowhan". She quickly scurried back into the bushes.

Two weeks later, my mother remarked that this was the second Saturday that Mrs. Dowhan had not come with butter. She said she hoped that Mrs. Dowhan was not ill. I told my mother my story of Frank and the beer.

Runa Johnson was one of my friends and her father had a farm north of Loni Beach. For her birthday, the class was invited for a Tally Ho. As usual religion came up for discussion. I remarked that she had the framed saying 'For the Fear of God' on her wall. I suggested that she attend our church where we love God and are not afraid of God. She vehemently denied that Lutherans feared God. I said she had this on her wall. She said no, so we had a bet. Runa was always right. As the sleigh pulled up to the Johnson's door, we both rushed in and up the stairs to her room. We almost knocked her Amma down. There on the wall was 'For the Fear of God'. She replied that no one in the church believed this. I told her she was in the 'crazy' church not I. The Unitarian church was often refered to by the Lutherans as the 'crazy' church.

My mother, sisters and I were attending a concert in our church and Laura Olson was accompanying us. As we passed Laura's house, her brother Humphrey called to her demanding to know where she was going. When she told him where she was going, he called for his mother. "Mother come quickly, Laura is going to the 'crazy' church. She ignored him. However, some of our friends would never set foot in our church. I told Humphrey not to worry, as we had neither a devil nor hell and she would be safe.

Sylvia Bjarnason was the daughter of the Lutheran minister. Mrs. B was away to Winnipeg and I was asked to stay with Sylvia. We talked late into the night. Her father would call us for breakfast and we would scramble to the table. Before we could eat, her father needed to say a multitude of prayers for God's intervention for his entire congregation but no prayers for Unitarians. He insisted we hold hands while he prayed. He held Sylvia's right

hand while she attempted to make toast with her left. Interspersed in the prayers he would ask Sylvia " Sylvia, ert pu a hlusta, Sylvia?" Sylvia, are you listening, Sylvia? He always began and ended his questions to her with her name. Due to our inability to stop talking at night and her father's incessant prayers, we were late for school every morning.

My nephew, Bruce Benson is reading an excerpt from his first novel, Skufty in the church that is now the Aspire Theatre. It will revert to the Gimli Unitarian Church in the summer when the Reverend Mr. Jonasson will again conduct services. So many memories. The church still lives on and so do I.

The Status of Icelandic in Canada

by Kristin M. Jóhannsdóttir

Sometime in the beginning of the century a young Belgian came to Canada to search for a better life. He was hired to work on a farm in the Argyle district and wanted to get used to the work and learn the language. After some months or possibly years, when he was already pretty good in the language, a visitor came to the farm. The visitor and the farmer held a conversation in a language the Belgian didn't know so after the visitor had left, he asked the farmer what language it was that they had been speaking. "Well, that was English", answered the farmer. "But, but, what language have I then been speaking", asked the terrified Belgian. "Well, that's Icelandic", the farmer answered.

Canada is a multicultural country with hundreds of ethnic groups, and the situation has often been referred to as the Canadian mosaic, in which the ethnic groups join instead of melting into one big pot. The Canadians have a multicultural policy which purposefully tries to avoid assimilation by encouraging ethnic groups to maintain themselves and develop as distinct groups, and things have been done to encourage the groups to increase group acceptance and tolerance (Berry 1998:86). There has, though, been some critisism of this policy, pointing out that it is quite difficult to have multiculturalism without multilingualism and since Canadian society is set in a bilingual framework there seems to be an inherent contradiciton (Berry 1998:86).

Only two languages in Canada, English and French, have ultimate legal protection, which they got with The Official Languages Act of 1969, an act that legislated bilingualism in Federal institutions and agencies. Other languages spoken in the country have the status 'unofficial' and their existence is confirmed by Article 38 of the Official Language Act (Rudnyckyj 1973:29).

Speakers of other languages than English or French responded harshly to the Official Language Act, demanding the same rights for their own language, especially since maintaining the language is often seen by the ethnic groups as crucial to survival as a seperate entity (Kelly 1975:23). Therefore the ethnic languages are often spoken in the home and many have made a conscious effort to insure their children are reared with some knowledge of how to read and write their ethnic language. This strong emphasis on the ethnic language has, however, often been in conflict with the dominant language of the country since many parents encourage their children to become competent in the dominant language, to improve their career chances. For instance, the Italian migrants in Montreal battled for their kids' right to learn English instead of French, since the parents considered that a better choice for their children's future, since English is a dominant language in not only Canada but North American, even though French is no doubt dominant in Quebec (Simon 1975:5-6).

The public school system has not completely reacted to the diversity of the community and minority groups have had to struggle to "hold on to their legitimate cultural and social practises" (Jaenen 1975:71). This is partly due to the fact that even though anglophones and francophones in Canada show support for the policy of multiculturalism, they have been against the use of public money to support the teaching of heritage languages. But as many ethnocultural communities argue, multicultural policy that doesn't include financial and institutional support for mulitiple language promotion is vacuous (Cummins 1998:293-295).

Nevertheless, the federal government initiated the so-called Cultural Enrichment program in 1977, providing modest support to the ethnocultural communities for the teaching of the ethnic languages. That support was eliminated in 1990 (Cummins

1998:295). Most provincial governments do, however, support teaching of a limited number of ethnic languages and the school systems are mandated to implement a programme in language teaching in response to a request from community groups who can supply a minimum of twenty-five students. In 1998 more than sixty languages were being taught outside of the regular five hour school day (Cummins 1998:295).

A survey of school boards, carried out by the Canadian Education Association, showed general happiness with the language programs and the advantages of such programs identified by teachers, parents and students were numerous: positive attitude and pride in one's self and one's background; better integration of the child into school and society; increased acceptance and tolerance of other peoples and cultures; increased cognitive and affective development; facility in learning other languages; stronger links between parent and school; and ability to meet community needs. The disadvantages were few and mostly there were complaints from the school boards of difficulties connected to scheduling, classroom space, class size and shortage of approproate teaching material (Cummins 1998:299). The disadvantages were therefore rather technical than actual dissatisfaction with learning the ethnic language.

I am not saying that there is only happiness with ethnic language teaching however: there are certainly those who fear some kind of a balkanization of school communities and see few benefits to promoting ethnic languages. Those people, who are mostly anglophones and francophones, fear that cultural barriers between Canadians could become too strong and feel that the educational focus should be on acquiring either of the official languages and becoming Canadian (Cummins 1998:303).

The Icelanders in Canada were quite concerned with education and it is common knowledge that they started a school only a few days after they arrived at the site of what became Gimli. The teaching was, however, carried out in English, which left the question of who would teach the Icelandic language. Most Icelanders were opposed to state aid for separate schools and the teaching of school subjects in any foreign language, and in the Icelandic Canadian newspaper Lögberg in 1888 it is stated in an editorial page that Icelandic should not be made a basic language of the school system and not even a compulsory subject in the public schools. English should be the basic language in teaching with choices of other languages as a secondary option (Ruth 1964:50). That is, one country, one language. The paper kept that view and one year later the editor wrote that minority groups should not expect to have their own schools supported by the state and Icelanders should not ask for any tax grants of that kind. It continued by saying that Icelanders should aim for a separate high school and college to teach the Icelandic language, but that school should be completely financed by Icelanders (Ruth 1964:51). Another Icelandic Canadian newspaper, Heimskringla, expressed similar views and the Icelanders never received, nor asked for, any state aid for the Icelandic schools in Manitoba.

