

# ICELANDIC CONNECTION



XCTP-0614 NSSI

*Vol. 64 #2 (2011)*

# ICELANDIC CONNECTION

VOLUME 64, NO 2 (2011) • WINNIPEG, CANADA

<b>On the Cover</b>	51
<b>Editorial</b> Almar Grímsson	52
<b>The Apiarist</b> Mylee Nordin and Heidi Malazdrewich	55
<b>Ancient Art, New Home: Glima in Manitoba</b> Charles Nathan Hatton	65
<b>Tales from the barber shop</b> Sarah Painter	74
<b>The Uniqueness of Traditional Icelandic Music</b> Brady Arnason	84
<b>The Wisdom of the Viking Gods</b> Thora McInnis	86
<b>Poetry</b> <b>Afi You'll Be Remembered</b> Mason Kane	89
<b>Sigríður Krakson and his daughter died at Mountain, ND – winter of 1903</b> Author unknown	90
<b>Book Review</b> <b>With Love to you All – Bogga S.</b> Reviewed by Linda Howard Glover	92
<b>Contributors</b>	95
<b>The Back Page</b>	96

# ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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

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## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

CANADIAN \$40 CAD yearly, \$80 two years U.S. & INTERNATIONAL \$46 USD yearly  
E-JOURNAL \$30 CAD / \$30 USD  
SINGLE COPIES \$10 CAD plus postage  
WE ACCEPT U.S. & CANADIAN FUNDS, MASTERCARD AND VISA

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

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

**Printed in Winnipeg, Canada by Dycom Direct Mail and Lögberg-Heimskringla**  
**ISSN: ISSN 1920-423X**

# ON THE COVER



PHOTO: ÁSTA SÓL KRÍSTJANSDÓTTIR

Snorri Participants 2011

# Editorial

## Threats and opportunities

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by Almar Grímsson

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I am honoured to share some of my views and experiences with the readers of the *Icelandic Connection*. I congratulate Lorna Tergesen for her outstanding work in keeping this excellent journal going. This is indeed a challenge in our modern cyber world where newspapers and journals are increasingly read on the internet. We also note the rapid development of reading literature by new techniques like iPad and Kindle.

Modern Icelanders keep very well abreast with cyber techniques. However, books are being published in no fewer numbers in Iceland than in recent years, which is also very interesting due to the fact that the Icelandic population was badly shaken by the *kreppa* – the economic crisis that came like a major earthquake in the fall of 2008. I believe that publication of printed media will sustain but when the cyber generation becomes the gray eminences of our societies in the future, adaptations will have taken place and *Morgunblaðið*, *The Icelandic Connection*, *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, and the *New York Times* will be read at the breakfast table on a touch screen.

There is some truth in the saying that in every threat there is a new opportunity. Although the after shocks of the *kreppa* are still occurring, many Icelanders are finding

new approaches in life and more leisure time is for many a new opportunity for unfolding some dormant abilities in oneself and enjoying a growing number of artistic performances of all kinds. The increasing number of visits to libraries, concerts, and artistic galleries bear clear witness to this positive development in the midst of the challenges for economic survival.

In spite of the dramatic changes in media communication, I am a firm believer that no new techniques will replace the direct connections when people meet people. There is a steady, growing interest in discovering ones roots and traveling to places which have personal and emotional relevance. E-mail followed by Skype, Facebook, Twitter, etc. are tools to dramatically enhance the direct communication of people in spite of great geographic distances. However, they will not replace the direct contact between people by mutual visits.

### Visionaries

I was very fortunate in 1998 to suddenly become heavily involved in the relations between Iceland, Canada, and the United States with Icelandic heritage in North America as the basis. This created a new dimension in my life and has led to

personal discoveries and new friendships beyond anything I could have anticipated. It became very clear to me how important it is for everyone to be aware of their family bonds and to look for far away relatives. In this connection, I applaud the great contributions of historians and genealogists like Nelson Gerrard in Canada and the “Cousins Across the Ocean” project in North Dakota led by George Freeman, Pam “Sunna” Olafson Furstenau, and Halfdan Helgason.

The simple yet brilliant idea of the Snorri Program was presented at an informal meeting in Reykjavík in 1997. This young man’s idea proved to be the right thing to do at the right moment. It was as if people on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean had been waiting for the Snorri Program to be conceptualized and implemented. The vision of the program was clear: To sensitize the younger generation of descendants of Icelandic immigrants in North America with a six week educational program in Iceland to discover their roots. I humbly submit that without this program it would have been difficult to keep up the spirit of Icelandic heritage in the numerous Icelandic settlements in the United States and in Canada. Most of the Snorri graduates are active in their communities and some have assumed leadership roles where they live. The expansion of the Snorri concept to offer a Snorri Plus program for those 30 years and older has also been a major success and the Snorri West Program which was successfully run in Manitoba for 10 years is being reinforced and broadened.

The fantastic project of building the Icelandic Emigration Center at Hofsóss in

Iceland in 1996 is thanks to the visionary Valgeir Þorvaldsson. The center plays a key role in spreading more knowledge and information about the history of Icelandic emigration in the 19th and early part of the 20th century. It is highly recommended that everyone visiting Iceland takes the journey to Hofsóss and spends ample time there to learn about the general aspects of the history of emigration as well as learning more about their own family history.

It is also clear that the opening of an embassy in Ottawa and the placement of an Icelandic diplomat residing in Winnipeg has strengthened the relations between Iceland and Canada considerably. In recent years the initiatives and encouragement of Consul General Atli Ásmundsson have made a huge impact and the Núna – Now art festival of young artists is a great example of such initiatives.

## Organizations

It seems that the Icelandic National League (INL) both in North America and in Iceland will sustain and grow further, but only provided that new approaches will be identified to reach out to the great number of people of Icelandic descent who are spread all over the North American continent. One idea being launched is to create a virtual Icelandic club on the internet. Again the new technique is not necessarily a threat but an opportunity. By making a metaphor of the descendants of Icelandic immigrants being an iceberg it is obvious that we see only the very tip of it.

Through the last 13 years, I have been able to visit almost all Icelandic settlements in North America and made contacts with clubs and individuals in all

those communities. The INL of Iceland was revitalized in 1997 and two main thrusts became the basis for its work. One was the Snorri Program and the other was to promote and carry out group visits to Icelandic settlements in North America. Since year 2000 there have been about 2000 participants in tours where INL Iceland lends it name and where Jónas Þór, historian and tour organizer, has played a very important role.

It is also very rewarding to see the great success of the annual Icelandic Festivals, Íslendingadagurinn in Gimli, MB and August the Deuce in Mountain, ND. Also the celebrations of Iceland's Independence Day, 17th of June, throughout North America as well as the various cultural and social activities at community level like the INL International Visits program and Porrablóts, are a token of the strong bond people feel toward the old country, Iceland.

## Onwards

All the Icelandic organizations have similar missions and that vision is focused on Iceland. Working together to achieve unified goals will continue to expand our reach internationally and strengthen our organizations in particular on local levels.

*Rev. Stefan Jonasson*

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All the work that has been done before us is very important and should be honored but there is more work to be done. I know that the visionaries of tomorrow will see new opportunities and continue to improve our work to promote and preserve our Icelandic heritage.

I recommend that all those involved in the organizational aspects of collaboration between Iceland and the vast number of people of Icelandic descent in North America keep an open mind for making that collaboration less bureaucratic and more personal. We should also keep an open mind and look into ways of making one truly international organization including INL of Iceland and INL of North America, and also South America with due respect for the history of Icelandic emmigration to Brazil.

I wish you all a peaceful and happy new year 2012.

## Correction Vol. 64 #1 (2011)

Cover photo of Dr. Ken Thorlakson  
(Vol. 64 #1, 2011) was taken by  
Bob Talbot.

Poetry title should read  
*The Spirit of Hecla Island*

In contributors notes the following:  
Thor is the son of Hartley and  
Heather Richardson and a grandson  
of the late Dr. and Mrs. Paul H. T.  
Thorlakson.

# The Apiarist

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Original concept by Mylee Nordin  
and Heidi Malazdrewich  
Images: Mylee Nordin

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*The Apiarist premiered July 14, 2011 at the Winnipeg International Fringe Festival.*

## Prologue

*Spotlight on stage. Lauren is downstage.*

There is a sound that is made when hundreds...thousands of individual parts make up a whole; rain, clapping, leaves rustling, crickets...

And amazing things can be made from this coming together; creeks, rivers, branches- whole trees moving...honey.

*Darkness. Only the sound of bees buzzing can be heard.*

## Act I

### Scene I

*Lights up on Lauren. The stage is bare except for 4-5 honey supers on stage. She stands on stage, her hands holding an imaginary package.*

A honey bee dies away from its hive. Away from the comb she helped to build, sisters she helped to rear and away from the honey she helped make through countless trips of nectar. Taking a cue from the bees, Adam Preston died without much notice. Out of town; away from his neighbours, his house – and most importantly – his bees.

A package arrived weeks after his death. No one knew what to do with it. *Contents:* Live Bees. One mated Queen

with attendants, ten thousand worker bees, 100ml of sugar syrup and a single sheet: Tips for Installing a colony. *Warning: Proceed with caution.*

### Scene II

#### Commitment will serve you well...

*The beginning beekeeper needs to concentrate on the fundamentals of beekeeping in order to achieve early success in the husbandry of bees.*

I had picked up the package of bees, my hands vibrating, uncertain of what I was getting myself into. I was heading home – quickly – after what was supposed to be a simple trip to the post office. It was the humming that propelled my actions from the moment I heard it. As I walked, the humming seemed to move. At first it was behind me, pushing me, then walking along next to me. Then it hovered above, like the bees inside were clouding over me. One bee managed to wiggle her way out of the corner, pushing her head out and sitting briefly on the top before flying off. At the time I wondered if she would find her way back.

*When the package arrives the beginner should confirm that most of the bees are alive: some dead bees should not deter the novice.*

I wasn't going to go inside. Not yet.



This unexpected package had come for my neighbour, Mr Preston, who I had not taken much notice of other than the sign at the end of his driveway; Adam Preston: Apiarist. That summer my fourteen year-old self might have come to think differently of the thin, quiet bachelor, but he did not live to see me age from girl to teenager, or teenager to adult, and I did not get to know him through conversations over the fence. Instead, I got his bees.

I had watched him work with his bees through my upstairs window over two summers. Before the unclaimed colony had come I might have confessed to watching him, dressed all in white, but would have implied it was a beekeeping curiosity. It was only until I was holding the hum in my hands that I realized it was him I was watching and the bees, only secondary.

*The hive for these bees should be ready at its location.*

Nothing was ready but I assumed the only place to put them were where he had put them; in his backyard. My eccentric mother was over the moon that I was taking on such a project and waivered between the un-cancelled colony being some weird sign or the benefits of me having this project in what would otherwise be a wasted away summer as the interesting part of the situation. It was her suggestion that I go and look in his shed to see what I could find. The oddness of being there didn't really hit me until I entered.

In the shed were boxes with frames of empty honeycomb, a beekeeping suit, a hat, a veil, a hive tool and what would become my diary for the summer, a journal – already written by him – all about keeping bees.

*Towards dusk the bees can be installed in their new home.*

I remember being in his yard and

seeing my own home a ways in the distance. I had had to roll up the pant legs so I wouldn't trip and his collar smelled of a not very familiar scent at the time of what I called, 'man'.

The hum, the grass, the collar are all clear to me, but the decision to claim the colony, to infer I could care for it, is lost, removed, void from my memory. I can't remember but I might have even suggested I had spoken to him about the bees and how to care for a hive. But to who: my mother, the Post Office, myself?

*Check to see if the Queen is alive. Suspend the Queen cage between frames.*

It was the first moment it occurred to me that inside there was a queen. Inside this hum there were all these individual bees. With a specific task I opened the box to see if I could find her.

She was in a small wooden cage with four attendants. I gently reached in and took her out and placed her between the frames. In a brood box there are frames of comb. The bees will build these beautiful cells where the queen will lay eggs which will turn into larvae and be cared for and capped off by the workers bees. These cells will also be where they bring back the nectar to store, turning it into honey.

