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Volume XLI, No. 2

Winnipeg, Canada

Winter, 1982

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GUEST EDITORIAL

**THE MOST JOYFUL NEWS**

*“ . . . I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone . . . ” Luke 2:11.*

by **Dr. Valdimar J. Eylands**

The public media has not brought much good news this year. After due allowance has been made for the usual sensationalism and distortions inherent in the public reporting of events, the fact remains that this year human behavior in many lands has reached a new low. It has indeed been a discouraging year for the humanist who believes in man's basic goodness, and his inevitable march to personal perfection, and to the attainment of utopian conditions in human affairs.

It is therefore about time that we hear some good news, and it is no accident that such has come, and is coming, to us at Christmas time from God himself, directly through the mouth of an angel.

But people cannot hear unless they turn off their noise making machinery, and try to develop a receptive mood. Nor will they listen unless they sense that something is being said that is of personal importance to them.

It is obvious that those who first heard the Christmas message listened and rejoiced in what they heard. If they had not, the message would not have been transmitted, and we would never have heard it. But people have often wondered why those humble shepherds were the first to hear the good news. They were humble, primitive men, uncouth in appearance, untutored and held in low esteem. Why did God select such an audience for the most joyful news ever announced? Why did he not rather send the messenger to Athens, the intellectual centre at the time, or to Jerusalem, the home of religious piety, or Rome, the

centre of political power, commerce and production? We cannot answer such questions. We can only surmise. Perhaps God intended to impress upon the world that he knows no inferior people, that riches and rags are alike to him, but only the inner man counts. Or was it perhaps because the mansions of the wealthy, and the minds of the self-righteous were closed to him. It may have been the old story: When a man thinks he has everything, he is not greatly concerned about what God or his fellow-men have to say.

A few decades ago we thought we had everything. Then the rains fell and the winds blew and our boasted civilization flew away like a house of cards, leaving us frustrated and confused, with a legacy of violence and terrorism both on the domestic and the international scene.

Atheistic wisdom failed us.

Superficial religion failed us.

Mechanics without morality failed us.

Competition without conscience failed us.

But God has not degraded nor deserted us. He brings us "the most joyful news ever announced." There is vastly more in it than a mere "shot in the arm," to make us happy over the holidays. Believing the good news of the gospel we find out spirits moved, our vision enlarged, and our hearts warmed. We, as human beings, are more than a cog in a wheel, or a fly on a pile of cowdung. We are called, not to solve the riddles of the universe, but to respond to the voice of its maker whom we call our Father in Heaven. He wants us to be a part

of the world's cure, and not of its cancer. He wants us to help make this world a better place in which "everyone" can live a meaningful and a happy life. The "joyful news" of the gospel means not only that we are called to serve God and fellowmen in love, but also that we are saved, if we will have it so. The core of the Christmas message is that Christ came and comes to seek and to save men and women from their confusion, and every kind of terror. ". . . I bring you the most wonderful news ever announced, and it is for everyone."

*A BLESSED CHRISTMAS and a  
HAPPY NEW YEAR.*

## AT THE EDITOR'S DESK

### REQUEST FOR A BOOK

Should anyone wish to sell the book *The Icelandic People in Manitoba* by W. Kristjanson, please contact:

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## PEOPLE



*U.S. President Reagan and Mrs. Reagan welcome the President of Iceland, Vigdis Finnbogadóttir, to the White House.*

\* \* \*

His memory is revered by the descendants of the Icelandic Pioneers in North America.



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Governor General

\* \* \*

### HALE AND HEARTY AT 94

Happy 94th birthday to a wonderful mother of nine, grandmother of 27 and



*Runa Arnason*

great-grandmother of 14. Mrs. Arnason was born in Iceland on October 20, 1888, coming to Canada in 1892. She married Vilhjalmur Arnason in 1915. Together they enjoyed 49 years of married life residing in Gimli. Mr. Arnason passed away in 1964. Mrs. Arnason resides in Betel Home in Gimli and enjoys good health. Her main interest is her love for family and friends. In honor of her birthday a family dinner party will be held. May God bless and grant you continued health and happiness for a very special mom, amma, and amma amma.

Runa was born at Vopnafjord, Iceland, in 1888. She migrated to Canada with her parents, Björn Jonsson and Gudrun Grimsdóttir, in 1892.

\* \* \*

### PRESERVING THE ICELANDIC HERITAGE IN SEATTLE

Bjornson is one of the busiest baritone soloists in Seattle. He sings in all Scandinavian languages, and even has sung in Hebrew and Latin. He has directed and sung in Icelandic choruses, directed church choirs and appeared in several local opera and light-opera productions.