This does not, however, change the fact that the Icelandic language was taught from time to time and that there are many Icelandic Canadians who still speak the language beautifully. Why has the Icelandic language been maintained so well in this country? And why is it that it is now dying?

Much depends on how families are built and how they are made linguistically. One of the most important factors in cohesion is marriage within the group and Kelly (1975:25) points out that "if the group is largely endogamous, there will be no pressure towards language shift rising from the nature of the marriage relationship, so that the language being common, it will be in a stronger position than otherwise." He does, however, point out that the impulse to marry outside the group increases with each new generation and its greater distance from the mother country. This is something that happened in the Icelandic Canadian society. For the first sixty or seventy years or so, most marriages were inside the community and many people took a dim view of those who married a

"foreigner". And the fact is that the children of very few mixed marriages speak any heritage language. It has simply been considered too complicated. But it is nevertheless a fact that when Icelandic Canadians were marrying each other, more children grew up learning their parents', or grandparents', tongue. And since in the little Icelandic communities, like Arborg, Riverton and Lundar, Icelandic Canadians did marry each other, the language has been kept longer in those areas.

Another factor worth mentioning is the use of mass media. In September 1877 the first Icelandic Canadian newspaper, Framfari, began publication and since then the Icelandic Canadian community has hardly been without its own paper. For the first several decades, the papers were in Icelandic, but later English took over there as well, in parallel with the decision of Icelandic Canadian parents to stop speaking to their children in Icelandic, and at the time when fewer Icelandic Canadians learned the language of their parents or grandparents.

Ethnic neighbourhoods form the third factor. In North America it is quite common that certain areas come to belong to certain ethnic groups, and in many of the bigger cities there are Chinese neighbourhoods, Italian neighbourhoods, even Japanese, Irish or Polish neighbourhoods, and in the prairies of Canada there are whole towns which are Icelandic, Ukrainian, Mennonite. Such areas have more of a chance to keep the language with the ethnic stores and other services being provided in the ethnic language. In the case of Icelandic Canadians and the Icelandic language, such areas include Gimli, Arborg, Riverton, Lundar, Baldur etc. Whereas many Icelandic communities in Canada didn't exist as specific groups for many years, and intergrated earlier with the other Canadians, the little Icelandic towns have stayed quite Icelandic although later people of other ethnic groups started moving in there. We can, for instance, compare the towns of Gimli and Arborg. Gimli has become a popular summer resort with thousands of retiring Manitobans moving to the town, making the proportion of Icelanders smaller every year. Arborg, on the other hand, has stayed much less changed, with older people speaking together in Icelandic when they meet on streetcorners. It has, no doubt, resulted in differences in the language spoken, although Gimli is doing quite well in trying to keep the connections and having the language taught.

"La foi est gardienne de la langue et la langue gardienne de la foi," is, apparently, a saying in Canada (Kelly 1975:25). Many of the ethnic groups, such as the French, Ukrainians and Mennonites, have kept close connections between the language and the church. That doesn't mean that the services have always been held in the ethnic language, but the churches have for long served as general meeting places for people of a certain ethnic origin. The Icelandic churches in Canada have been many and have been divided into several different religions. They have nevertheless for long kept a certain status in the life of Icelandic Canadians. In the first years the service was held in Icelandic but around 1930 English started coming in more and more, depending on which pastor could be had. For a while the services would be in both English and Icelandic but little by little English took over, although masses in Icelandic have been held on occasions until last year (Isfeld, personal communication). But although the English language has taken over the service, the churches still have the function of being a certain center for people of Icelandic origin.

The fifth factor is the workplace. Kelly (1975:26) points out that "if one can work in one's own language, that language is strengthened, but it is the experience of most of the ethnic work force that work is not available in one's own language, unless one is in a service industry catering to the ethnic group. In any case, the language of work often causes hybridization of languages by reason of the technical terms that have to be used, and relationships with administrators." In the early years of the settlement many of the Icelanders worked together at wood cutting or at the railroads and, no doubt, communicated in Icelandic. These opportunities for working with their

countrymen grew fewer with time, and although they must have been more frequent in the Icelandic towns, it is clear that also their Icelandic ceased to be the language at work. That may have affected language use more than many would think. Additionally, it must be said that, unfortunately, Iceland has never had a very distinctive cusine, with Icelandic restaurants competing with the delicacies of Canada. Nor is there any other trade that is specifically Icelandic and that provides opportunities for using the language at work.

Finally I should mention Icelanders love of literature. When the immigrants came to Canada they didn't own much, and their luggage didn't take up much space. Nevertheless they brought tons of books, all kinds of books, manuscripts, printed books, big books and small books. The love of books, storytelling and poetry, has been a big part of the Icelandic nation since it came to exist as a specific nation and that has stayed with the nation, even after they emigrated and became Canadians. That factor certainly has a great affect on the existence of Icelandic in Canada.

The fact is that the Icelandic Canadian society is going through very normal changes that have affected almost all minority groups in Canada, though differently. Wsevelovd Isajiw (1975:132) has researched Canadian ethnic groups, and has seen patterns that run through. (1) A pattern of "transplantation" of the old culture, (2) the rebellion pattern, and (3) the returning or rediscovery pattern. He makes the assumption that these patterns are discernable under the conditions of pluralism of ethnic stratification.

The pattern of transplantation refers to the immigrants' attempts to re-establish the old country in the new country and applies especially to the first-generation immigrants. "It is the process of building ethnic ghettos, of establishing relations with people whose sympathy and loyalty can be assumed" (Isajiw 1975:132). This is actually the idea behind New Iceland. But as Isajiw rightly points out, transplanted things never grow the same, and the transplantation pattern is not really a continuation of the old ways. "Even in rather isolat-

ed areas the characteristics of the new society impinge on the immigrant" (Isajiw 1975:133). Some people stay in this pattern and generation after generation they hold to their ethnic identy." And there is nothing wrong with that, as long as they have also adjusted to the world around them and participate in things other than those of their transplanted new world.

The second pattern is the rebellion pattern, which is specifically characteristic of the second generation, although some first-generation emigrants no doubt went that way as well. They have a strong self-awareness which comes about as "a consequence of psychological confrontation with the cultural ways and relational structures of the larger society" (Isajiw 1975:133) and, as Isajiw points out, "one result of such confrontation is either embarrassment, dissatisfaction with, or shame of one's own parental patterns and expectations". The reaction to this might be of various kind, such as conscious rejection of one's past or overidentification with the dominant society. No doubt there are many Icelandic Canadians that have gone this way, but they are not very visible, because they do fall in with the crowd. Those who follow the rediscovery pattern, however, are more visible.