I looked at the package of remaining bees and as I started to get a little overwhelmed I simply took the box and dumped the rest of the bees in.

*Gently shake a portion of the bees over the queen cage and the rest at the entrance to the hive.*

I read that one after the fact.

*If all goes well, bees will begin to flow towards the entrance. To witness this fairly uniform movement of thousands of individual bees is truly an exciting moment for beginners and professionals alike.*

Bees were everywhere, uncatchable

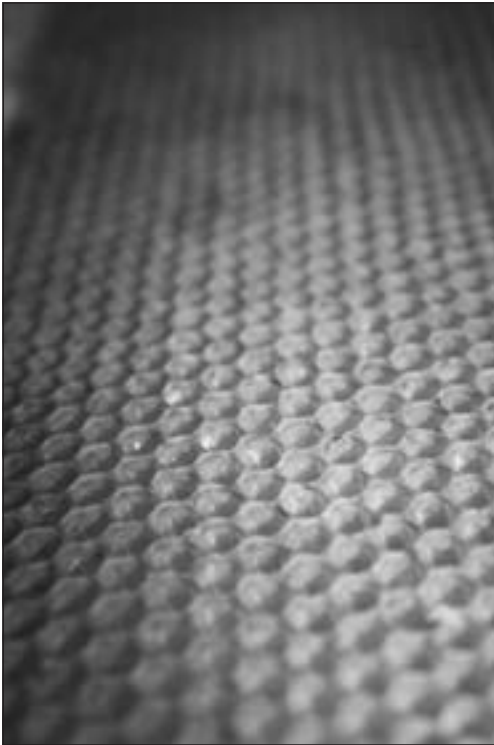
and I didn't know if they would come to this home I had put together for them. After I put the lid on I stayed and watched and true to what it said they settled down towards the entrance and were guided in by the scent of their queen.

*For the next ten days the inner cover should remain in place.*

## Act II

### Scene I

**'Patience is a virtue...' or 'It's in the details...'**



Wax is like a tomb. Any chemical used in the hive will be found in the wax, preserved forever.

I had found Mr. Preston's bee journal in the shed that clearly instructed me to wait for 10 days after installing a colony.

10 days is rather painful for a 14 year-old but I was determined not to break this rule. I tempered my curiosity by going to his yard to watch what the hive was doing from the outside. In the first day or two the bees didn't seem to go too far, hovering more around the hive and getting used to their surroundings. They need to take orientation flights to figure out how to return home once they start bringing in nectar.

By the third warm spring day they were really coming and going from the hive, zipping in and out of the entrance. Without realizing it, in my coming and going from his yard, passing by his house, my curiosity to go inside was growing and if I couldn't enter the world of the bees I became determined to enter his.

I seemed to convince my parents rather easily that I should see if there were any more books or information to be found at his place and casually suggested I go and look.

Like cracking open the lid to a hive I remember entering cautiously but unlike the liveliness of bees inside, everything was still. Preserved like wax was his life at that moment in time when he had left and not returned. There were books on beekeeping, and fish, and plants. He had packets of seeds waiting to be planted and egg cartons put to the side for seedlings to start. He had a record player, with a small pile of records next to a CD player with a small pile of CDs. Everything seemed so precise without being planned.

At the time I took for granted that was him, the sum of him. I didn't think how he might look differently or what would be different had he made it to 45 or 50. And now I think of that 14 year-old, in his house and how I would have been remembered if that is as far as I made it.

I picked up some of his books and a

pen, indulging in the creepiness of knowing he was the last person to have touched them and now he was gone. But it was at the door to his bedroom that I stopped myself of invading what all at once seemed too intimate.

*Sound of a beekeeper's smoker blowing smoke.*

## **Scene II**

### **Care for something that cannot care for you back.**

With Adam's journal in hand, I was preparing to open the hive for the first time. I had lit the smoker and puffed a little at the entrance as instructed. I felt a little unsuited for the job but was too curious to stop myself from going in. I wanted to see if the queen had emerged from her cage and if she begun laying eggs.

I was so cautious, so gentle. I didn't want to squish or alarm them. They continued with their work. I made my way to the center of the frames where the queen cage was and saw that it was empty. My excitement was too much thinking it had actually happened. It had worked. It was nothing I had really done but it felt exciting to think it had happened as it was supposed to. The real sense of victory came when I spotted her. There she was making her way through the bees, finding cells to lay in.

With the sun at your back, hold the frame, parallel to the ground then turn it up so the sun hits the bottom of the cells. You will see a small, white egg positioned on its tip. If there is evidence of eggs, the queen has been there and laid within 1-3 days. When I held the frame up and looked down at the bottom of the cell, there was a tiny egg that in 21 days would become a bee.

In many ways I haven't done anything as daunting or as brave since. It was around that time when I lost my sense of braveness, moved into myself and the

nerve I had as a girl started to disappear. If Mr. Preston or Adam as I came to think of him had been there I would have been shy, embarrassed and downplayed my awe of the bees, the queen and finding those eggs.

When a worker or female bee is born she chews her way out of the cell and then begins work right away. She will clean out the cell where she was created so another egg can be laid. She will then go through many different roles in the first part of her life, working as a nurse bee, caring for the brood that is developing, cleaning the hive, working the nectar to honey and guarding the hive. She will do all these things before she takes her orientation flights and leaves the hive for the first time, halfway into her life. How does she know what task to take on next?

## **Scene III**

### **Transitions...**

One of the main concerns for beekeepers in the springtime is to ensure the colony has enough room so as not to swarm. Before the hive runs out of the room the beekeeper must add another box or super to ensure the queen will have some more space to lay or a place for the colony to store honey. If more room is not added, the colony will create a new queen and just before she has emerged the old queen who has whittled herself down by eating less will leave with part of the colony.

Mr. Lowell lived on the other side of us; far enough away from Mr. Preston to mouth off freely about his hatred for bees and close enough to infer he had the right to this concern. He never seemed to go on about the bees he saw visiting his yard, perhaps because he knew enough to know his apple tree wouldn't have given him apples or his zucchinis wouldn't have been quite as impressive without them. But his sticking point always was

about the concern of swarming.

If the bees were searching out a PR person to build fear and menace over swarms Mr. Lowell would have been their guy. He might have suggested swarms having the capacity to pick up small children or devour one of his Pomeranians Coconut or Marshmallow had he met someone not quite as concerned as him.

Two summers before when wasps set up a nest in the middle of our fence, Mr. Lowell came over one evening at dusk and torched it, leaving a black burn mark to remain all summer on the white board. My father, so offended, never confronted Mr. Lowell about the nerve he displayed and seemed to assume if there was no room for discussion about how to deal with the nest beforehand; there would be no discussion afterwards about how it had been handled. It was as if that black burn mark was a warning to wasps and bees and any other creature that if they were anywhere unwanted, they would be taken care of.

“But a swarm of bees isn’t on the attack,” I wanted to say to Mr. Lowell. “They are between homes - they are at their most vulnerable. They are all flying together, protecting their queen because if they don’t they won’t be able to go on. There will be no way for them to create a new queen since they are without a hive and no new eggs for them to make a queen from.” Instead, when Mr. Lowell was going on about the relief from potential swarms now that Mr. Preston was dead, I said nothing. I simply looked at him like I was listening, the same way I had the time he spoke of the benefits of alcohol cleaning one’s body of bad bacteria.

#### *Scene IV*

#### **We say so much without words.**

I do not know why Adam Preston chose to call himself Apiarist over

beekeeper. *Apis* is the genus of bees. Honey bees: *Apis Mellifera*. It could have been his scientific appreciation for the art of beekeeping or as many people in town thought a pompous obnoxious thing to do but I came to think, and still do, that he thought the word beekeeper misleading. How does one keep bees? How can we keep a creature, that by its very nature must go out, must leave their home to fulfill their name? I think he chose to call himself Apiarist as he thought of himself a student of bees

To communicate, bees dance. In the darkness they dance next to one another after they have come back and found a food source. They waggle, using the sun as reference and the vigour of their movements to tell how far the nectar source is located.

As a beekeeper, or Apiarist, you must help to ensure the bees are ready for the honey flow. When the flowers are in bloom and the nectar is available bees must go out and maximize the short opportunity to collect as much as they can.

I would open the hive and sit, study and watch their movements, watch the bees bringing back nectar and pollen. Watch the younger bees, head first in cells drinking the nectar, working it into honey. Watch how they would link together to catch the wax flakes that come from their bodies.

I would watch them dance and I found this amusing. To think of them as people next to one another, not saying anything but passing along information so important, so essential, guiding the other to where food could be found.

It was their first year in this spot but I wondered when they returned the next year would they remember this place? Would the clover they found in relation to the sun be familiar to them?

I wondered these things but did not have the words or the nerve to really ask

them to anyone. When I suggested it casually to a friend she reminded me that bees would have the brains smaller than a pea and so I too just laughed it off. But it seems I did it with an assumption that all the angst and awkwardness of those years would be quelled by language that I would come to acquire. I thought the feeling of being so transparent yet so misunderstood would somehow quiet over time.

My 30 year old self thinks of people as bees and wonders how we ask each other to come with us. How we ask each other to return to places we once were? Can we find places without language? Can we find them without words, by movement, without light? How do we answer feelings without words? With our cantaloupe sized brains.

### *Scene V*

#### **You cannot control how you are remembered.**

It seems when you mention bees to people they either think of honey or stings and usually their words are either sweet as honey or cutting as a sting. As a beekeeper, you will get stung; it is the nature of the work.

It was a typical hot prairie day with a dry heat and a light breeze you could only detect by looking out over the yellow canola field. It was the Sunday of the last week of school, which for me at that time was the true marker of the beginning of summer. The bees were starting to really bring in the nectar now and I was expecting a very good crop. I had actually told people this...I watched the bees coming and going, zinging in and out of the entrance before I entered the hive.

As I was standing there I started to, and I did this a lot as a 14 year old – still do and it makes me feel like a 14 year old – I started to get caught up with this dialogue in my head about keeping bees and how wrong it was for me to be wearing this veil and gloves since they had no defence. That was it. I put down the frame and slowly started to pull off my gloves. I held my hands out above the hive. Nothing. I started to untie my veil and gently pulled it up over my head. There I was, standing next to the hive and sure enough – nothing. I decided the next step was to pick up a frame. So I gently reached in and grabbed the frame and started to pull up but the first feeling of the bees crawling up my hand caused me to let go a little and the frame dropped just slightly. Up flew a bee right near my eye and before I could do anything about it I felt the sting. I slipped the frame back in place and reached up to get the stinger out. I



closed up the hive, grabbed my things and started to make my way home. By the time I got there my eye was almost swollen shut.

I tried to convince my mother that 'this' (gestures towards face) was reason enough to not go to school. "It might be challenging for me to read," I said. "Perhaps I could say there was an incident with a bb gun and I have to wear an eye patch. I'm just throwing out ideas here..." My mother took this incident, my first sting memorable regardless, as a learning opportunity. "This will be a chance for you to talk about this project. Talk about the bees. I bet you haven't told anyone that you have been doing this. You should talk it up. Tell people. Why are you so shy?"

On my way to school I ran past by our mail carrier, "Oh no, but really he took a bite out of you!" .... "Thank you Germaine", I mumbled.

I'm going to let this learning opportunity go. I won't tell him that it isn't biting, rather stinging and it would be a she, not a he.

But it was hard to look that way and stay under the radar. At school I felt completely exposed, uncertain if I should try and be on the inside of the joke and point to it or give into the utter embarrassment. I tried to be in on it and come up with things in my head but perhaps the venom dulled any sense of humour I had. My body let me down even more by just not being able to look up and I could not stop covering my eye with my hair.