*Tani and Sigrid Bjornson are active in Icelandic activities in Seattle. Both were born in an Icelandic community in North Dakota.*  
Mike Siegel/Seattle Times

Mrs. Bjornson is a singer, too, and when the Bjornson children and grandchildren visit, there almost is nonstop music, interrupted only by Icelandic snacks and coffee.

"On Christmas Eve, the family must sing all the old Icelandic carols before any packages can be opened," she said. "Oh, that is so hard on the grandchildren, who do not understand."

\* \* \*

#### PROVINCIAL JUDGE

Kristjan Fredric Stefanson, 38, of Gimli, Manitoba, has been the provincial judge presiding at The Pas and District Circuit Court, since September 1, 1979.

Mr. Stefanson graduated from the Gimli Collegiate Institute in 1962 and was the recipient of the Governor-General's Medal. In his grade twelve year at the collegiate he was president of the student council.

Upon receiving his B.A. from the University of Manitoba in 1966, he entered Law School and obtained his degree in 1969. He articulated with the Winnipeg law firm of Aikins, MacAuley and Thorvaldson, remaining there until 1971 when



*Kristjan Fredric Stefanson*

he joined the Brandon law firm of Carroll and Potter.

In 1973, he joined the Manitoba Attorney-General's Department as a Crown Prosecutor in Thompson, Manitoba, transferring to Winnipeg in 1974. He held this position until his appointment as a provincial judge.

Kris Stefanson is the third son of Sigrun Stefanson and the late Eric Stefanson of Gimli. Eric was a member of parliament for the Interlake Area from 1958 to 1969.

At this time Stefanson is the only provincial judge of Icelandic descent in Canada.

\* \* \*

#### SVEINN SIGFUSSON TO BE INDUCTED INTO SPORTS HALL OF FAME



*Sveinn Sigfusson*

Sveinn is modest about his accomplishments and rewards in sports and feels that his record speaks for itself. However, in a recent interview with Barry Mullin of the Winnipeg Free Press he told of his achievements:

"I'm not much for bragging," says the modest Sigfusson who will be inducted into the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame and Museum next month.

It's not that Sigfusson wants to minimize his accomplishments. He feels that talking tends to over emphasize the significance of his nine Canadian gold medals, a national record in discus, being named to the 1954 All-Canada track and field team when he

was a mere 42 and competing in two British Empire Games.

At the 1950 Empire Games in Auckland, New Zealand, he took the bronze medal in discus.

The man, affectionately known as *Big-foot* because of his size 13 track shoes, prefers to let the record of his accomplishments in business and on the playing field speak for themselves.

\* \* \*

#### "PHARMACIST OF THE YEAR"



*Joe Tergesen, Manitoba Pharmacist of the Year (right) receives the A. H. Robins "Bowl of Hygeia" from Mr. R. Steer.*

Joe Tergesen of Arborg is Manitoba's Pharmacist of the year for 1982.

The Arborg resident who has practised his career for approximately 30 years in the Interlake received the honor at a banquet in Winnipeg this past spring.

He was awarded the Bowl of Hygeia by R. Steer of A. H. Robins company at the Manitoba Pharmacists' 19th annual banquet. The Bowl of Hygeia is a community service award and is presented to a pharmacist who has distinguished himself in the community.

The Robins company presents this award throughout every province, the United States, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.

Joe Tergeson who, along with wife Frances, has operated a pharmacy in Arborg since 1952, is a deserving recipient of the award.

His more visible contribution to his community is through his active work with the Arborg branch of the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded.

In 1962 Joe spearheaded the formation of the Arborg branch and donated space above his store and helped secure donations for supplies so special classes could be held for area children.

He maintained the school for four years and during that time handicapped children enrollment went from three to ten children.

As the children grew older the parents saw a need for a pre-vocational training facility, and with Joe's leadership, Riverdale Place Homes was incorporated in 1975.

*Parents: Joe and Lara Tergesen, Gimli, Manitoba.*

\* \* \*

**WESTDAL BROTHERS ON THE MOVE**



*Paul Westdal*

The Canadian Wheat Board has announced the appointment of Paul Westdal

as Manager of its office in London, England. Mr. Westdal joined the Board in 1970, and worked in the Market Development Department until 1976, when he took a leave of absence to work with the World Food Program in Senegal. He returned to the Market Development Department in 1977, and was appointed Director of Market Development in June, 1981.

\* \* \*

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mark MacGuigan, recently appointed Christopher Westdal of Winnipeg to be High Commissioner to Bangladesh, with concurrent accreditation to Burma.