The rediscovery pattern is the most important and most significant because it works on maintenance of ethnic identy, a project which can span over generations. Isajiw (1975:133-134) describes the people making up this pattern as "persons who have gone through the basic process of socialization not in the culture of their

ancestors, and who might have experienced much social mobility within the larger society but whose feeling of identity with their ancestral group has actually developed rather than decreased." These people are rediscovering their ancestral past as something with a new meaning. The past becomes transfigured (Isajiw 1975:134). In some people's cases this might be accompanied by rejection of the values of the dominant culture but others enjoy their heritage culture without rejecting their own. It is this third stage that most of the visible Icelandic Canadians are in today. These are the people who want to keep contact with Iceland, want to keep some of the customs and even learn the language, but, at the same time, be Canadian. This is the group most important for preserving the ethnic culture.

For an ethnic language to survive in a bilingual situation it must be of some independent use because the languages with more prestige have a tendency to crowd them out (Kelly 1975:24). We can't anymore depend on the amma-factor, with the kids learning Icelandic just so that they can talk to the grandparents. A language that is the property of the old is simply a dying language. That is sad, but it is a fact. In the Census of 1996 it is stated that 70.685 people of Icelandic origin live in Canada, 25.735 of them in Manitoba. At the same time, only 3,275 Manitobans spoke any of the Scandinavian languages, with only 130 considering it their mother tongue. And although Icelandic is no doubt the biggest factor in this number it is nevertheless clear that those who speak the language are becoming fewer, and they are getting older. Most Icelandic Canadians who speak Icelandic today learned it as a first language, spoken at home. They didn't learn English until they went to school at the age of five or six. Young parents today, however, don't speak Icelandic, which means they do not speak the language to their children and when the children don't grow up hearing Icelandic, the future of the language in Canada is clear. Only death is possible.

But it doesn't have to be so bad and the Icelandic Canadian community certainly seems to be strong enough to survive even though the language dissappears as a first language. The third stage of rediscovery blossoms and there are hundreds of Canadians of Icelandic origin who want to keep their roots and want to keep the connection with Iceland. They are simply going to do that in English. I am not here, however, to say that we should not pay attention to the Icelandic language. On the contrary. I think it is quite important that the Icelandic language will be kept alive in some form, although it has ceased to be the first language of Icelandic Canadians. Everything that has already been done to keep the language is quite important: conversation classes at the Scandinavian Centre, language teaching in various places throughtout Canada, and certainly the Icelandic Department at the University of Manitoba.

We have to make sure that even though Icelandic will, after a few decades, probably have died as a mother tongue in Canada, there will always be Canadians who do speak the language, who can read Icelandic books, poems or even just postcards. And together, we can do that.

Return to the Gudny by dinghy

66 Degrees North

by Margaret Rice

"We really are down to our backpacks," I remember saying to my husband, our suitcases stowed for the week by an obliging hotel. Clad in hiking clothes suitable for all sorts of Icelandic weather, we are choosing to spend our final few days in the country on a whimsical journey to one of the few places with which I have no ancestral connection. Remote, rugged and romantic, we want to see for ourselves the place to which the elderly protagonists of the celebrated Icelandic film, Children of Nature, risk everything to return. Indeed, the more I hear such words as "elemental" and "inaccessible" used to describe the area simply known as the West Fjords, the more I yearn to go there too - a magical ending to a marvelous month of travel in Iceland.

And now the taxi is collecting us in the never-ending light of Icelandic summer and, en route to the bus, the driver is laughingly convincing me that he and I are related, reminding me how much I love being part of one large ethnically connected family.

A local bus from Reykjavik will get us to the port of Stykkisholmur in just under three hours. Meanwhile, the morning begins to unfold like a series of ever-changing postcards. First, we share the Ring Road, Iceland's Route One, which circumnavigates the country for its thousand miles, with other traffic - cars, trucks, tour buses - on a fairly busy stretch. This, after all, is still the environs of the capital, Reykjavik, the city where almost half of the country's 250,000 inhabitants live. Then, to our right, the landmark Mount Esja, the most conspicuous mountain in the capital area, is briefly visible before we enter the new four- mile tunnel under Hvalfjord and, on exit, continue north of the fjord to the next stop of significance, the town of Borgarnes, gateway to the fabled Snaefellnes peninsula immortalized by Jules Verne. Here, as in so much of Iceland, the countryside is rich in saga lore, but today we are mindful of our different destination, as, departing the Ring Road, the bus rumbles west along the distinctly less traveled Route 54. Now there are frequent stops to fling down newspapers or parcels at the side of the road where a sign names a farm, and a single-lane dirt or gravel track leads to it.

With just a glimpse of the area's focal point, the elegant and mystical Snaefells glacier, we turn sharply north for the final portion of our trip to Stykkisholmur. It charms us to see Helgafell once more, the " holy mountain" which only last week we scaled in silence and upon whose summit, in accordance with local legend, made our three wishes. And then abruptly, we are arriving; but not without incident. Our backpacks are mysteriously missing from the bus, and with them, we are alarmed to realize, our airline tickets home. Calm is restored, however, when it turns out that our "luggage" has simply been put off in error at the filling station back up the road.

So now we are free to enjoy a ten-minute walk down the main street of the town to the harbour. At the offices of Saeferdir or Sea Tours, we purchase two tickets on the ferry Baldur to take us across what the map shows to be Iceland's widest fjord. The trip over Breidafjordur from Stykkisholmur on Snaefellnes to the West Fjords will take almost three hours, but the day is a warm and sunny seventeen degrees, and this journey by water rather than overland is essential if we are to capture the spirit of the characters in the movie which has inspired this expedition.

The ferry does not leave until four in the afternoon, but, meanwhile, we are most content to savor our surroundings. The harbour is full of fishing boats with evocative names like Thorsunn and Grettir while

the harborside buildings are brightly coloured. Facing north across the bay, the Sea Bastards' Inn serves meals in a modest brown house with a few tables on a small verandah. We lunch with delight on its homemade fish soup and fresh brown bread, and afterwards visit Norska Husid, the Norwegian House, originally the first two-storey wood frame house in Iceland, now a museum depicting the gracious life of a merchant and his family in the early nineteenth century.

It is only, however, when at last we set sail that we feel our real adventure is beginning. We certainly seem to have left tourists behind and the rollicking golden presence of Stasi, an Icelandic sheepdog, whose owner is a breeder, seems to confirm the authenticity of what we are doing.

Moreover, Breidafjordur is truly a wonder. Studded with islands and skerries, its waves dancing with puffins and cormorants, the beauty of the fjord dissolves time until suddenly we reach Flatey, largest of the islands, and the halfway mark of our voyage. Bright with buttercups, its small harbor is surrounded by a group of pleasingly painted timber houses, apparently being lovingly restored by what is now chiefly a summer population.