I made it through the day by throwing away the learning opportunity and simply saying, "I was stung by a bee." It wasn't until the end of the day that the sheer sense of relief had numbed by defences. The comment, "Hey Quasimodo!" by Martin Sheneck caught me enough by surprise to

respond. This guy was too much. He had called someone ignorant for thinking a wish chip was a potato chip with a bubble in it rather than one that curled over. As if that was some phenomenon with a term for it. I thank god I didn't include this point in my response. "Yeah, Martin I was stung by a bee and you know what? What's more, it was my own bee. Because I am a beekeeper - an Apiarist. I don't use the term beekeeper because you know what? You can't keep bees...how can you keep a creature...never mind...but you know what? Do you want to know how a honey bee queen mates? She leaves the hive just once in her life and goes out to find a group of drones, which are the male bees. They are all clouded together and the queen flies up through them and the fastest drones that can reach her mate with her - up to maybe 20. And the experience it so intense it breaks off - their penis...penises...I don't know if they call them that on bees..."

I cannot actually remember logically what was going on in my brain at the time that prompted telling him this fact, whether it was to say the most shocking thing I could say to him or that I thought a weird scientific fact might put me at an advantage with this boy who defined people ignorant according to their knowledge of chip terms. But it was what came out. I might have turned to someone and attempted to high five them had there been someone next to me, but there wasn't.

I thought I was heading home but instead went home just to get the key to Adam Preston's still preserved house. I entered in through the stillness and right to the shut door of his bedroom. I entered without smoke, hat or veil. Into what I thought would be the most forbidden place. I opened the door and inside was

a bedroom. Books on the nightstand, a shirt on the bed, some pictures of people I didn't know. One was of his parents who would come in the next week to clean out the place. They were standing along side him at his graduation from University, smiling. I remember grabbing it and sitting on the bed, convinced this was the moment I would cry. I would cry out of embarrassment but what's more, cry for him and the loss and the bond we had over our interest in bees...but I just couldn't. I put back the picture as it was, closed the room and left it for those that really knew him to find it as he had left it.

### **Act III**

#### ***Scene I***

##### **We are measured in time and timeless.**

I returned to the way I knew him; with bees and through his book.

I found the only entry he had written about stings, where he had referred to the handling of the boxes. "If you work without gloves, you soon discover where to put your hands so as not to get stung and thereby not kill any bees in your handling".

He was a poet and I wondered if his parents knew this when they came to go through his things and empty out his house. My own parents kept saying how difficult it is when death occurs out of order but all I wondered was if they knew his attention to detail and why he loved bees so much. I didn't realize what it means out of order is that they knew all the stages of him; his one year-old helpless self, his four year-old precocious self, his thirteen year-old obnoxious self, his twenty year-old daring self, his thirty year-old distance self and simply, by virtue of that, they knew him.

By the third week in July I had long healed from my first sting and had ac-

quired a couple more. The bees' hum filled any silence in my days and at night I attempted to find the queen in my dreams.

When you look at a frame in a hive it gives you a picture of the rest of the hive; the health of the bees and the queen, their food source at the time, the balance of ages within the hive. If there isn't that balance in a hive it cannot sustain itself. The hive collapses we are seeing now is because the older forager bees are leaving the hive and cannot make their way back. Their senses are impaired; the way they measure distance, speed and how they see with their five eyes and smell their hive by the pheromone of the queen.

These creatures, who work so hard making water into wine or nectar into honey, are so resilient are also as fragile as skin. If cut too big, opened too large, they cannot repair themselves.

A delicate balance of age is necessary within the colony to make up the whole, like our own selves. We contain the experience of our childhood self to make us brave enough to take on new things and our teenage, misunderstood self, which makes us empathetic...we are worker bees, guard bees, nurse bees. We rise to the occasion and take on the role as required.

#### ***Scene II***

##### **Loss is not measured by size.**

As much as I say I lost my braveness or that that was the last time I can remember being brave, like the spike in drones in a hive before it about to swarm, I got a boost of confidence and took on a beekeeper swagger. I would walk with the supers to my house and back for no reason. I would put on my hat and veil in my yard as if there was business that needed to be done there. I would wave to Mr. Lowell

as if to reassure him any potential swarms could be handled by me. The worst part, perhaps, was counting my honey before I harvested it.

It was for this reason that I didn't see it coming at all. Just before the August long weekend a storm picked up and I thought only briefly of the bees while out with friends, wondering if they would be okay.

When I entered the yard the next morning, past his still empty house, I could see the lid off and the hive knocked over with four or five bees circling above their destroyed colony. I walked over to see the devastation, to see what could be salvaged. Tipped on its side the hive body protected the small cluster of bees which remained. I looked up to see if anyone could see me, could see how I had let them down, how so little remained...how I had lost my swagger.

I picked up the box and tipped it back on the hive, clumps of dead wet bees

falling down between the frame to the ground and on my feet. It was the only time I felt as though I may be intruding just to check if the queen was still there. The bees were clustered in the middle, fanning their wings as though they were shivering. If a hive is queen-less, they make this distinct sound to try and locate the queen, fanning their nasanov gland to pick up the scent in the communal disorder. They weren't making this sound. On the fifth frame in there she was, making her way over the cells surrounded by attendants, looking for cells to lay in. I cleaned it up as best I could, reassembled the hive, putting the one honey super they had not yet finished on top and sat outside, next to the hive.

Since that moment I have had more devastating, more tragic things occur to me; in hospital rooms, I've left people, people have left me. I've been embarrassed – I've lost. But I've always stood just





outside myself, aware of how I moved, how I showed my loss. But there in that yard, I wept. I felt it so out of my control but that there must have been something I could have done. Although that's the way things usually are.

It could have been that I thought of myself as a forager bee; that I would soon be leaving my home and that my adult self would go through all the different phases of me to get to where I was supposed to end up and remaining a fixed forager, knowing what my role is. I now know it doesn't work that way.

### *Scene III*

#### **What remains is sometimes unexpected.**

A worker bee will produce ½ teaspoon of honey in her lifetime. There must be no way for her to know that at the end of all the trips she makes for nectar to bring back to the hive there will be honey to show for it. But she also cannot do this alone.

As I prepared the bees for winter I wrapped the small hive and hoped for the best. To survive the dearth of food and cold, they cluster together and move throughout the hive eating the honey

they have stored. They will eat the sweet taste of clover and sunflower and canola and borage and dandelion all through the winter months; the memory of summer sealed into a food that will never spoil.

I had harvested just a small amount of what I could in honey since they had reduced in size and their season cut short. When the colony has reduced the nectar they bring in down in water content they cap it off with a thin coating of wax and that is honey.

I took the two frames I could, ensuring they would have enough for winter, and gently uncapped the cells to let the honey flow out.

I no longer live near open fields or still have to go to work if I looked like this (demonstrates sting again). Sometimes we have so little to show of our memories other than blurry landscapes, faint smells or soft hums. What remains can fly off and never return. But when you have a taste picture in a jar, of a time that reminds you of awkward years, neighbours you never really knew and places that are gone, it fills you with a soft, gentle hum and you can thank the bees for that.

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# Ancient Art, New Home: Glima in Manitoba, 1876-1935

by Charles Nathan Hatton

Glima, Iceland's traditional form of wrestling has a lengthy history in Manitoba. With Icelandic settlement dating to just five years after the province's entry into Confederation it was certainly among the earliest non-Indigenous wrestling systems practiced on the Canadian prairies. Glima's significance to the early Icelandic settlers is illustrated not only by the fact that they deliberately transplanted it to the New World but that in subsequent years they deemed it important enough to consistently include on the limited roster of events at their most important annual cultural celebration, Íslendingadagurinn festival. Today however, glima is virtually extinct in Manitoba and its early history has gone largely unrecorded. To rectify the matter, at least in part, this article examines glima during the sixty years following the block migrations of 1875 and 1876 with emphasis on its history and practice within the Icelandic community, some of its prominent champions and the impressions that the art generated when it found an audience within the general Manitoba populace.

## Historical and Technical Overview

Although its precise technical origins are unknown, glima which translates into English as "Game of Gladness" traces its genesis to the Viking settlement period. Written records pertaining to Icelandic wrestling date to as early as the 1230s where it is mentioned in Egil's Saga.[1]



PHOTO: YULIA LUNDHOLM

Despite Iceland's relatively small size, several folk wrestling traditions developed on the island, each with their own peculiar technical variations. In *bryggspenna* for example, both contestants assumed a bear hug posture and attempted, mainly by strength, to throw one another to the ground. Because of the virtual absence of technique it favoured men gifted with brute power and size. A second system, *lausatök*, had no required opening stance (although participants typically assumed a collar and elbow tie-up) and permitted

holds to be taken on all parts of the body in an effort to trip an opponent to the ground. However, it was the *brókartök*, or trouser grip style, which gained widest currency in Iceland. Although both *bryggspenna* and *lausatök* are also frequently referred to as *glima*, the trouser grip style which is unique to Icelandic culture, has been largely synonymous with the term since the thirteenth century.[2] Accordingly that is how it will be applied here unless otherwise specified.

In *glima* contests participants assume a vertical posture and grip one another by the pants at the hip with the left hand on the outside and the right hand on the inside. They retain this position while they circle to the right in a smooth and flowing fashion, attempting to trip or toss their opponent to the ground. Although a hold must be maintained on the pant leg, the arms can nevertheless play an essential role in helping to unbalance a wrestler and execute a technique. A match ends when any part of the body above the knee touches the ground, constituting a 'fall.' However, if both men fall to the ground simultaneously, the contest is re-started. Matches are typically decided on a best-

two-out-of-three-fall basis. Since 1905, a specialized belt, termed a *glímubelti*, has been used in matches, although the traditional pant hold has persisted in circumstances where the apparatus has been unavailable. The primary emphasis in *glima* matches is on technical finesse and timing, not on strength.

### Reborn in Manitoba

By the time Icelandic migrants began their trek to the Interlake district between Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba during the 1870s, *glima* was already a centuries-old cultural tradition, and the prospective settlers did not wait to be established on the land to resume their customary practices. Indeed, *glima* literally formed part of the sojourning experience, as members of the 1876 colonial cohort who travelled to Canada aboard the steamship *Phoenixian* entertained themselves with music, dance and wrestling bouts.[3] The rugged pastoral regions which constituted their newly-adopted homeland required intensive efforts to farm, leaving little time for recreational pursuits. Additionally, the strain caused by inclement weather, flooding, scurvy, and a devastating smallpox outbreak in the winter of 1876-77 exacerbated the already trying conditions faced by Icelandic-Canadians during their first few years in the New World.[4] Unlike many immigrant groups which both preceded and followed them, Icelanders possessed near-universal literacy and the limited time available to them for collective effort was directed primarily toward establishing churches, li-



PHOTO: YULIA LUNDHOLM

braries, and schools. Reading and Bible study were also important activities which consumed the finite leisure moments accorded to the early settlers.[5] Given the circumstances confronting early Interlake settlers, sport certainly could not have been a high priority. However, Icelandic people held physical prowess in high regard, so qualities such as agility and endurance were well respected within the community.[6] Therefore, although virtually no records exist specifically pertaining to glima during the first decade and a half of settlement in Manitoba, it is reasonable to assume that, if practiced en route to the North America, people continued to do so once established in their new home.