*Christopher Westdal*

Mr. Westdal (B.A., St. John's College, Winnipeg; M.B.A., University of Manitoba) joined the Canadian International Development Agency in 1973. He has served abroad in New Delhi, and at CIDA Headquarters (Asia Division). Since 1978 he has been CIDA Regional Director for Eastern Africa.

*Chris and Paul are the sons of Sveinn and Margaret Westdal, Winnipeg. Grandparents: Pall Jonsson Westdal who emigrated from Vopnafjörður, Iceland in 1904, and Helga Sveinsdottir, born in Winnipeg.*

\* \* \*

**AN ACCOMPLISHED BALLERINA**



*Gaile Petursson-Hiley in CONSTRUCTION COMPANY by Stephanie Ballard, with music by Andre Gagnon. Photo by David Cooper.*

Of Icelandic descent, born and raised in Winnipeg, Gaile is currently in her fifth year with Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers. She was an apprentice for one year prior to joining the company. Gaile has had several roles created for her by such outstanding choreographers as Brian McDonald and Lynne Taylor-Corbett.

She started dancing at the age of 3 1/2 years with the McConnell School of Dancing, joined the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School of Dancing at the age of 9, having passed the Royal Academy examination.

She was a student for four years in the Professional Programme at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and prior to coming to

Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers was a company member of the Pacific Ballet Theatre in Vancouver, B.C. She has performed at Rainbow Stage, on C.B.C. series "Good Times", at Dance Discovery, and Music Interlalia. She recently appeared in the Canadian Dance Spectacular Movie by the National Film Board "Gala".

Gaile has been the recipient of a number of grants and awards from the Canada Council, the Manitoba Arts Council, and the Du Maurier Search for the Stars Competition. She has studied in New York, the American Dance Festival (N. Carolina), and Banff School of Fine Arts. She will be performing in Brisbane, Australia this year as part of the Cultural Arts Presentation from Canada. Gaile was one of the ten Canadian artists chosen as part of the "Kanata Ensemble" representing Canada in the Commonwealth Games.

*She is the daughter of Petur B. and Edith M. Petursson; granddaughter of Olafur and Anna Petursson and great granddaughter of Elsbet Gudmundsdottir, one of the original Icelandic settlers at Gimli.*

\* \* \*

**THOUGHTS OF MOM AND DAD**

Regardless of the time of day  
Or of the time of year —  
One thinks of those gone on ahead,  
and wipes away a tear!

So it is this Christmas, our thoughts and memories we'd like to share.

Mom — Ingibjorg (Emma) Thomasson, daughter of Ingunn and Arni Thomasson, sister to Gunna, Jonathan, Tom, Paul from Morden, Rose Hjartarson (deceased) and Kay Breckman from Lundar, Steini and Hannes from Winnipeg and Helga Block from Toronto. She was born and spent her childhood days in Brown, Manitoba (1-6 district south-west of Morden). With determination and courage she worked her



Leo and Ingibjorg (Emma) Danielson

way through high school which she took in Winnipeg and Manitou Normal School. She taught one year in Winkler and then accepted a teaching position at Rocky Hill School, a community east of Lundar, Manitoba. For two of the many years she spent teaching in this community, she taught two schools at the same time — one week at a time, including a Christmas concert at each school.

'Twas at this time she met a male resident of this community who was to change her career — Leo, son of Hergeir and Kristjana Danielson, brother to Baldwin Danielson from Lundar, Laufey Gudmundson and Daniel Danielson from Winnipeg, Margaret Stevenson from Calgary, Herdis Stevenson from Vancouver and Sigrun Peake from Chilliwack.

Previous to their meeting, Leo had held various jobs — threshing in the Glenboro-Cypress River area, fishing on Lake Manitoba and working in a garage in Winnipeg. He also worked on his dad's farm and then did some trucking between Winnipeg and Lundar.

Mom and Dad were married on July 20th, 1935 in a double wedding ceremony with Mom's sister Kaye and Laugi (Slivers) Breckman at their home at 1-6 outside under the trees.

So began their married life they were to share for forty-five years. Their family of three sons grew to fourteen members:

Dorothy, John, Alan, Doug, and Nancy Breckman, Michael, Sandra, Marcie, Devon, and Tracy Danielson, Judy, Jim, Derek and Jana Thorsteinson. Dad, with the loving and strong support of Mom, operated the Lundar Transfer for thirty-eight years (1930-1968). Mon was very involved with community affairs: Red Cross, 4-H, Church, Choir, Sunday School (as superintendent for years). Dad in the Elks, Masons, Agricultural Society, Church in Lundar as well as a very keen supporter of the Otto-Stony-Hill Church, Museum and the Lundar Historical Book. They both curled and were avid hockey fans, and in the later years enjoyed New Horizons.