Beyond, on the other hand, is a vastly different vista. Despite the unwavering length of the arctic day, the weather has shifted and, as we approach the primordial mountainscape ahead, the whole peninsula of the West Fjords stretching west into the icy waters of the Denmark Strait seems bathed in a greenish gray light, the effect undoubtedly of one of the frequent fogs for which the region is famous. Soon, however, we are landing, although totally unprepared for what appears. Brjanslaekur, designated one of the main entrance points into the West Fjords, seems at the very least a curious choice since there is no settlement here at all. But, civilization or none, suddenly people are scrambling off the Baldur and onto the lone jetty, some with cars and some without. Amidst the crowd of those disembarking and those meeting them, I look in vain for the long- distance bus supposedly timed to connect with the ferry and take us to the regional capital of Isafjordur. Chancing on a familiar face, that of a pleasant, somewhat portly Icelander, whom I remember as being on the bus from Reykjavik, in desperation I dash over to him, to ask if he knows anything about a bus. Indeed he does and points my husband and me in the direction of a shabby white van, the interior of which is equally worn. But our options being non-existent and persuaded by the fact that it is leaving immediately, we, the helpful Icelander and one other man who remains a stranger for the journey, all climb aboard.

And so we set off on our second road trip of the day. Yet not before the van, having gone merely the urban equivalent of a few short blocks, emits an ominous rattling noise, shakes and then lurches to a stop. Before we have time to react, the driver is out, examining the underside of his machine. In a moment, he returns to his seat upon which there is much excited chatter in Icelandic- our friend just in front of us, the stranger in front of him, and the driver. Then, almost as quickly as it began, it subsides and, incredibly, the van starts to move.

"What's happened?" I ask our interpreter, striving to project a calm I am far from feeling. His reply, quoting the driver, undoubtedly loses something in translation, but since this driver and this vehicle are all that we have, I realize it must do.

"He says there are some problems with the van, but he thinks it will see us home."

For some reason, hearing this news, reminds me of the printed itinerary which we received from the travel agent for this, the most unusual part of our trip: Bus Brjanslaekur to Isafjordur 1900 (not sure of arrival time) Despite the proviso in brackets , nothing in it had seemed cause for concern. Bracing myself for the journey, I look at my watch. It is just after seven p.m.. Therefore, much to my amazement, I have to acknowledge that we are right on time so far.

We are travelling a highway, Route 60, which, I am to learn later, is one of the highest in Iceland. A narrow, potholed gravel track, it has neither shoulders nor guard rails and is designated a 'summer only' road. For the next few hours, it will

Beginning our hike at Hornvik

weave and wind its wild way over sheer granite mountains, across desolate treeless heaths with their solitary orange emergency huts, and down and around deep and craggy fjords, each with its own tiny fishing village at the bottom. For half the distance to Isafjordur, we are boundlessly grateful to be diverted from our terror by our affable and knowledgeable travel companion, now pointing out a forbidding grey stone figure looming out of the fog whom he identifies as Floki, the Norwegian guided to this part of Iceland by a trio of ravens, and then showing us his favourite waterfall, Dynjandi ("resounding"), a spectacular series of ever widening cascades, the effect of the whole like some aqueous garment, a watery veil. But all too soon we are at his home, Hrafnseyri, on Arnarfidur, yet another of the many fjords serrating the west coast. He leaves us with the news that the place where he lives was the birthplace of Jon Sigurdsson, Iceland's most ardent nationalist.

A moment later the van starts up, and we are once again climbing up from the fjord to yet another lonely moor. Until now, we have had the road to ourselves, but here we overtake a rental car which has pulled off and stopped, and we know instinctively why we chose not to drive ourselves. Shortly after, rounding a rough and steep mountain slope, we meet a second car and simply avert our eyes from the edge. If anything, the sense of danger enhances the effect of the extreme beauty we are witnessing and, conscious that our camera is useless in a speeding vehicle, we seem to intuit that each of us is making his or her own memories of this day.

Suddenly, just when I have been lulled into a sort of acceptance of the bizarre rhythms of our journey, we are hurtling forward into darkness. I feel as though I'm in a fairy tale as the van disappears deeper and deeper into a chasm rough hewn out of mountainous ochre rock. As if in a dream, we seem to go on forever, until strangest of all, we come to an intersection.. To my surprise, I realize that we could turn left under this mountain. But we don't, and a few minutes later, emerge to the welcome lights of Isafjordur in the valley below.

In the morning, we actually wake refreshed, in our comfortable, if unremarkable concrete hotel on the town square, and

Our destination, Hornbjarg.

at breakfast, over several cups of splendid Icelandic coffee, strong but never bitter, remind ourselves why we are here. The town, spectacularly set between mountains and sea, will be the base for not the focus of our exploration.

Our objective is nothing less than to arrange a trip which will take us down the long broad fjord known as Isafjardardjup out into the North Atlantic, and along the coast of Iceland's most northerly shore, an area known as Hornstrandir. For it was, after all, the forlorn yet exotic loveliness of that place which had so impressed us in the closing scenes of *Children of Nature.* Moreover, the travel brochures had fed my fantasies.

"Hornstrandir", one began, "is the most magnificent the country has to offer. The absolute silence that reigns on the now uninhabited coast is something most visitors will never have experienced before and will certainly never forget. There perhaps, the contrasts are sharper than ever; in the harsh outpost overlooking the Artctic Circle, flowers bloom around the ruins of old turf farmhouses while plants and wildlife flourish in this reserve where man has not lived and sheep have not grazed for decades."

Recently, I had heard of a boat that might take us for the day to the film's locale, one of the bays at the base of the cliffs and mountains forming the Hornstrandir coast. Adalvik was purported to be a sandy beach fringed with wildflower meadows and still containing the ruins of a once vital village abandoned by its inhabitants in 1952.

"There's a trip to Adalvik today," offers the helpful young man in the Tourist Office, " but unfortunately it has just left." "Wait a minute, though. You can take an even better tour tomorrow. You'll see Adalvik from the boat, but then go even further, right to the nature reserve on the north coast. It's a brand new cruise. The best yet."

It's also an expensive proposition, we discover, but when will we ever be this close to something so unfamiliar again? 66 degrees North. The edge of the Arctic Circle. The latitude compels us so that we don't really hesitate, or ask many questions, or even look at a detailed map.

All we know definitely is that at nine o'clock tomorrow morning we will walk from our hotel to the harbour to board a boat called the Gudny. All we need bring is lunch, rain gear and a camera. Then, during the next twelve hours, we should have some unforgettable experiences.

Keen to be underway, we are up early the next morning, scanning the sky, which while not the cloudless bright blue of the previous day, still appears to promise a fair voyage. It is with a sense that is at once carefree and excited that we make our way to the harbour and the dock where the Gudny will be waiting.

Looking back on that day, what strikes me first is that I think I expected something grander of the boat itself, but there she was, a forty-five foot aluminum cabin cruiser. Still, she looked fresh and seaworthy, and the sight of several trim and energetic young men loading on gear and goods in an efficient manner, inspired confidence,

On board we discover seats much like those in the van, comfortable but definitely not luxurious. Observing my fellow passengers, I wonder what has brought each of them here in the early morning of the last day of June, We are eight in all, excluding the crew of three, and a quiet and pretty local girl who, I learn, is to be our guide. An attractive young German couple exude fitness and have apparently come with the purpose of camping for a week. Otherwise, we seem to be daytrippers - a jovial middle-aged Norwegian couple who have been here before, a mysterious solemn pair of men, possibly father and son, whose nationality is not clear, and my husband and I, two gracefully (I hope) aging romantics, I forever searching deeper for my Nordic roots.