### **Glima and the Íslendingadagurinn**

Despite the perilous conditions facing them in the early years, the Icelandic settlers survived, and eventually thrived, in Manitoba, reaching a population of 7,000 by 1890. By that time, however, they were numerically dwarfed in the province by Anglo-Protestants, who arrived in large numbers after Icelandic settlement began in 1875.[7] Assimilationist pressures accompanied the demographic shift, and concerns naturally began to arise over the erosion of Icelandic culture. The Íslendingadagurinn (Icelandic Festival of Manitoba), first staged in Winnipeg on 2 August 1890 to commemorate the adoption of the Icelandic national constitution on that day fourteen years earlier, represented a conscious attempt to preserve Icelandic customs from assimilation. Speeches by important Icelandic-Canadian officials, while acknowledging Icelanders' place in the larger Canadian society, emphasized the importance of cultural traditions and survival. During the inaugural event, organizer John Olafson noted that

Icelanders, "while they should aim to be... citizens of this country they should not forget to have warm emotions to the old land." [8] Similarly, Mr. E. Johannsson, speaking on the same occasion, opined that, "While he was opposed to building a Chinese wall around his [community] to prevent assimilation, he was equally against too rapid assimilation, holding that strength of character and a proper degree of conservatism was a good thing for the individual and the nationality." [9]

As one of the oldest extant Icelandic cultural practices, glima not only represented a definitive link to the ancestral homeland but also a connection to Icelanders' ancient past. Efforts were therefore made to stage glima matches at the Íslendingadagurinn, as part of a larger sports program, beginning with the festival's debut in 1890. Despite intentions, however, attempts were not always successful. During the inaugural 2 August celebration, for instance, the event had to be called off due to rain.[10] On other occasions, such as in 1893 and 1899, matches were cancelled because the other athletic contests ran too late. Nevertheless, during the first forty festivals, glima was staged on at least thirty occasions.

Although many in the community attempted to preserve Icelandic customs in the New World, the end of the 1890s, after a quarter century in Manitoba, Icelandic-Canadians were becoming increasingly integrated into the larger Canadian culture. One observer noted, while attending the 1899 Íslendingadagurinn that:

*It was doubtful whether a majority of those present had ever seen Iceland. The picturesque Icelandic costumes worn in former years by a few of the ladies were yesterday absent, and so far as dress was concerned, there was nothing to distin-*

*guish any of the people from other citizens. Had a stranger have been told that they were Scotch, he would never have known.*[11]

After the turn of the century, festival attendance dropped considerably, a product both of growing acculturation to Anglo-Canadian norms and political infighting within the Icelandic community. [12] Even the wrestling portion of the sports program reflected the mounting influence of outside customs. Catch-as-catch-can wrestling, which originated in Lancashire, England, was becoming the most popular style of wrestling throughout Canada and the United States at this time and in 1901 and 1902 it was staged alongside glima at the Íslendingadagurinn.[13] As the precursor to modern Olympic amateur freestyle wrestling, catch-as-catch-can in contrast to glima, featured a considerable amount of ground wrestling as participants attempted to pin their opponent's shoulders, as opposed to throw them to the ground. Thereafter however, there was evidently an attempt to re-assert explicitly Icelandic customs, and despite its more general popularity, catch-as-catch-can was discontinued from the Icelandic festival programs.[14]

To ensure glima's preservation as a part of Icelandic culture in Canada, Íslendingadagurinn organizers went beyond simply staging competitions to ensuring that the art remained true to its original spirit. One of glima's central tenets, as noted, was an emphasis on technique and strategy over brute strength. Accordingly, by 1903 prizes were awarded specifically for athletes deemed to give the most skillful exhibition of the art. Wrestlers were typically granted the distinction even if they did not win the competition. In 1903, for example, Paul Magnusson was deemed

the "most skillful" even though he did not place among the top three winners.[15] Cash prizes were typically very generous in the early sports programs. For instance, athletes winning the 1905 glima event were awarded \$10.00, the largest prize offered for an individual event. However, the wrestler deemed to have "Best Glima" was also awarded \$8.00.[16] In 1908 the principle was given its most ardent expression when winners were decided purely by skill, not by falls.[17] Although it was evidently a one-time occurrence, the importance of skill remained central in the ensuing years. Sport in general grew tremendously in popularity during the first few decades of the twentieth century and Íslendingadagurinn, recognizing its heightened significance, began to award competition winners the Hanneson Belt which they were entitled to wear for a year. As a corollary however, by 1925 athletes were also being awarded the Jonas Pallson Cup in recognition of the most artfully executed technique in the tournament.

### **Glima Outside the Icelandic Community**

With the widespread popularity of catch-as-catch-can wrestling, glima had little opportunity to make inroads as a fashionable sporting pastime outside of the Icelandic-Canadian community. However, in the rare instances where the general population could be exposed to the art, it proved to be popular among spectators. In February of 1915, for instance, glima instructor G. Sigurjonsson, accompanied his pupils staged thirteen matches as part of the undercard attraction for a professional catch-as-catch-can wrestling contest between world's lightweight champion Jean Paradis and local grappler Alex Stewart at Winnipeg's Walker Theatre. Following the bouts, one

commentator opined:

*Glima wrestling, an interesting feature of the Walker entertainment, would soon, it is believed, displace in popularity the ordinary [catch-as-catch-can] style. The spectacle of two strong men striving for mastery in the usual manner is undoubtedly interesting and even thrilling at the outset, but when it becomes an endurance contest, running into hours, it palls. But this lively "Glima" tussling, a lighting succession of one minute bouts, with constantly changing contestants, has no chance to flatten the sense of appreciation. It is like a number of bouts welded deftly into one.[18]*

The author's remarks touched on one of the central problems facing professional wrestling during the period: authentic contests between two skilled adversaries could devolve into marathon endurance contests which held little appeal for spectators. Although, according to professional conventions catch-as-catch-can matches could be won either by pinfall or by submission, unsatisfactory stalemates were a frequent occurrence.[19] For a public becoming accustomed to the fast-paced entertainment offered by motion pictures, such spectacles were proving increasingly unpalatable. Ultimately however, the solution was not to popularize the speedy and competitively legitimate glima but instead to begin integrating colourful dramatics and orchestrated mayhem into professional wrestling cards.

### Johannes Josefsson

One individual who did combine knowledge of Icelandic wrestling with a remarkable flair for showmanship was Johannes Josefsson (sometimes spelled Josephsson). Without question, Josefsson can be credited as the individual most

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Time—1:15, 1:45, 2:15, 2:45

All interest in the event  
around the names of the en-  
lors and they will have  
great matches.

**A Class Foe**  
Mayhew, A. Howard  
Jack Edwards, B. McDonald  
Arthur, Geo. Spencer  
Time—1:15, 1:45, 2:15, 2:45

**B Class Foe**  
Dr. Red, T. H. Edwards  
Lady Winton, C. Winton  
Trick, G. M. Fraser  
Time—1:15, 1:45, 2:15, 2:45

**Free-for-All Foe**  
Dr. Will, B. E. Hamilton  
Greenbaum, T. McDonald  
Time—1:15, 1:45, 2:15, 2:45

**C-Class Foe**  
Edward Boy, Butterfield  
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Tommy Mack, M. Hamilton  
Steve Jackson, A. Stone  
Time—1:15, 1:45, 2:15, 2:45

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A playbill for Glima at the Walker Theatre in Winnipeg. *Winnipeg Telegram*, 1 Feb 1915

responsible for exposing North American audiences to glima (or at least his version of it) during the early part of the twentieth century. Born in Akureyri, Josefsson won the Grettir Belt, emblematic of the Icelandic national championship, in 1907 and 1908. A talented athlete, he had only been practicing the art for about two years before winning his first national title.[20] In 1908, Josefsson also travelled to the Olympic Games in London as a middleweight competitor in Greco-Roman wrestling although an injury incurred before the tournament forced his withdrawal.[21] Thereafter he left the world of amateur athletics and began touring Europe and North America, giving glima exhibitions in circuses and vaudeville houses.

Josefsson and his troupe appeared in Winnipeg at the Pantages Playhouse during the second week of December 1914, staging three daily performances. Advance

billing for the former champion's show, which among other accolades, described him as "the embodiment of easy grace and fierce cunning of old Berserker of the Norse legends," highlighted his aptitude for self promotion.[22] In contrast to the conventional trouser-grip style however, Josefsson's glima emphasized the art as a system of self-defense. The *Manitoba Free Press*, in reviewing his performance stated: "Johannes Josefsson... gives evidence of being a very dangerous customer to tackle, be it with fist, foot, knife, or gun, and for ten minutes he demonstrates his ability to outwit all comers whether they come at him one at a time or all together." [23]

In crafting his performances, it is evident that Josefsson was utilizing

methods drawn from outside the *brókartök* tradition. It is probable that he garnered some of his technical inspiration from the more liberal *lausatök* style, which was still being practiced in Iceland at the turn of the century.[24] Other elements in his act, such as gun disarming, may have been devised by himself. However the numerous trips and throws that Josefsson employed with his legs while executing his self-defence manoeuvres were clear hallmarks of glima.

Inevitably, with an emphasis on unarmed combat as opposed to sporting competition comparisons were drawn with other martial systems including Japanese jiu-jitsu which had come prominently to the English-speaking world's attention during the previous decade.[25] This being the case, Josefsson's advance press carefully highlighted the differences between the two methods. Drawing on popular perceptions of jiu jitsu as a deadly and dangerous art one Winnipeg report asserted glima's superiority in that regard, claiming: "Joseffson... tumbles the trio about in an astonishing manner that makes Japanese Jiu-jitsu seem calm and ceremonious when compared." [26] In fact, far from being purely a stage performer the former Grettir Belt holder demonstrated his willingness to test his own methods against Japanese martial arts in open competition and his victories in such contests provided additional material for his advertising campaigns.[27]

A unique athlete and impresario, Johannes Josefsson made a favourable, if not spectacular impression with Winnipeg audiences.[28] Although a significant proportion of attendees at the Winnipeg shows were likely also of Icelandic heritage his travelling "glima" act gave the general Manitoba populace

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Two playbills for J. Josefsson's glima show at the pantages (they are the same, advert, but were scanned differently). *Winnipeg Telegram* and *Winnipeg Tribune*, 5 December 1914

(as well as those in other regions of North America where fewer Icelanders resided) exposure to martial arts traditions that were neither British nor explicitly Asian in origin. Perhaps more importantly with Icelanders being such a demographic minority in North America, he helped increase awareness of Icelandic culture in a predominantly English-speaking society. Josefsson continued touring successfully until 1927 after which point he finally returned to his native Iceland, having amassed a small fortune of over \$120,000 USD. In 1930 he used his savings to open a hotel in Reykjavik. [29]

### **Jens Eliasson, Two Style Champion**

Being largely surrounded by an English-speaking majority from the 1880s onward, Icelandic-Canadians had practised catch-as-catch-can wrestling since at least the turn of the twentieth century. As the case of Johannes Josefsson indicates certain glima specialists were not adverse to testing their wrestling skills by competing under various rule conditions. Manitoba's foremost athlete in this regard was Jens Eliasson. Wrestling out of the Winnipeg YMCA, Eliasson claimed the middleweight (158 pound) provincial amateur catch-as-catch-can championship in 1922, pinning his opponent A. Kauffman of the Cameron Highlanders twice in succession (amateur wrestling, like professional wrestling, required a wrestler to score two out of three pins or falls on his opponent). [30] The following year Eliasson dropped down to the welterweight (145 pound) class to win a second provincial title. [31] Significantly, his opponent in the finals that year was Jack McLaughlin who went on three weeks later to garner the first of three consecutive Canadian National Championships. [32]

Eliasson's achievements in amateur wrestling were matched by his prowess in glima. In 1922, he won the Hanneson Belt and repeated the feat again in 1924 and 1925. Other glima practitioners had previously earned more than one first place finish in the Íslendingadagurinn tournament. Similarly other wrestlers had earned more than one first place finish in the Manitoba Amateur Wrestling Championships. However Eliasson was the only athlete to ever win either single or multiple titles in both sports giving him a unique distinction among Manitoba sportsmen.

### **Glima in Decline**

Icelandic-Canadians continued to practice glima into the Depression years. Likewise, it remained a feature in Íslendingadagurinn's sports program until as late as 1935. However with the passage of time, interest in the uniquely Icelandic sport diminished as further integration into the larger Canadian society continued. During the Second World War youth sports were staged at the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba in lieu of senior athletics and an invigorated interest in wrestling did not occur in the post-War years. Despite its diminished prominence within the Icelandic-Canadian community after the mid-1930s, glima was a significant activity among the first few generations of settlers, representing a link both to their ancestral homeland and their Viking forefathers who sojourned to its shores a millennium earlier.