They took great pride in the home they built and lived in for the remainder of their lives. Dad was a real lover of nature — enjoyed watching birds and animals and appreciating God's creation.

During their retirement years, Mom and Dad made three trips to Iceland (becoming

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very interested in finding new relatives and friends and much appreciative of Icelandic culture); also several trips to Western Canada and California.

*Re-living these times  
Recalling the past  
Remembering the years  
That have gone so fast!  
So hard to believe  
Those times — gone by!  
Back to reality  
. . . to die!*

\* \* \*

### NINNA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY



Ninna Stephenson

On Saturday, October 16th, 1982 a large number of people congregated at the First Lutheran Church on Victor Street to celebrate the 90th birthday of Winnipeg's Icelandic Grand Lady. They rejoiced in the fact that she had by her unselfish service to her fellowmen earned the esteem and gratitude of a host of friends. They all wish her health and "joie de vivre" in the coming years.

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## Greetings

from

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## AN ICELANDIC IMMIGRANT'S GRUELLING EXPERIENCE

by Magnus Arnason, translated by Sigurbjörg Stefánsson

### THE AUTHOR



The writer of the following account, Magnus Arnason (16/6/1884-12/9/1953) son of Arni Magnússon and his wife Elin Sighvatsdóttir, was born in Reykjavík, Iceland. Having been orphaned at an early age, he entered the home of the noted statesman Benedikt Sveinsson and later stayed on there with his son, the famous poet Einar Benediktsson. He absorbed the culture of this remarkable home, being especially fond of poetry. He went abroad with the poet to Denmark, where he learned the Danish language, and presumably also acquired his mastery of house-painting.

He came to Canada in 1911, at the age of twenty-six. The following memoir tells of his earlier experiences of working condi-

tions for immigrants in our country. Those that he encountered were so extreme that at first sight one might doubt that they could have existed. But those who knew Magnus do not doubt his account at all. He is described as a quiet, well-mannered man, not given to exaggeration. Besides, he wrote these reminiscences wholly for himself and his family, not for publication. A fellow-workman of a later period feels no doubt from his knowledge of Magnus, and also of working conditions as he knew them, that they are quite authentic.

Seen in that light they are a remarkable document, revealing working conditions before the protective legislation and labor unions of today existed. Nowadays we often tend to judge unions harshly and feel that they go far overboard in their demands. But what would life in our country be like without them? This document may help to give one a balanced view.

—Sigurbjörg Stefánsson

\* \* \*

### A MEMOIR BY MAGNUS ARNASON

*"These are notes on the hardships and ill-treatment that I experienced."*

In the year 1911, on March 29, I, then twenty-six years of age, emigrated from Iceland to Canada in search of employment, as did most of those who sought Canada in those years. About mid-April I began to work, first with a shovel at digging cellars for houses. That was work that many here in Winnipeg avoided, for it was considered rather bad, and was therefore available.

I cannot say that I liked that work well, so I soon gave it up and began to paint

houses; for that I had done for years in my homeland. Very many houses were then built here in Winnipeg, but that employment lasted only during the summer months, for in the fall, or about mid-November, it turned so cold that everyone gave up that work. Then one had to try something else. As matters stood, it would not do to give up working, for at that time wages were not so high that one could save much.

Three of us Icelandic immigrants formed

a group, Gudmundur Filippusson and his brother Filippus Filippusson, who had come on the same ship as I from our homeland. Gudmundur had come to Canada the year before and practised house-painting here, but Filippus practised plumbing and steam-fitting. We discussed what would ensue during the winter, and all agreed that we must seek employment outside the city. There were only three choices: fishing on Lake Winnipeg; farm work, looking after cattle; or working in the forests for a railway company. We were told that the work on the lake was cold and bad in every respect, which was not correct. I have experienced it fully since and do not dislike it at all. Now I regret that I did not select it. The farm work was ill-paid and we were not used to it, so we did not consider it. The work in the woods appealed to most of us, and we determined to try it, and settled on that. Then we walked downtown and saw an advertisement in an office window: "Good axemen wanted. Fifty (\$50) dollars a month." the pay appeared good, and we did not even consider that we knew nothing of handling an axe. The company offered to pay the fare one way, fifteen dollars to the end of the railway line, and then it was stated that we would have to walk thirty miles from the end of the rail to the hut that we were to stay in. We must work there for at least three months, and we signed our names to that. Now this was a rather bold move on our part, since we knew nothing of this work, but enlisted for it as fully experienced workers. That was what they wanted, and wages were not paid except to good men. We were full of youthful strength, accustomed to hard work and all in the prime of life, and we felt that those were good recommendations with which to begin.