Leaving the stillness of the harbour, the Gudny begins her long journey down the fjord while we all rush to the back of the boat exclaiming at the stark beauty of the mountains which line our passage. We feel blessed, delighting in the late June sunshine, when suddenly, just as we are about to head into open water, there it is, like a gift from the tiny fishing village of Bolungarvik at the base of three mountains. Just for a moment, as if to soften the harsh contours of this land, one of the mountains wears a halo of snow white cloud. Meanwhile, all around us the waters of the fjord shimmer serenely – almost like glass.

Recalling that scene, perhaps it makes sense that I really don't remember noticing when things changed, a subtle or perhaps not so subtle, shift in sea and sky. I can only say that one minute we were all outside laughing and taking pictures from the back deck and the next, the captain was politely but firmly ushering us back inside and closing the door. Even with a detailed map, I would be hard-pressed to pinpoint just where everything started to go wrong. I do know I saw Adalvik through my binoculars and that even a low-lying fog obscuring some parts of the bay could not extinguish the excitement I felt in being there.

Next, with a swiftness that is breathtaking, I am in the midst of every poem, story or song about storms at sea that I have ever known. We are either in the trough of a mammoth wave or it is washing over us. The captain keeps saying this is all normal though the stern is rising out of the water, the propeller spinning in the air. Once, the cargo above us shifts and, momentarily the captain is out on a line to secure it. Oddly, I am not afraid, and when the Norwegian firmly declares that the Gudny is a good boat, he couldn't be more convincing than if he had built her himself. Maybe what I feel is nothing more than a blind faith in the prowess of my seafaring forebears.

So on we sail, if you can call it that, and the captain assures us we are almost there, that the worst will soon be over. By now I am suffering, however, from a surfeit of hardfisk, 'coins' of dried fish, a regional delicacy I had earlier been honoured to accept from him. Maybe if I weren't just half Icelandic, I decide, my digestion could deal better with dried cod in heavy seas.. As it is, the malaise lingers until thankfully I become aware that the four metre waves of the ocean are behind us and we are at last traversing the considerably calmer waters of a bay. We are here – Hornvik – our scheduled destination.

But before I can contemplate the joys of terra firma, just as I am getting cautiously to my feet, unexpectedly, I am being thrown a life jacket. Just for an instant I find myself thinking, " This is crazy. What am I doing here?" I had come to the West Fjords with the specific purpose of seeing a film site, but today a dense atmosphere of unreality keeps challenging my clarity of purpose. And, as I am lowering myself into

the orange dinghy evidently deployed to take us ashore, my unease grows sharper. I seem to be outside myself, to be watching someone whose identity puzzles me.

The beach at Hornvik is not made of golden sand, but of sizeable smooth grey rocks and we must wade a few steps to reach it. Then, the six of us (minus the German couple who are going on further), led by our guide, are carefully making our way up a path of sorts through lush fern-like growth to what looks like an abandoned cottage. Built from concrete and timber, clad in parts with corrugated iron, once, she tells us, this was her grandfather's farm, lived on year round for generations until fifty years ago, when isolation and an unforgiving climate were to defeat even the hardiest farmers and fishermen. Now, used solely as a summer cottage, the old farmstead will give us a place to deposit our packs while we go for a hike before lunch. A black and white photo of a man with a dead polar bear looks down on us from a frame in the kitchen. Evidently, these awesome predators are still occasional visitors in the region, drifting in as they do, on pack-ice from Greenland.

Out in the bay, the Gudny is retreating with its transport of cargo and the German campers. In the time it takes to go further east along the coast, we will be climbing one of the hazy mountains in the area. When the wife of the Norwegian pleads fatigue and chooses to remain for a rest in the cabin, I confess I am tempted to do likewise. For although our recent voyage has also left me feeling somewhat drained, it's more than that. The fact is I'm I beginning to regard myself as something of a fraud, a bookish dreamer masquerading as an outdoor type. After all, I've come to Iceland for the most sentimental, the most predictable of reasons: to unearth its past, and in the process, to discover my roots. For this reason, I have difficulty recognizing a blond woman in late middle age dressed in blue-grey hiking shoes, charcoal windpants and lime green anorak as myself. As someone equal to an arctic trek. As someone ready to go on. Nonetheless, go on I do.

So now we are six (including our guide), climbing single-file, looking for old footpaths which are often far from distinct, crossing unnamed streams without bridging, breathing in the sweetness of a multitude of wild flowers. Once we look over to an inlet crammed with Siberian driftwood and a seal sleeping on a rock beyond. Our lone companions are the myriad birds of both sea and land, although once we glimpse a small tent on a hillside to our right, the temporary home of scientists studying the Arctic fox, Iceland's sole indigenous mammal. And always, there in abundance is the wild green of the tough Icelandic grass, so luxurious that at times it seems we aren't walking but rather wading through it.

Turning once to see how far we have come, a speck on the slate grey sea below surprises us. The Gudny has returned ahead of schedule, but for the present, we seem to be operating in a world which has banished time. Now and then the sharp cry of the Arctic tern makes its presence known, yet for the most part I am aware of

moving in a column of silence so profound as to command reverence.

All of a sudden, our guide is issuing directions, advising us to fan out on the meadow. Each is to find his or her own way to the top. From experience, she says that is what works best at this point. The infamous Icelandic wind is picking up, however, and several times I surrender to its force. But the others all seem to be rushing ahead effortlessly and it soon becomes obvious that they won't come down until we join them at the top. I really don't think I can make it. After all, this is the same wind, our leader has told us, that once blew a flock of her grandfather's sheep off the very cliff towards which we are headed.

And then, like some quiet miracle, it happens.

I stand up. My husband gives me his hand and suddenly I am not just walking but running uphill towards a lofty meadow, atop a cliff that until today meant nothing to me. For the past month I have been searching unceasingly for one thing above all – that ineffable spark of spirit which makes me Icelandic. I expected to find it in Horgardalur , in the barren valley of my grandfather's ancestral farm. I looked for it in Seydisfjordur, the post-card-pretty village of my grandmother. If not in either of those places, I felt certain of finding it at Thingvellir, the sacred parliamentary plains of this ancient country. After all, it was there in 1930 that my grandfather, by then a Canadian, had returned to deliver an address for the celebration of Iceland's millennial.

But the land and the latitude clearly has something else in mind for me. Weary but exhilarated, I let myself sink into the thick grass at the summit. I have climbed 1500 feet, and it is here on Hornbjarg, the most northern point in Iceland, that I have finally found my Viking heart.

Margaret at the top.

Learning about Flin Flon

by Megan Einarson

For my family story history project I decided to interview my grandmother, Kathleen Einarson. She grew up in the small mining city of Flin Flon in Northern Manitoba, and lived there from 1938 to 1986. During the years she lived there much happened.

Both her parents were immigrants who had come to Canada several years earlier. Her mother's name was Catherine Bain Sailor who had come from Scotland. Her father's name was Leendart Jan VanderWal (later changed to Leonard John when he gained Canadian citizen) and he had come from the Netherlands. They met in Yorkton Saskatchewan where her mother worked at a drycleaner's and her father was a tailor. They got married and moved to Flin Flon in 1930 looking for a new life where her father could start his own tailoring business. But Flin Flon was a mining town and it was very hard for her father to find work. Eventually he got a job at the Hudson Bay Melting & Smelting Company (HBM&S) where he sewed up things like pants and tents.