### **Manitoba Íslendingadagurinn Glima Champions 1890-1935**

1890	Glima cancelled on account of rain
1893	Wrestling cancelled due to the program running late
1894	S. Johannson
1897	John Erickson (first) E. Gislason (second)



- 1899 Wrestling postponed due to the athletic program running late
- 1900 H. Martenson (first)  
J. Peterson (second)  
S. Stevenson (third)
- 1901 I. Isfeld (first)  
E. Davidson (second)  
A. Isfeld (third)
- 1902 Sigurd Baldwinson (first)  
Paul S. Palsson (second)  
Baldwin Jonsson (third)
- 1903 Kitill Sigurgeirsson (first)  
Helgi Marteinson (second)  
S. Baldwinson (third)  
Paul Magnusson (most skilful)
- 1904 E. Davidson (first)  
T.O. Sigurdson (second)  
John Davidson (third)  
K.S. Eyford (best glima)
- 1905 E. Davidson (first)  
Helgi Marteinson (second, most scientific wrestler)  
E. Abrahamson (third)
- 1906 S.D.B. Stephenson  
Halldor Mathusalemsson (most scientific wrestler)  
E. Abrahamson (overcame greatest number of opponents)
- 1907 Halldor Mathusalemsson (first)  
Ketill Eyford (second)  
Sveinn Bjornsson (third)
- 1908 H. Mathusalemsson (first)  
Einar Abrahamsson (second)  
Sig Stefansson (third)
- NOTE: Matches were said to have been decided by wrestling skill rather than by falls*
- 1909 Jon Arnason (first)  
J. Halflidason (second)  
A. Johnson (third)
- 1910 Jon Arnason (first)  
Einar Abrahamsson (second)  
Gisli Benson (third)  
Sig Stephensen (fourth)
- 1911 V. Olason (first)  
J. Gilles (second)  
Agust Eyjolfsson (third)
- 1912 Sig Sigfusson (first)  
Vilhjalmur Petursson (second)  
Thorliefur Hansson (third)
- 1913 Gudmundur Stefansson (Belt of Honour)  
Einar Abrahamsson (second)
- 1914 Gudmundur Stefansson (Belt of Honour)  
Adalsteinn Johannsson (most graceful performance)  
Chris Oliver (most agile performance)
- 1915 J. Kristjansson (first)  
Gudmundur Sigurjonsson (second)



PHOTO: YULIA LUNDHOLM

- B. Olafsson (third, best style of wrestling)
- 1916 Gudmundur Sigurjonsson (first)  
Ben Olafsson (second)
- 1917 E. Erlendsson (first)  
A. Siddell (second)
- 1918 Steindor Jakobson (gold medal)  
Adalsteinn Johannsson (silver medal)
- 1919 Benedikt Olafsson (first)  
Jens Eliasson (second)  
Unnsteinn Jakobson (third)  
Gudmundur Sigurjonsson (best style of wrestling)
- 1920 Glima cancelled on account of rain
- 1921 A.E. Thorgrimsson (first)  
Jens Eliasson (second)
- 1922 Jens Eliasson (belt)  
A.E. Thorgrimsson
- 1923 Karl Magunusson (Hannesson Belt)  
G.B. Gudmundsson (second)  
Jens Eliasson (third)
- 1924 Jens Eliasson (Hannesson Belt)  
Mr. Fabnis (second)  
B. Olafsson (third)  
N. Ottenson (best wrestling)
- 1925 Jens Eliasson (Hannesson Belt)  
O.J. Thorgilsson (second)  
Benedikt Olafsson (Jonas Palsson Cup)
- 1926 Chris Oliver (Hannesson Belt)

- B. Olafsson (Jonas Palsson Cup)  
K.J. Johnson
- 1927 Sigurdur Thorsteinson (awarded the Hanneson Belt for first place and the Palsson Cup for most artistic execution)
- 1928 Bjorn Olafsson (Hanneson Belt)  
Benedikt Olafsson (Jonas Palsson Cup)
- 1929 Wrestling cancelled due to the program running late
- 1932 Bjorn Skulason (Hanneson Belt)
- 1933 Oskar Thorgillson
- 1934 S. Jakobson (Hanneson Belt)  
A. Johnson (second)  
J. Sigvaldason (third)
- 1935 L.Bergson (first)

#### ENDNOTES

- [1] M. Nicholas Bennett, *Glima: Icelandic Wrestling* (New Orleans: By the Author), 7-8, 13.
- [2] Bennett, *Glima*, 9; Peter Kautz, "The Gripping History of Glima," *Journal of Western Martial Art* (January 2000), [http://ejmas.com/jwma/articles/2000/jwmaart\\_kautz\\_0100.htm](http://ejmas.com/jwma/articles/2000/jwmaart_kautz_0100.htm) (accessed 13 May 2011).
- [3] Nelson S. Gerrard, *Icelandic River Saga* (Arborg, MB: Saga Publications, 1985), 147.
- [4] W.L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 162, 177; P.B. Waite, *Canada, 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 62; Jean R. Burnet and Howard Palmer, "Coming Canadians" *An Introduction to a History of Canada's Peoples* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 26.
- [5] W. Kristjanson, *The Icelandic People* (Winnipeg: By the Author), 42, 44; Ingibjorg Sigurgeirsson McKillop, *Mikley The Magnificent Island. Treasure of Memories Hecla Island 1876-1976* (Steinbach, MB: By the Author, 1979), 183.
- [6] Gerrard, *Icelandic River Saga*, 147.
- [7] Ken Coates and Fred McGuinness, *Manitoba: The Province and the People* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987), 32.
- [8] *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 August 1890.
- [9] *Ibid.*
- [10] *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 August 1890; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 4 August 1890. Rain also forced the glima's cancellation during the 1920 festival.
- [11] *Manitoba Free Press*, 3 August 1899.
- [12] Jónas Thór, *Islendingadagurinn 1890-1989: Saga Islendingadagsins: An Illustrated History* (Gimli, MB: The Icelandic Festival of Manitoba, 1989), 33. One regular point of contention during this period was over the appropriate date to stage the Icelandic Festival, and in 1898, for instance, a rival festival was held on 17 June.
- [13] *Winnipeg Telegram*, 3 August 1901; *The Voice* (Winnipeg), 15 August 1902.
- [14] Thór likewise notes in *Islendingadagurinn 1890-1989*, 33, that, at approximately the same time, "new and influential individuals began to leave their marks on the community," and thereafter greater efforts were made to celebrate distinctly Icelandic traditions.
- [15] *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 August 1903.
- [16] *Heimskringla*, 2 August 1905.
- [17] *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 August 1908.
- [18] *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 February 1915.
- [19] Illustrating the problem, a wrestling match between Minnesotans Walter Miller and Joe Carr at the Winnipeg Coliseum on 31 May 1915 lasted two hours without either man scoring a fall. Although it started out spectacularly, as the match progressed beyond 60 minutes, both men became physically exhausted and made little attempt to bring the affair to termination. Referee George Walker eventually complied with audience demands to declare the protracted contest a draw. See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 1 June 1915; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 1 June 1915.
- [20] Peter Kautz, "Johannes Josephsson The Legend of Glima: Icelandic Wrestling," *Grappling Arts International Newsmagazine* 1, 8 (September/October 1999), 32; Bennett, *Glima*, 12.
- [21] Kautz, "Johannes Josephsson," 32.
- [22] *Winnipeg Telegram*, 5 December 1914.
- [23] *Manitoba Free Press*, 8 December 1914.
- [24] Bennett, *Glima*, 9.
- [25] See, for example, the *Winnipeg Tribune*, 9 December 1914.
- [26] *The Voice* (Winnipeg), 4 December 1914.
- [27] One such incident occurred on 30 March 1913 atop the roof of New York's Madison Square Garden, the result of a disagreement that had developed between Josefsson and jiu jitsu exponent Otagawa. Both men were appearing at the time with the Barnum and Bailey Circus giving exhibitions of their respective arts at the Gardens. Although Otagawa insisted that they wear a belt and kimono, the Icelander nevertheless succeeded in throwing his adversary twice. See the *New York Times*, 31 March 1913.
- [28] One review of Josefsson's act published in the *Winnipeg Tribune* on 8 December 1914 described it as "a real novelty to Winnipeggers," but suggested that it "would make an excellent curtain raiser." -The following day, however, the *Tribune* noted that "all who see them are favourably impressed with their work."
- [29] Kautz, "Johannes Josephsson," 34.
- [30] *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 March 1922.
- [31] *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 March 1923.
- [32] *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 March 1923; Glynn A. Leyshon, *Of Mats and Men: The Story of Canadian Amateur and Olympic Wrestling from 1600 to 1984* (London, ON: Sports Dynamics, 1984), 109.

The International Glima Association is working towards popularisation of Glima outside of Iceland, targeting its recognition as a contemporary sport which has evolved in unbroken tradition from the Viking era a thousand years ago.



[www.internationalglima.com](http://www.internationalglima.com)  
or  
[www.glima.is](http://www.glima.is)

# Tales from the barber shop

by Sarah Painter

Ever since I was a child growing up on the beaches of Gimli, Manitoba, I have always felt a strong connection to my Icelandic heritage. When I was small, this took the form of eating vinarterta



and wearing a plastic Viking hat. As I grew up, I was a proud and enthusiastic member of Iceland Camp. Around that time, I remember hearing about the Snorri Program and just feeling or maybe knowing that one day, I would do that. It was this odd certainty that my former child-self had, which was solidified during my first trip to Iceland with my mother, sister and Amma. I applied for the program immediately upon my return.

What I can say honestly about the ap-

proaching a six-week journey in Iceland, is that one may feel very nervous. I wonder if I might be so candid as to even express that I was terrified and regretful leading up to the month of June. I knew that I was do-

ing the right thing and that there was such extraordinary potential for a life changing-experience. What I struggled with before leaving was that there seemed to exist this risk. This threat that leaving my comfort zone and living in another country for six weeks would perhaps be too scary and unfamiliar to me. In the end, I learned that

bravely entering into new situations can provide the most important and interesting lessons. May I tell you a story? A story from a sheep farm....

\*\*\*

I awake in the morning to find myself on a sheep farm in northern Iceland. I am nervous to face the day as I am a stranger in this house and a novice at farming. I reluctantly make my way down to the kitchen and find my cousin Sigrun pre-

paring breakfast. The weather isn't good, but "we're going to try to work" she tells me. I quietly eat my bread and cheese. I'm starting to realize that I can't even pretend that I'm not the biggest city slicker that these folks have ever seen. I return to my room to prepare for my first day of sheep farming and stand in front of my closet in a quiet panic. Pick the right clothes. Pick the right clothes. Ummm.... What do modern day farming gals wear to shear sheep? Layers. That's a good start.

I bundle myself to the best of my abilities and head downstairs awkwardly. I think that it was mostly me that was creating the awkwardness, as I have never farmed, been near sheep, or had to do these things combined with a group of farmers that don't speak English. I am so nervous that I can barely hold my coffee cup to my mouth without slopping it everywhere. How on earth am I going to pull this off? Yikes!

So I get geared up and me and Sigrun head down in the truck and make our way to the sheep pen in the fields. I hop out of the truck to find about six other people: Three other Icelandic sheep farmers and three of their grandchildren, none of whom speak English. Oh yes, and an enormous audience of sheep. I learn that the farm has about 130 sheep total. They shear the sheep in packs of about 20 or so. So I cautiously approach a pen with

about 20 adult sheep and countless babies, who are there as sort of a package deal.

At this point I'm beyond nervous. I am prompted by the farmers to get into the pen and so I awkwardly hurl myself over the gate. It's been a long time since I've worn rubber boots, let alone climbed things in them. I land on my unsteady feet in the pen and stand tightly against the fence. I find myself feeling really strange and not very bright. It's funny how foolish you can feel when you don't speak the same language as everyone else and you're learning to do something new. Especially, when you're the new kid on the block. There were a few moments that I feel like I might start to cry and I fantasize about going home or at least back to reunite with my Snorri friends. I was at another



crossroads and my instinct told me to run, although I was in the middle of nowhere. But Sigrun was by my side the entire time. I had told her the day before that our Icelandic teacher always said "Flott!" (excellent) when we had done something



right and that it always made me feel very good. She must have remembered that, because she kept saying things like “you are sooo flott!”. Those little words made me feel like I could dive in and just do my best. And so I did... and so the fun begins...

Please allow me to break this down for inquiring minds. I had no idea what to expect when I found out that I was about to spend the day ‘shearing sheep.’ Personally, I had an image of sheep docilely standing while electric trimmers gave them the buzz cut of their dreams. I was a little surprised to find that it’s not like that. They do have clippers but that involves them all being in the barn or “sheep house” which is a huge fiasco to coordinate. So the process is to wrangle one of these guys up, guide (force) them to the fence, and then tie their head/horns in such a way that they can’t escape. Sounds like a breeze, right?

After accomplishing the near impossible, the real work begins. The first order of business is to make the first cut. I paired up with Sigrun’s husband Gudmundur for this activity. First, he assesses to make sure that the sheep feels healthy and is well built

enough that removing its wool won’t risk illness. You do this by pulling up on the hide, to see if it feels loose like a baggy t-shirt or “Icelandic sweater”, if you will. Then, he would start a cut from the rump area and up the back, separating it into two halves. From there, we would both ‘go at it’ with scissors that looked like you needed a tetanus shot just to hold them. It’s a shearin’ frenzy until

you bring it on home...

Lather, rinse, repeat. Until they’re all done. All of the sheep in the pen anyway. Once you have both halves off, they get tossed into the wool “receptacle”.

A few observations about clipping sheep:

- They do not like getting haircuts
- You can’t count on them staying still
- They don’t understand that the more they buck/ram their heads into the fence, the worse their new hairdo looks
- Shearing is harder than it looks
- There’s a lot more poop attached to their wool than you might think
- Ergonomics is not a main focus of farming (I will never complain about the body mechanics at my work again)

Now the funny thing about shearing, is that it’s not always a slam dunk. For example, some of them just can’t be clipped. For others, they can only be half-clipped. We’ll refer to these guys as the “hair dos” of the group. Some of them might just

have their ‘collar’ trimmed off and the rest remains like some kind of crazy vest:

I spent my day shearing with Gudmundur, who can’t speak English at all. It must be the English television that he watches because he was busting out these pretty good one-liners after each sheep was finished. It was very impressive. Imagine an Icelandic farmer saying any of the following to a sheep as he gives them a smack on the rump to send them on their way:

- Goodbye
- Thank-you
- Thank-you and Goodbye
- Goodbye my love
- Thank-you very much
- See you next time

Now during the shearing time, you take things one sheep at a time. What makes for the full fascinating experience is that the pen is an absolute fiasco of sheep frantically racing around. It’s a mix between trying to organize themselves and not get too close to the hairstylists that surround them. A riot at its finest, I’d say. So during the panic, babies obviously get split from their mums. The lambs actually sound like they’re calling “maaAAAAAaam” and racing around. Some of them even try to get a bird’s eye view.

Before the reuniting process can begin, the babies need to receive some antibiotics to make sure that they will stay healthy. This involves chasing these little rascals

around the pen, snatching them up and administering a dose of liquid medication from a little pump. After the baby receives its dose, it’s marked with a green bingo dabber. This allows the farmers (and me) to know who has not been “processed”.

Once all of the babies that are scrambling around have green dots on their head, it’s time for them to hit the ol’ dusty trail out to the mountains. Before the crew can release these sheep out into the world with their new looks, they need to allow them to get organized and for the mums and babies to find each other. First, everybody gets let out of the barber shop, then they need to sort themselves out near the gate that leads them to their summer lodging. They’re released in smaller family units out to the mountains. They can’t go



all at once or all of the work that they just did to get everybody figured out would have been for nothing. It’s funny because once one or two families get through the gate, all of the other sheep want to try to bolt with them. All of the farmers yell at them and wave their canes in the air so

that the sheep get spooked and run the other way. I couldn't help but notice that when people scream at sheep in Icelandic, it sounds an awful lot like German.

Then its time for them, one by one, to walk that big ol' catwalk back into the mountains. They're on the loose until the round up in September. See you little buddies! Don't do anything that I wouldn't do!

\*\*\*

Sheep farming taught me some very



special lessons. I think that for starters, I learned that grabbing the "sheep" by the horns (a little farm humour) is the right plan of attack in shearing and in life. I couldn't help but notice, that the more I rolled up my sleeves and tried my best, the easier things were getting. That kind of attitude and action is something that's noticed by others. I think that it helped me to feel like I was part of the group, more than a just new person on the periphery. I

couldn't change the fact that I was a total city slicker. What I could control is that I was going to be the most enthusiastic sheep-shearing city slicker that they'd ever seen. I was giving 110% every second that I was out there.

The other important lesson that I think I took away from this situation, is that being too sensitive is always a set back. Being an English-speaking gal who had never worked a farm in a group of Icelandic farmers was definitely not an ideal educational situation. I didn't

want that to stop me from getting a full experience. There were a few times when Sigrun, who is essentially my personal translator, wasn't around. I refused to let that stop me from putting my rubber boots back on and making things happen. At times, it was a little tough because if I was doing something wrong, I'd hear someone scream "SARAH!!!!!" and wave their arms up and down like crazy.

OR scream "SARAH!!!! NO!!!!". Once you get past the initial embarrassment of whatever mistake you've made, you get comfortable with this type of feedback. I started to realize that I take non-verbal feedback really personally and so I was getting a bit upset. Once I realized this about myself, I could finally relax a little. I just needed to loosen up and quit being so uptight.

# Letters Home

A play written by The Gimli High School Drama Club  
performed for November 11, 2010 at Gimli

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## Cast

**Julius:** A captain in the army  
**Marguerite:** Julius's wife back in Canada  
**The Unknown Soldier:** A man with nobody to write to back home keeping journal entries.  
**Tim:** A young soldier, new to the war  
**Elli:** Tim's girlfriend  
**Rosemary:** A nurse going overseas with the army  
**Charles and Victoria:** Rosemary's parents  
**Freddy:** A young man going to war  
**Daphne and Diana:** Freddy's young sisters

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*Two single spotlights light the stage in front of a plain black curtain. Those in the war stand in the spotlight stage left, while those home in Canada stand in the spotlight stage right. Those reading letters to each other file on stage in order of the letters being read.*

*Offstage:*

**Julius:** I know you're upset about me leaving you with the child, but I've got to do this, Marguerite. All these new young men signing up need someone to lead them.

**Marguerite:** It won't be the same, Captain. I'll do my best with little Teddy.

*(Tim and Elli walk on to stage together in a bit of a rush because they are late)*

**Elli:** Don't leave, they can find someone else.

**Tim:** I gotta go, It won't take that long, I will be home before you know it. (Tim hugs Elli and turns to leave he take another look at her then sighs) I know you hate the weather here so maybe you should hold onto my sweater. *(Elli takes the sweater)*

**Elli:** Here take my pendant. *(Elli takes off her necklace and gives it to Tim)* now I will always be with you. *(Elli smiles)*

**Train station voice:** would all of the brave new recruits please head to platform 3.

**Elli:** now promise me that you will write and please don't get hurt.

**Tim:** I promise. *(Tim gives Elli one last hugs then he leaves)*

**Julius:** Well, it's time.

**Marguerite:** Promise to write me, darling.

**Julius:** Every day. Farewell, my love. *(They exit)*



*(Unknown Soldier enters)*

**Unknown soldier reading to himself with writing:** Journal Entry #1 – Well, here I am on the train to my first war assignment. I guess I have nobody to write home to, so I'm writing to my journal. This won't be so bad, everyone else is going to war anyway. I'll go out, fight for my country, see the world, and even get paid. Maybe when I come I'll finally find someone to spend my life with and start a family.... It's been so lonely since my parents died. *(exits)*

*(Tori enters stage left, her parents enter stage right)*

**Tori:** Dear Mother and Father, I've arrived here safely, and there's not too many people to take care of so far. It's funny, I thought I would be one of the youngest nurses here, but really most of them are in the same shoes as me. I know how worried you were before I left, but I'm sure that this is the right thing for me to do. I'm proud of my choice, and I hope you are too. I'm already beginning to miss you. Love you lots, I'll write as often as I can. Your daughter, Rosemary.

**Cordelia:** Our dearest Rosemary, we are glad to hear of your safe arrival. Of course we are so proud of you for taking on this challenge.

**Robert:** Tell her to be careful about all those men over there! You never know their intentions.

**Cordelia:** Your father asked me to tell you to focus on your work. Oh, and I have to tell you, it is all around town that Nurse Jennings has been spending a curious amount of time at the hospital with Dr. Jones.

**Robert:** Oh, Victoria, she doesn't need to know all the latest gossip. Tell her that our

hockey team has been doing quite well.

**Cordelia:** Oh, Charles, she doesn't give a care about that. Our prayers will be with you, we are always thinking of you. With love, your parents. *(They exit)*

*(Enter Julia, Kiara and Jordan, in the same fashion as before)*

**Julia:** Heya Freddy! Are you having fun?

**Kiara:** We're not having much fun now that we don't have you to play with.

**Julia:** And you left us with all the chores!

**Kiara:** Diana, it's my turn to write!

**Julia:** Guess what I tried the other day! It was the strangest thing I've ever tasted!

**Kiara:** It had bubbles in it! It was called... What was it called, Diana?

**Julia:** Coca-Cola! Have you tried it yet, Freddy? You would like it.

**Kiara:** Have you heard that they might make TVs now? Father said maybe we can have one when you come home safe.

**Julia:** Father and mother are so worried about you. But we know you'll be okay, because you're our big brother.

**Kiara:** We miss you lots! Come back soon.

**Julia and Kiara:** Love you!

**Jordan:** Hi Daphne and Diana, I'm glad to hear you're still doing well. Don't give mother and father a hard time about doing all the extra chores. The food here isn't so great – They make eggs out of a powder! I haven't tried this Coca-Cola yet, but one of my friends has and he told me about it. I've met so many great guys out here. I have one really good pal who's from the other side of the country. He's been having a rough time because he misses his sweetheart. You know what I really miss? Chocolate. You guys should save up your money and send me some. One of the nurses here is really sweet. I miss you two. Don't worry, I'll be back soon. Stay out of trouble! Love, Freddy. *(They exit)*

*(Unknown soldier enters)*

**Unknown soldier (to journal):** Journal Entry #17- It's getting harder and harder to find time to write in my journal. But when I see everyone else getting letters from their loved ones, writing in my journal is the only thing keeping me on track. Right now, I'm treating myself to a chocolate bar. I had to soak it in my coffee for almost a half hour so it is soft enough to not break my teeth when I bite into it. There I go again, talking about chocolate because I can't bring myself to write about all the haunting things I see every day... friends I've lost... terrible things I've had to do... It's a strange feeling. Every day I just hope I live to see the next... I've got to go, I definitely need all the sleep I can get. *(He exits)*

*(Tim and Ellie enter)*

**Tim:** Dear Ellie, I wish I were home. I miss you so much. The food is all so horrid, you have no idea how much I long for a piece of your apple pie. I am not as lonely as I thought I would be. I have your pendant to remind me of you, and I made some new friends, like Freddy. Now he's a funny guy, he's always writing to his little sisters back home. It seems that almost everyone has someone they've left behind. I will be home before you know it. Yours forever, Timothy. PS Will you marry me?

**Ellie:** To Tom, You don't know how long I've hoped you would ask. Of course I will marry you. All you have to do is come back home. Oh why did you have to go. Your father says the war is good for you, and your mother and sister still cry if we talk about it too much. I wear your sweater every day. I have busied myself with the war effort and I have learned how to knit

scarves and mittens. Sincerely, The Future Mrs. Timothy Baker. *(They exit)*

*(Marguerite and Julius enter)*

**Marguerite:** My dear Captain Julius, I wish as much as you that you didn't have to go, but of course I understand your duty, and will support you all the way. However, I am slightly annoyed with you. Teddy said his first word yesterday, and of course, it was Daddy. He's growing up so quickly, and he's looking more and more like you every day. I find it difficult waking up every morning with naught but the memory of you in bed beside me. I wish you and all your young men well. I'm glad they have someone so capable and caring to lead them. Be strong, my darling. All my love, Marguerite.