When her parents first came to Flin Flon they ended up living out of an old boxcar. But when Catherine found out she was pregnant they decided to move and find a better home. At the time, Flin Flon was pretty small and the hospital had just recently been built. My grandmother's older sister, Sjaane Adriana VanderWal, was one of the first babies born there. She was also the first female non-aboriginal baby born at the hospital. A few years later, in 1938, my grandmother was born.

At that point in time Flin Flon was rather secluded as there were no roads built that connected Flin Flon to the other towns. There was only the Canadian National Railway system which connected Flin Flon with the surrounding area. This kept the town's population fairly small. But it was also very safe. My grandmother could go out and play in the bush for several hours and her mother wouldn't have to worry. It was a small community and everybody knew everybody. The main roads coming in and out of Flin Flon were built in 1951.

My grandmother was about four years old when the war began so she doesn't remember much about what it was like. She said that the town was put on rations and everybody was given a rations book. This meant that every time you bought certain foods, like meat or sugar, you had to hand them a coupon. Her father joined the Dutch army since he was not yet a Canadian citizen and was stationed in Guelph, Ontario. Went he was sent there the whole family went with him. They stayed there for a year. During this time Princess Juliana of the Netherlands came to Canada with her two daughters to escape the war back home. One day her father came rushing home and told his wife to get my grandmother dressed in her best dress. The princess was coming to inspect the troops and he wanted her to present Princess Juliana with flowers. Although at the time no one was allowed to use film so there weren't any pictures taken.

At the end of the war my grandmother remembers looking out the window and seeing something on fire. She called to her parents and when they came they told her that it was an effigy of Hitler. The townspeople were burning it up and celebrating the end of the war.

During the war my grandmother helped her parents put together parcels of food to be sent to her father's family in the Netherlands. In 1949 she went there with her dad and her sister to visit some family. She said that they still had the Jello packages that were sent since they didn't know what they were. When her sister made it for them they were really pleased with this newly discovered food.

My grandmother has several fond memories of her childhood. Saturday mornings she would go to the local theater for the Saturday Morning Fun Show. You'd go in the morning to watch a serial of some sort, then before the main show, there would be a contest for the kids up on stage. It was a lot of fun and the whole thing only cost a quarter. If you wanted to buy candy for the show you only had to pay a nickel and you could get a large bag of penny candies.

Water was delivered in a barrel and you had to be very careful about wasting it. On Sunday evenings the whole family would bathe. They'd start with my grandmother, since she was the youngest, and end with her father. In the winter they brought snow in from outside and heated it on the wood fire. When everybody was done washing the water would go outside and be dumped in the garden.

My grandmother had many different jobs while she lived in Flin Flon. During her last year in school she worked at a confectionary called Freedmons. She'd serve milkshakes, sundaes, French fries, steaks, and burgers. When she finished school she worked at a store in Bakers Narrows, which was a campground. This was where she met my grandfather, Phillip Einarson. She also worked at Sears and as a receptionist for a clinic before she got pregnant. She had four children in total. Later she taught herself to decorate wedding cakes and found work as a cake decorator and as a guard for the RCMP.

In 1969 Prince Charles was on tour and came to Flin Flon. The men and women of the Royal Canadian Legion did a parade march for him before he came to review the troops. Since her father was part of the Dutch army stationed in Guelph he had different markings on his uniform. When Prince Charles saw these he came over to ask him about them.

In 1986 my grandfather was transferred to Nelson BC where he worked as a district manager for Sears. They still live there now, although they still go back to Flin Flon to visit old friends.

All in all, my grandmother says that Flin Flon hasn't really changed in the last few years and it isn't really much different than before. The city is, of course, much larger than it was when she was growing up, and there are a lot more people living there now.

I ended up learning a lot of things that I didn't know previously. I learned about my family as well as what was happening the same time that my grandmother was growing up.

When I was young I went with my parents to visit some family up in Flin Flon. But the only thing I really remembered about it was how rocky everything was and the Flin Flon Stack (apparently one of the tallest free standing structures in western Canada). I had no idea the kinds of things that had happened in Flin Flon's past, nor did I really care. But talking to my grandmother has given me a

pretty good idea as to what it would have been like for her growing up in Flin Flon during it's earlier years. My grandmother had come from an average Canadian family, so a lot of the things that she had to go through in her daily life could easily reflect most people of that time.

Although one thing that I thought was really interesting was the origin of the name Flin Flon. It's the only city in the world that's named after a science fiction character. However, I'm not really sure if the story about how they found the book in the first place is true or not, but it is very interesting. Something else I read on the official Flin Flon city website was that in an old diary belonging to a radio operator it was stated that they were only going to call the city Flin Flon until they heard from the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting. But the company never got back to them so the name stayed.

Letters from Friðjón Friðriksson

Translated by unknown source

The last of the Fridjon letters

Letter 26

Modruvellir, Sept. 6, 1884

Dear Friends,

Knowing that you are now in this country, I extend a thousand welcome wishes to you.

In a letter from my brother Arni, I read that you have lost your youngest child. I can imagine your grief, and my wife and I share this sorrow. I know that God comforts you, and I believe that the grief will turn out to be a blessing for you.

Eyjolfur Einarsson brought me your letter, dear friend. I thank you very much for it.

I am not going to discuss church matters at any length in this letter. The people here in New Iceland hope to be able to enjoy your services to some extent, but a congregational meeeting in Winnipeg will have to decide on the proportion of your services they will be able to pay for. I very much look forward to making a trip to Winnipeg to see you soon. I would like to take my wife and children with me, but the idea of travelling with the children scares her. Maybe we will just move to Winnipeg for the winter. That's just an idea, as of yet.

I have asked my brother Arni to advance you money for the time being, whenever you need it.

I am looking forward to seeing you just as much as I used ot look forward to Christmas when I was a child.

With many good wishes and kises from your loving friend and "brother",

Fridjon

Letter 27

Modruvelir, the last, Day of Winter 1885

Dear Friend,

I have now settled down here. The trip down was rather troublesome even though we didn't have any accidents. We all made it here safe and sound, except the children caught cold. We moved into a clean "Shanty" which my father-in-law built last spring. I have plenty of food: white fish, pike, pickerel, eggs, butter, cream, moose meat, geese and ducks.

I am now highly respected here because I have become so very rich. I am envied by people because I have so much food and because I do a lot of interestig things without much effort. I am also con-

sidered the most fortunate of men because I do not use tobacco, and therefore I am not suffereing due to the lack of tobacco, a condition tormenting many people these days.

I must be the most happy of all here since the populace give me the pleasure of confiding in me—they tell me all their troubles.

Being so happy, I don't find it appropriate to complain, but the lack of sunshine bothers me a great deal these days. We have had chilly, overcast and cloudy skies the last few days, and today we have a severe sleet storm from the north, with the snow piling up all around us.