**Julius:** Marguerite, without your eyes around, what is there to compare with the beautiful lull of moonlight? Without your face by my side, there is nothing with to compare the beautiful colour of every flower. Every single time I look at the stars at night, I know you are looking at the same sky, and every fiber of me aches to be within your arms again. The thought of seeing you and Teddy again ignites such happiness inside me that I long for the war to be over quickly. I watch my young men write home to their sweethearts, and I remember when we were so young. I hope one day their love will grow to compare to ours. My troop has been fairly lucky so far, but one young man from my group is in the hospital now because he lost his arm protecting another one of my soldiers. I hope his bravery will set an example for the rest. Yet thinking of him makes me realize how fragile life is, and how important it is to show your love to those who matter. Please don't let Teddy forget me. I will come home soon and only then will the

moonlight have meaning again. I love you. Julius. (*They exit*)

(*Unknown soldier enters*)

**Unknown soldier:** Journal Entry #53- Journal writing has taken on a whole new meaning as a necessary form of therapy, as I must learn to write with my other hand. It's strange, sometimes I still feel as though that arm is still connected to me. I wriggle my fingers, yet they are not there. The physical and emotional pain of losing my arm makes me wonder what I have left to live for. I haven't just lost my arm, I've lost any hope in the future. I can't go back to my old job now. I had such high hopes of meeting someone to spend my life with, but I wonder who will want me now. (*He exits*)

(*Tori and her parents enter*)

**Nurse:** Dear mother and father – Things have changed since the last time we wrote. More and more injured men are coming in every day, and usually we don't have enough cots to supply for them all.

**Robert:** Of course, we all feel the economic strains as well.

**Nurse:** You wouldn't believe the smell here. One young man I've been treating particularly stands out to me. He's lost his arm,

**Cordelia:** Lost an arm! That poor thing.

**Nurse:** But the saddest thing is that he has nobody to write home to.

**Cordelia:** No parents? No wife? No siblings?

**Nurse:** I don't understand this, because he is so brave, so charming, so witty. I assure him that he'll overcome this if he keeps faith, as I try to every day as things get more and more difficult. His is a minor wound compared to so many I've seen, and

I wish it would end soon,

**Robert:** Don't we all, my dear, don't we all...

**Nurse:** I can't bear to see much more suffering. I so long to come home, but there's so many people I'll miss here. All the people here are like family to me now and one soldier in particular that I've been spending a lot of time with named Freddy.

**Robert:** I told you to warn her!

**Nurse:** I hope all is still well with you. Love, Rosemary. (*They exit*)

(*Jordan and his sisters enter*)

**Jordan:** Dear Daphne and Diana, You wouldn't believe the things that have been happening. My friend got very hurt when he saved my life one day.

**Daphne:** Saved his life? Oh my.

**Diana:** At least he's okay.

**Jordan:** I feel very guilty. I've been spending all my extra time in the hospital, keeping him company. And I've gotten to know that nurse quite a bit better. She's incredible.

**Diana and Daphne:** FREDDY'S GOT A GIRLFRIEND!

**Jordan:** I hope we'll keep in touch, because soon I won't be seeing her anymore, as I am coming home very shortly. I can't wait to see you girls.

**Diana:** He's gonna see how much I've grown!

**Freddy:** I love you, I'll see you soon, Freddy. (*They exit*)

(*Tim and Ellie enter*)

**Ellie:** Dear Tim, Your mother and I have been busy making arrangements for the wedding. My mother has sewn me a beautiful dress. Hopefully things will be easier when you're back. By the news reports, it sounds like it won't be long now. I can't wait until the day we will finally be

wed, but more importantly, the day you will come home. Love, Ellie.

**Tim:** Dear Ellie, Guess what. I'm coming home. *(They exit)*

*(Marguerite enters alone, with the other spotlight remaining empty)*

**Marguerite:** My dear Captain Julius, I'm writing again because I'm concerned with the fact that you didn't respond to my last letter. I'm sure you must be very busy with the effort to end the war, but please find the time to write me whenever you can. Teddy misses you so. He just learned to ride his bike, and can't wait to show you. He is such a handsome boy, just like his father. He is so proud talking about his father to all his friends. I have saved all of your letters as a keepsake of this hard

time and a testimony to our love. Knowing we've survived this, I know we can survive anything. Love forever, Your Marguerite.

*(2 men in uniform enter the stage, approaching her spotlight. A knock sounds, and they hand her a letter. The spotlights go out, and Marguerite sings Amazing Grace a cappella.)*

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PHONE ORDERS WELCOME

# The Uniqueness of Traditional Icelandic Music

*by Brady Arnason*

Jon Leifs was an Icelandic composer who heavily influenced Icelandic music all the way until his death in 1968. He was the first person to extensively study the intricacies of Icelandic folk music, and picked out ten aspects of it, which show the uniqueness's and similarities between it and other forms of music. This short paper will focus on the uniqueness of the music, and its connection between the uniqueness of Icelanders, and Icelandic culture.

One of the unique aspects that Leifs discusses is the range of these folk

songs. What is unique about the range of Icelandic folk songs is that it is usually very limited (the most common range of a whole song is a mere six tones, and it's uncommon for any song to go past an octave). The likely reason for this is the nature of Icelandic folk songs, which are usually sung by many people, and makes it easier to sing for these large groups. Also, a simpler musical range redirects the focus of these songs towards the lyrics, which makes sense, as many Icelandic folk songs are just Poems or cultural fragments that

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have music added on to it.

Another unique aspect of Icelandic folk music is the use of the augmented fourth. The augmented fourth is the most controversial interval in music history. It's unnatural sound has even lead people to believe it to evil, or demonic, and was known as Diabolus a Musica by many religious scholars a long time ago. Due to all the negative connotations and overall strange sound it produces, the augmented fourth was not accepted in music for almost its entire history. However, Icelanders don't seem to have a problem using it as it pops up often in these pieces. A possible explanation for this is the lack of Catholic influence in Iceland's distant past, as well as Iceland's isolation from the rest of the world.

The third unique aspect of Icelandic folk music is its pedant rhythm. What pedant rhythm means is a very slow, deliberate consistent note pace. These songs are almost completely consisted of quarter notes, half notes, or full notes. You may see a dotted quarter note eighth note combination in there every once in a while, but there are almost never any eighth or sixteenth notes within any Icelandic folk song. The reason for this pedantic rhythm is likely the same reason as the reason for the limited range, which is that adding complex note timings and unconventional rhythms takes away from the importance of the lyrics of the song.

The fourth unique aspect of Icelandic folk music is the liberal use of fermatas. A fermata is used to provide a pause of indeterminate length, usually at the end of a phrase. In these Icelandic folk songs, there are many fermatas, usually one at the end of every 2-6 bar phrase. These constant pauses take away form the general rhythm of the song, but since the rhythm is relatively pedantic, it's still easy to restart and stop after each phrase. Fermatas are used so frequently

likely because its provides a better emphasis on the lyrics of the song, and gives you a bit of time to think about each line, and appreciate the story-telling aspects of these songs.

These unique aspects of Icelandic folk music (as well as other ones such as the tonal nature, extensive use of fermatas, and commonality of codas) are what makes the music so interesting. Icelandic folk music was created by regular everyday Icelanders, and looking at it can give us an insight into the culture. The lyrical importance and ease of singing of these songs leads me to the two most important purposes, I believe, in Icelandic folk music; to tell a story, and to share and enjoy the music together.



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# The Wisdom of the Viking Gods

*The following is a write-up of a presentation given by Thora McInnis, raconteur extraordinaire, on the 2nd September 2011 at the Viking Feast in Gimli; an event sponsored by the New Iceland Heritage Museum*

Iceland's major medieval literary sources are the Eddas and the Sagas. There are forty sagas in existence, each telling a story of the Viking Age, mostly relating to the settlement era of Iceland in the ninth and tenth centuries. These sagas tell us of the culture of the different events and characters of the Vikings; of bravery in battle, revenge killings, social justice, heroism and good old family feuds. Following is a poem from one of the most famous of these Sagas: the *Saga of Njall*. It tells of the conflict many had with reconciling their faith in the old gods with introduction of the new Christian god.

We have vestiges of the presence of the old Norse teachings in our lives to this day. The Christians have their cross; the followers of Asatru (as the worship of Odinn and his clan is called) use Thor's hammer as their symbol. Today as speakers of English we reference the names of the Norse Gods each time we say Tyr's Day, Odinn's day, Thor's Day or Freyja's Day or in their present pronunciation: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday.

*Njall's Saga* tells us that Olafur Tryggvason came from England to Norway with many ships and men in the summer of 995. He came to claim the throne and to bring Christianity to the country. He went ashore on the island of Moster on the west coast of Norway. He was accompanied

by several English priests and a bishop called Grimkjell. On that island Olafur Tryggvason held the first official mass in the land of the Vikings. About 35 years later Norway was officially a Christian country and Olafur Tryggvason made his mission to take his message of Christianity to the people of Iceland.

Christianity was accepted to Iceland in the year one thousand by a decree at the annual Althing (or Parliament). The ruling was that Christianity would become the religion of the land but people would be permitted to choose to practice their old religion if they wished.

The story of the introduction of Christianity in Iceland is told in *Njall's Saga*. A zealous priest named Thangbrand was sent over to Iceland by King Olafur Tryggvason to convert the heathens. The poem recounted here illustrates the feelings that ran high in situations where the old gods clashed with the new in the minds of the people of Iceland at the time of the last millennium.

The priest Thangbrand was on his way to the east fjords when his ship, the *Bison* was wrecked. The priest survived the shipwreck and continued his preachings. The next spring the priest was on his way to Bardarstrand he met up with a woman, Steinunn, who challenged him saying that her Thor was more powerful than his

Christ. She then recited this poem, to let him know how his ship had been wrecked.

It was Thor's giant-killing hammer  
That smashed the ocean-striding Bison  
It was our gods that drove  
The bell-ringer's boat ashore.  
Your Christ could not save  
This Bison of the sea from destruction;  
I do not think your God  
Kept guard over him at all.  
Thor seized the ship,  
Shook its frame  
And beat its timbers,  
And hurled it on the rocks;  
That ship will never  
Sail the seas again,  
For Thor's relentless thrashing  
Smashed it into fragments.

Our main sources for understanding the old Norse religion of the Viking age as well as the poetic traditions of the Vikings were a series of books called the *Eddas*. The *Eddas* contain pretty much all we know of the old Gods of our Nordic ancestors. They spell out how the world was created into three realms: Heaven where the Gods live, Middle Earth where we mortals live and the Netherworld which is inhabited by the Giants, Trolls and Dwarfs.

Many stories about the adventures of the gods were written up in the *Eddas* and they are available for us to enjoy a thousand years later. Through the *Eddas* we are able to get a sense of who they were, their particular powers and how we should live our lives in order to be called up to their version of heaven – Valhalla – when we die. As opposed to the one god teachings of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths where we are redeemed through being god-fearing and virtuous, the gods of the Vikings taught us that redemption came from bravery in battle and being honourable to your friends and relatives.

Our Icelandic keen sense of kinship and blood relations is a teaching that has been with us since our ancestor's worship of the old gods.

The *Words of the High One* or *Hávamál* also come to us from the Eddas. These are guidelines or rules to live by, a bit like the Judaeo-Christian Ten Commandments, only from a Viking point of view. These lessons were handed down to us mortals from Odinn the father of all the gods. Here are just a few examples of such lessons one need to know in order to conduct oneself honourably and appropriately.