I am hoping the weather will change for the better by tomorrow morning (the beginning of summer), enabling the sun to warm our souls as well as our bodies.

There is nothing to report in the way of progress or social activities here. I have not had any time yet to discuss church affairs. Most seem to be detached from these matters, but many look forward to your arrival this spring. I shall discuss all this with the leaders of the congregation soon.

Tomorrow mail will be sent from here to Selkirk. In the future mail will be sent from here to Selkirk every other Thursday, to be forwarded further north the following Saturday.

I dread news of the rebellion and many other things. I am not worried about the Metis becoming victorious and moving eastward through the province, but the rebellion is doing a great deal of harm and causing fear and sorrow to those who live throughout the Northwest.

On Easter Sunday I wrote Tryggvi Gunnarson about your money . . .

My wife and I send our best wishes for the summer. Kiss your children for us. I look forward to seeing you when the ice has thawed and spring has come.

I bid you goodbye,

Your friend,
Fridjon

Poetry

The Overcome

by Richard Hanna

The evil which has it's way;
he who holds his head too high up
goes down, takes a plan with him
some evil walks this way.
He's by the pillar of creation
clutching a flame to warm his heart.
It's igniting the sights he sees
as what he sees is what he needs.
The pressure won't leave him alone
it's in his face, and he
feeling so high holy now
has held his head up so high,
ignites like the love of life
to live life day by day.

Book Reviews

Travelling Passions: The Hidden Life of Vilhjalmur Stefansson.

Translated by Keneva Kunz

Reviewed by E. Leigh Syms
University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg

Vilhjalmur Stefansson was one of the foremost explorers of the early 1900's, following three Arctic expeditions (1906-1914), an extensive writing and lecturing career and a hero among Icelanders of Iceland and North America. This is an overview of the private (and often secret) life of the man. Initially, I viewed this work with some trepidation, wondering if it was going to be primarily a voyeuristic exploration into his "warts" and foibles. Although this element is present, we learn a great deal about the man, attitudes towards the Inuit then viewed as primitives and the competitive, and sometimes nasty nature of early explorers. We are left with the question of whether we want our heroes to be somewhat larger that life or to be shown with all of their "warts."

The "discovery" of Stefansson, the man, is enriched by a variety of fortuitous materials. Boxes of his personal correspondence including love letters were discovered at a flea market in Vermont. Palsson, an anthropologist from the University of Iceland, who had already done extensive research when publishing Stefansson's field diaries, also scoured archives for Stefansson's personal papers, letters from people with whom he corresponded and a variety of reports by his contemporaries, some of whom were downright hostile, and subsequent writers and researchers. He also interviewed people who had known Stefansson and his half-Inuit son, Alex, whom Stefansson never acknowledged, as well as his grandchildren, his wife, friends and children of his lovers.

Stefansson, like other Arctic explorers, faced phenomenal danger, not once but three times. Ships were locked in ice and destroyed and people died. Palsson discusses their being driven and uncovers the inevitable competitiveness and jealousy among fellow expedition members. All of the explorers of the time and more recent times were silent on the primary role of local Natives to make their expeditions successful; we need recall only Hillary's account of his initial conquering of Mt. Everest as a more recent example of this behaviour.

During his later years, Stefansson worked with the Russians to share ideas on developing a Jewish state in the Soviet Arctic. He was a victim of a severe attack during the McCarthy era of the communist witch-hunts. His most damming evidence was guilt by association with a friend who had been labeled a communist and his praise of the truly egalitarian "communistic" sharing among the Inuit.

As an anthropologist, Palsson cannot write this monograph without, at least, one chapter on societal values and perceptions. He leaves us with thoughtful ideas about changing social values towards Native peoples and towards exploration. He discusses the difficulties in documenting societies objectively. Even though Stefansson attempted to describe the "real" Inuit lifestyle, he realized that he had difficulty in not adding value laden embellishments.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson has a monument to him in the Interlake area of central Manitoba. During the early and mid-1900's, he was frequently written about. Even though he spent only the first two years at Ames, he has been written about as a Canadian, American and Icelandic hero. Palsson documents a record of his considerable amount of literature in recent years although, I think, this literature remains relatively unknown among the public.

This book is a useful reminder of his importance to older readers and an introduction to younger readers. It is no alternative, though, to reading his publications on his fieldwork and research. Even with the scandal and warts exposed, he remains an important and interesting figure, even if some may now consider him a somewhat less epic hero.

This book has numerous black and white photographs of various phases of Stefansson' s life and photographs of the many people with whom he was involved. The maps, on the other hand, are rare and poorly designed to help the readers develop a sense of where in the North he was travelling.

Perhaps the last word is but exemplified in the opening remarks of the Forward, by her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General of Canada:

"The more I read about Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the more I admire him, and the more I understand why he attracted such controversy. He was a brilliant anthropologist and an original thinker, . . ."

The Imagined City

By David Arnason and Mhari Mackintosh

Reviewed by Rev. Stefan Jonasson
Published by Turnstone Press, Winnipeg

David Arnason's name on the cover of an anthology is the literary equivalent of a designer label on a pair of jeans – the reader can be relatively confident that the book will draw upon the best of materials and be arranged with creative flair. *The Imagined City* is no exception. David Arnason and Mhari Mackintosh have assembled a volume that is, at once, a pleasure to read and a delight to behold.

The Imagined City grew out of a course that the editors taught at the University of Manitoba. "The students in that course discovered a wonderful array of writing about the city," according to Arnason and Mackintosh, and "looked at Winnipeg with a fresh eye, and saw what a fascinating place they inhabited." This fascination with the city comes alive in the pages of the book, which presents the familiar with remarkable freshness and the more the more obscure with brazen confidence.

In their introduction, which is a literary gem itself, Arnason and Mackintosh observe that "great cities are known more by their representation in art than by their economic or military greatness." How true, no matter what the History Channel may suggest to the contrary! The amazing array of authors included in this volume underscores this point, reminding us of both the breadth and richness of Winnipeg's literary scene from the earliest years. Few cities of its size can boast of such a rich store of talent: novelists Carol Shields and Margaret Laurence, Ralph Connor and Frederick Philip Grove, poets Dorothy Livesay and Miriam Waddington, journalists James H. Gray and Vince Leah, and social commentators Marshall McLuhan and Larry Zolf.

Some of the authors included will be less familiar to some readers. Among these lesser-known but historically significant figures are Francis Marion Benyon, a local journalist and novelist who was a founding member of the Political Equality League; Douglas Durkin, a poet and novelist who taught at Cornell University; poet J.J. Gunn and novelist E. Jane Taylor, who wrote under the pen name Jane Rolyat. The editors are to be commended for retrieving literary gems from these and other more obscure writers. In addition to Winnipeggers themselves, *The Imagined City* includes the perspectives of outsiders and visitors. Among others, Winston Churchill, Hugh MacLennan and Stephen Leacock all offer sympathetic portraits of the city.

The Imagined City is arranged into seven sections, each one representing a distinct era or neighbourhood. I found the first three – "Early Red River," "Boom Town Winnipeg" and "The New Century" – to be especially engaging, offering interesting glimpses into the early years of the city and its eventual coming of age in the early twentieth century. Two sections, "North End Winnipeg" and "City of Dreadful Night," deal honestly with the internal solitudes that are also a part of the city's history, while the remaining two, "World War II and After" and "The New Metropolis," best reflect the creative diversity of Winnipeg's writers.

Noting that, "Winnipeg is a great multicultural city because it has enfolded into itself the cultures of the world," Arnason and Mackintosh have endeavoured to represent the diversity of cultures found in Winnipeg's literary scene, albeit with uneven results. Several of the more significant ethnic groups found in the city are represented, though by no means are they all there. An excerpt from Armin Wiebe's book, *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens,* is a stellar piece of ethnic humour—subtle but hilarious. Written in English with apparently perfect German grammar, it chronicles the visit of a fictional Mennonite couple to the old Eaton's store in Winnipeg, where the MTS Centre now stands. Those of us who knew and loved Eaton's will immediately recognize this couple from our own sojourns in the grand old store.

I was especially heartened by the editors' inclusion of three noteworthy aboriginal authors—Beatrice Culleton, Tomson Highway and Yvonne Johnson—without whom any literary history of Winnipeg would be strangely incomplete. On the other hand, I was surprised by the absence of Franco-Manitoban authors, let alone those of Asian, Pacific or African heritage. On balance, the North End and inner city seem over-represented in the collection as though, thirty-five years after the amalgamation of the suburban municipalities with the City of Winnipeg, no one has noticed the boundary changes. One is left to wonder whether culture exists in the suburbs—save for Wildwood Park, that enclave of academics and sophisticates near the University of Manitoba.

In addition to a passing nod to the suburbs, I would have appreciated a few representative selections of translated pieces, since a great deal has been written about Winnipeg in foreign languages. After all, Winnipeg boasted a foreign language press that rivalled the likes of Chicago and New York. The immigrant experience is largely missing from The Imagined City, save for where it is refracted though the imagination of subsequent generations writing in English.

In defence of the book's omissions, the sheer volume of available literary material meant that it was impossible to include anything more than a sampling of the written works about Winnipeg, so the editors necessarily restricted their selections to a manageable range and quantity of material. After all, the book professes to be "a" literary history, not "the" literary history of Winnipeg. So, rather than dwell on what is not there, it is important to recognize and appreciate the astonishing richness of the selections which were incorporated into the collection.

The diversity of genre is as remarkable as the diversity of authors. The selections include correspondence and diaries, memoirs and travelogues, short stories and poems, interviews and excerpts from novels. The individual pieces range from the tragic to the comic and from the purely factual to the profoundly imaginative.

I found myself having mixed feelings about the poetry in *The Imagined City.* Having claimed that "sometimes a clumsy statement can say more than an elegant poem," the editors then included several poems which reflect the clumsy more than the elegant! This is not to say that the volume is without profound or touching verse; it's just that the editors lean heavily towards free verse, whereas my tastes belong to the "Ólafur Kárason of Ljósavík" school of poetry. Preferring the lyrical "landscapes" of Stephan G. Stephansson and Guttormur J. Guttormsson to the ragged "abstracts" of many contemporary poets, I have an abiding fondness for metre and rhyme, which was not satisfied by most of the selections in The Imagined City, however deep some of the passages may well be.

Three authors of special interest to people of Icelandic descent are included. Laura Goodman Salverson is represented by a moving passage from The Viking Heart, which includes her elegant account of a winter's evening where, "the darkness was an opaque canvass against which the soul of Winnipeg stood out a lovely and radiant thing." Guy Maddin reflects on "manufacturing a history more interesting than the arid, dull, lower-case one

Canadians always give themselves" in his review of the play 1919. The Icelandic trio is rounded out by David Arnason himself with his poem "Marsh Burning."

Beyond the written word, *The Imagined City* is beautifully illustrated with photographs, drawings and maps – some of which will be familiar to anyone acquainted with the city's history, while others are newly rediscovered images of the city's past. The illustrations and the text complement and reinforce each other, yielding a volume that belongs on both the bookshelf and the coffee table!

The editors have done a magnificent job in pulling together this collection, which is a praiseworthy effort to present Winnipeg's literary richness. David Arnason is currently head of the English department at the University of Manitoba and the author or editor of dozens of books, although he is best known for his collections of short stories. For a time, he was also acting head of the university's Icelandic Studies department. Mhari Mackintosh is a Winnipeg writer and Margaret Laurence scholar.

The Imagined City will be a welcome addition to the library of anyone who loves literature, historical photography and the rich cultural diversity of Winnipeg. Arnason and Mackintosh suggest that "we can apply most of the words that define the qualities of human beings to cities." If this insight is correct—and I think it is—then *The Imagined City* makes the case for describing Winnipeg as brilliant and creative, passionate and surprising. Overall, The Imagined City is akin to the dark night described by Lara Goodman Salverson – "an opaque canvass against which the soul of Winnipeg stood out a lovely and radiant thing."

Contributors

TONI ARMANNO is a writer and researcher who lives and works in Vancouver.

MEGAN EINARSON won the Young Historian Award from the Manitoba Historical Society in the Family History category for her essay. Megan enjoys reading and painting. She has a strong interest in history.

ALI BENSON PASCOE was born in Gimli in 1916, the youngest daughter of Olina and Gisli Benson. After living in Winnipeg for sixty-five years, she and her late husband Art moved back to Gimli. She has two sons and three grandchildren.

MARGARET RICE was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and is the granddaghter of W.H. Paulson, who became an Immiration Agent to Iceland after he emigrated from that country in 1883. She is presently studying Icelandic. She and her husband Doug Van Hamme took their first trip to Iceland in June 2004.

RICHARD HANNA is a first time published writer from Winnipeg. A poet like his great-great grandfather, Jon Jonatanson, whose daughter Valgerdur (Loa) came to Canada at four years of age.

KRISTIN M. JOHANNSDOTTIR was born in Akureyri and has an Masters of Arts degree in Icelandic language and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Icelandic language and literature from the University of Iceland. She taught Icelandic at the University of Manitoba for four years and is currently working on her PhD in linguistics at the University of British Columbia.

REV. STEFAN M. JONASSON is Director for Large Congregations at the Unitarian Universalist Association, which is headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts. He also serves as minister to the Unitarian churches at Arborg and Gimli—two tiny congregations in the Manitoba Interlake. This paradox does not go unnoticed! Stefan's ties to The Icelandic Canadian magazine are extensive: he has served on its board since 1981, with one hiatus, and he is the brother of the late Eric Jonasson, a former business manager of the magazine, and great-nephew of Axel Vopnfjord, a former editor.

ANGELA MAIDA formerly of Manitoba now lives in Vancouver. She is the proud mother of Svava, Joren and Maren.

DR. LEIGH SYMS is associate curator of archaeology at the Manitoba Museum. He is recently retired but continues to write on archaelogy. He and his wife, Shirley, were very active board members of The Icelandic Canadian magazine.

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

PHOTO BY KARI TORFASON/ERNIE EINARSON

The back page

Walter Sopher delivering his opening greetings at the 2006 Icelandic National League convention in Victoria, B.C.