- Let the cup go round, yet drink only thy share, speak fair or not at all. No one can blame thee for ill breeding if thou go early to sleep.
- The love of a woman whose heart is false, is like driving with a slip-shod, wild two year old, badly broken horse on slippery ice; or sailing in a rudderless ship with a gale behind her; or like setting a lame man to catch reindeer on the thawing hill-side.
- No man should blame another in matters of love; hues charmingly fair may move the wise and not the dullard. Never blame a man for what is all men's weakness. Mighty love turns even wise men into fools.
- The man who will win a lady's grace should speak fair and offer gifts and praise the fair maid's form. He that woes will win.
- No man should trust a maiden's talk, nor any woman's word; for their hearts were shaped on a whirling wheel, and falsehood planted in their bosoms. Now I will speak clearly, for I know quite well that men's mind to women is false. Men speak fairest when they mean falsest, this misleads honest souls.



- Anything is better than being false. He is no friend who speaks to please.
- Cattle die, relatives die, you yourself will one day die, but the one thing I know that never dies is each man's reputation.
- A man should be a friend to his friends, pay back gift with gift, but no man should be a friend with his enemy's friend.

The following are proverbs from the Viking age:

- Bad is called good when worse happens.
- If a man knew where he would fall he would spread straw there first.
- You cannot tell a drunken man from a wise man until both have slept.



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- What happens in a moment may take years to mend.
- One enemy is too many and a hundred friends are too few.
- What you cannot say briefly you do not know.
- One should speak little with others and much with himself.
- He who is pleasing to himself is displeasing to others.
- He who buys what he does not need steals from himself.
- No one becomes a good doctor before he fills a graveyard.
- One should choose one's bedfellows while it is daylight.
- You do not know your friends from your enemies until the ice breaks.
- That which is loved is always beautiful.



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# POETRY

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## Afi You'll Be Remembered

Mason Kanne

Just off of Lake Winnipeg,  
On Centre and Third Avenue,  
Is now the home of one,  
But until recently was home to two.  
Afi, your battle was long and hard,  
But now you have found peace.  
There are many ways you'll be remembered,  
Including some of these:  
Every taste of Hardfiskur, Mysuostur and Skyr,  
Of Vinarterta and Sukala, your memory will be there.  
Your family will miss you,  
Many tears will be shed.  
But we remember all the good times,  
And all the things you've said.  
You've lived a long life,  
With many memories to share  
Although you won't be with us,  
You'll always be there.  
From the flowers and new growth of spring,  
To the icy winds of December,  
With every lake born gust and breeze,  
Afi, you'll be remembered.

*Jon Irving Kardal was my grandfather. He passed 08/12/2009.*

Editor's note: corrected spelling – súkkulaði

**Sigurður Kraksson**  
**and his daughter died**  
**at Mountain, ND – winter of 1903**  
**(in the name of the widow and mother)**

So here I stand, a foreigner, widow, mother,  
by chains of sorrow bound.  
Sorrow stirs its own coals,  
while in sorrow I ask: ‚come final moment‘,  
Death has me condemned,  
The death of other I have wept.

A foreigner, various burdens I met,  
difficult the road and many delays.  
But my loving friend always responded  
and in the arms of love he me enfolded.  
I was thus eager my load to bear  
and always ready to perform my duties.

Mother’s wisdom and Mother’s fears  
many sleepless nights brought me,  
but a child’s love and a child’s virgule,  
my heart and strength re-nourished.  
No one can translate the love and gladness  
a beloved child brings to a mother.

How I would gladly sacrifice  
for my loving friends, my life!  
Waking, praying, working, ruling,  
struggling through all dangers, troubles-  
for I often saw the shadow of death  
in sleepless nights on my window.

The worries came true, and all my fears,  
I saw my loved ones depart in death.  
Cold and dreary was the night of death,  
Dear Lord, that battle was heavy to bear,  
Our lifeless child to kiss,  
and then a loving husband to lose.

I remember how young I adored  
 a loving man, better than most.  
 I remember how he could soften the problems  
 that life on earth brings in winter.  
 Do I remember the child? O my dear God  
 if you mention sorrows of a widow, mother.

I remember how she had to suffer,  
 I remember how he prayed and kept watch.  
 At last when her struggles were over  
 how his own waning life flickered.  
 How the father love was sacrificed to death  
 and the fulfillment of my sorrow and need.

All this I remember til the day of judgement  
 The unshed tears no longer mentioned.  
 And here tho my sorrow I tell  
 the fountain of grief gets no shallower.  
 Him I loved, her I bore.  
 Who does not understand how my hurt bleeds?

Death does not understand love  
 and obviously laughs at the tears of man.  
 But God is love, drives away sorrow,  
 He wept before, in early mankind.  
 See, I am foreigner, widow, mother!  
 Heavenly Father and mankind's brother!

I have loved, – Your love,  
 so I will trust, in life and death.  
 So may my tears cool my soul.  
 Soon will end the journey of woes.  
 A father's love I saw offer a life,  
 May the love of God His children shield.

*Found amongst the personal belongings of Sigurður Kraksson and submitted by Susan Sigurdson. Sigurður was Susan's great-grandfather. He was born in Hölum, Bakki, Kaupangur, Iceland; he died March 27, 1903. He homesteaded the family's farm in Thingvalla Township, Pembina County in 1889. Susan doesn't know what he and the daughter died from. The daughter's name was Anna Summarros, born in 1897, died March 3, 1903.*

# Book Review

## With Love to you All – Bogga S.

by Audrhea Lande



**Reviewed by Linda Howard Glover**  
**Your Nickel's Worth Publishing 2011**  
**Paperback, 242 pages**  
**ISBN 978-1-894431-62-0**

The title, *With Love to You All - Bogga S.* and the lifelike photo of Sigurbjorg Stefansson on the cover of this book draw us into reading it immediately and not wanting to stop until our eyes are beyond seeing the words or comprehending the content.

Audrhea Lande certainly did her homework before writing this book about the beloved Miss Sigurbjorg Stefansson. In the prologue, Audrhea writes, "It was

May 2008 when I talked to Barbara Bjerring and that's when the story took off with me in its grip, unfolding Sigurbjorg's life before me like gifts being opened on Christmas morning." Henceforth, Audrhea, who never knew Miss Stefansson or had any previous connection to her, interviewed Miss Stefansson's former students, neighbours, friends, and family. Each interview referred her to several new sources. Many said, "She deserves to have a book written about her."

It is thrilling to read this book and to picture Miss Stefansson through Audrhea's interviews. Copies of letters, photographs and her diaries all bring to life and meld together the picture of an amazing woman who lived to make this world a better place. Her determination and self-discipline never waned.

The first few chapters tell us about Sigurbjorg's parents and the difficulties they endured in coming to a new land from Iceland, of her early childhood and of her love and admiration for her parents, of her university years, and her first venture into teaching.

This book cannot be read just once. In many instances, it is a book of historical value to be referred to again and again as it reveals much about the early Icelandic settlers. However, I found portions of the book respecting family ancestry and details about their lives difficult to follow perhaps because of the complexity of their lives and relationships.

Miss Stefansson's teaching career spanned from 1918 (*Her First Venture into Teaching*) until she retired in 1962. The chapter *Miss Stefansson the Teacher* is filled with remembrances of former students. They all spoke of Miss Stefansson with warmth, admiration and deep respect for the breadth and depth of her knowledge and her personal connection to them.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA HOWARD GLOVER

**Miss Stefansson is holding a wooden cover made for the original copy of the Gimli Saga. Accompanying her is Ethel Howard**

The chapter *The Achievements of her Later Years* tells the story of Miss Stefansson's determination to establish a library in Gimli. The Evergreen Regional Library was founded mainly through her personal financial gifts and the tremendous amount of time and energy she spent in organizing,

sorting and cataloguing books, and in translating books from Icelandic to English. Writing about her father, Sigurbjorg quotes an Icelandic proverb *blindur er boklaus madur* (without books a man is blind). Audrhea says, "Sigurbjorg would, as an adult, claim all her father's interests as her own." This chapter also refers to the central role which she played in the preparation of the Gimli

Women's Institute's *The Gimli Saga Community History* in 1973 and the revised *Gimli Saga* published as their centennial project in 1975.

The causes that she fought for and against were many. She wrote letters to the editors of newspapers. She drafted resolutions, making use of the Women's Institute as a vehicle to proceed in lobbying officials at all levels of government against proposed projects which would be damaging to the Town of Gimli, the surrounding land, and Lake Winnipeg. She sought justice for people such as the Japanese Canadians

who were interned during

the war, demanding an apology to them from the Government of Canada. These accomplishments and many others are included in this book.

In a copy of a letter of instructions (page 214) written in 1972 to her cousin Kari, Sigurbjorg wrote: "You will see

that I have elected donating my body to the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Anatomy, and eyes to the Eye Bank. This is not a rash decision, but one arrived at by much thought.... The body I regard as only a garment, no more to be considered than a dress or a coat. Why not use it to help others if that is possible?" In the same letter she wrote, "As to a memorial service, the people who matter most to me are scattered so far and wide that they could not possibly attend it. Besides, they will remember me no less and I would think more pleasantly and naturally without it."

After Sigurbjorg Stefansson's death (1897 – 1985), my mother, Ethel Howard, a close friend and colleague of Miss Stefansson, wrote a tribute in the *Interlake*

*Spectator* a copy of which is included in this book on page 216. In part, that article reads, "Indeed, no service was needed to preserve her memory in the minds and hearts of all who were touched by her life."

I was one of Miss Stefansson's students for three years in the 1950s. My memories and admiration of her have remained prominent in my mind and, in my heart, for all of my adult life. Her concern for all of her students, and for all people, was always evident and her advice well received.

Audrhea Lande has captured Sigurbjorg Stefansson's character and personality. Audrhea now knows Miss Stefansson very well and has passed on that knowledge in this book. Indeed, it is a book that needed to be written.

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# Contributors

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**BRADY ARNASON** I'm an Arts student at the U of M, majoring in Philosophy. I'm 20 years old. I'm very passionate about all different kinds of music, which is why I chose this subject to write about initially in my class. The Arnason family recently went to Iceland and travelled around the country to discover our families former homes.

**LINDA HOWARD GLOVER** considers Gimli to be her hometown. She lived there as a teenager with her parents. Now residing in Edmonton, she is active in the North End Seniors Creative Writing Society. They have published three volumes of short stories – *Word Weavers* in which Linda has stories.

**ALMAR GRÍMSSON** was one of the originators of the idea of the Snorri programs. He served as the president of the Icelandic National League in Iceland until just recently. Almar has made himself known to many in USA and Canada in various ways, such as being an Icelandic representative and even a tour guide with groups from Iceland.

**CHARLES NATHAN HATTON** B.A. (HONOURS); B.ED.; M.A. is a doctoral candidate at the University of Waterloo whose research looks at wrestling in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**MASON KANNE** is a writer currently living in Winnipeg, MB. Growing up in Northern Manitoba, Mason took an affinity to writing, but started working with it more earnestly after taking part in his first Poetry Slam and several other Open Mic Nights. Living and working downtown Winnipeg, Mason finds major influences for his writing come from a mix of personal experiences and being raised in an artistic environment, encouraged by family and friends.

**HEIDI MALAZDREWICH** recently finished her Masters in Directing at the University of Calgary. She has worked as an actor and director on numerous projects and is currently preparing for MTC's *Romeo and Juliet*.

**THORA MCINNIS** is no stranger to the Icelandic-Canadian community. Her first recitation tribute to her Viking roots was on the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba main stage at the age of six and she has multiple performances to her credit since then. She lives in Gimli and is daughter of Svava Simundsson and Melvin McInnis, Granddaughter of Gunnar & Margret Simundsson and Gordon and Gudrun McInnis, great-granddaughter of Hrund Skulason.

**MYLEE NORDIN** originates from Winnipeg where she attended the UofW Theatre program. She learned how to care for bees in the prairies but continues to work in the field as the Staff Beekeeper for the Toronto Beekeepers Cooperative.







PHOTO: JÓHANN PÁLL VALDIMARSSON:

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## The Back Page

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Svava Simundsson with granddaughter Aleesha Thorunn upstairs in the Icelandic collection at the Arborg Library