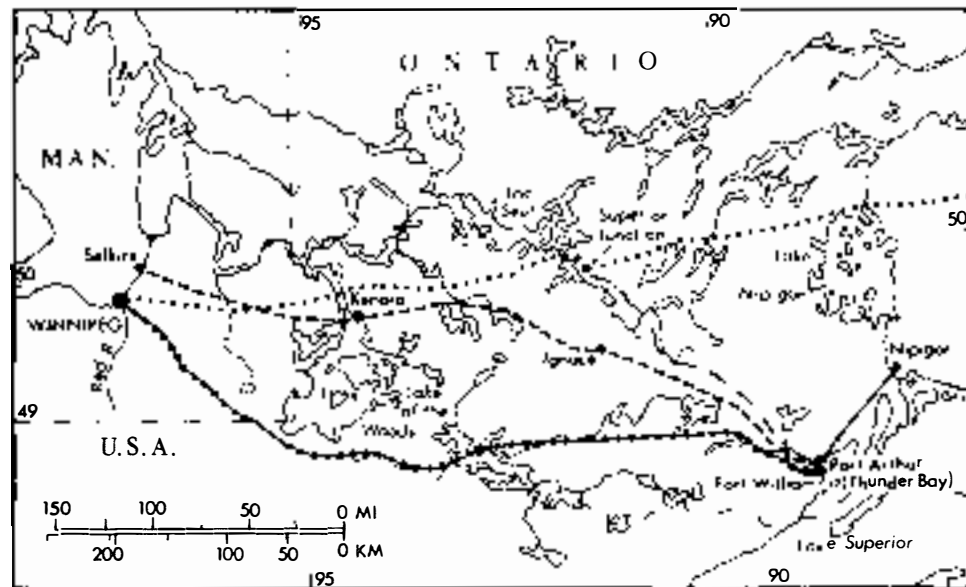
We were told to take with us a blanket to sleep under and a revolver to defend ourselves against wolves in the Ontario forests

— for that is where we were to go. We had to be ready to leave on December 22. Then they expected to have engaged the sixty men they wanted: cooks, horsemen and others. The day came, clear and cold. The frost was 30° below, as they say here. (Note: -30°F.) Early in the morning we were packed into the C.N.<sup>1</sup> coach, and there, all mixed together, were Norwegians, Swedes, Frenchmen, Belgians, Slavs and Negroes. We Icelanders thought it was a rather rough-looking lot, and the smell was not of the best. It was difficult to find air to breathe, for it was most appropriately described in the words of an old man: "For there were commingled, sour and dense, the smells of sweat, urine and dirt." And to top it all, very many of them were drunk and their language unpolished, as often happens when Bacchus is present.

All went without mishap to St. Johns<sup>2</sup>. That was the name of a small town at the end of the railway line. Dust was coming on, and we did not see our surroundings plainly. But there was a wretched hotel there into which we all pushed our way, and the floorspace was just sufficient for us all. There we lay side by side all fully clothed. It was little better than being out-of-doors, for all had to stand up occasionally to shake off the chills.

In the morning we stood up at 6 o'clock, took a hasty meal, and then set out into the snow, which reached halfway to our knees. Now we had to walk thirty miles, which turned out to be rather long and difficult for us, with heavy going, unbroken snow and hills to be crossed. We agreed to take turns at breaking the trail and walk one behind the other. We walked that entire day without seeing any human habitation, and by then many had become hungry and thirsty.

At six o'clock in the evening we reached some huts. There was a group of men cutting trees. They were just on the point of stopping work. We asked who was the foreman and they pointed him out. We



## Key:

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| ..... National Transcontinental Railway | ----- Canadian Pacific Railway |
| — · — · Grand Trunk Railway             | ———— Canadian Northern Railway |

Map of southeastern Manitoba and northwestern Ontario showing the Canadian Northern, Canadian Pacific, National Transcontinental, and Grand Trunk railways from Winnipeg to Lake Nipigon (based on a portion of a 1911 railway schedule map entitled "Canadian Northern Railway and Connections"). Drafted by Caroline Trotter. (Courtesy of Dr. Leigh Syms)

asked whether he could sell us food. He surveyed our group and probably thought that we were rather many, but then, after some silence, he said that we could have food for fifty cents a meal.

We were extremely hungry and therefore felt relieved and longed to sit down and rest and drink cold water, of which there was a sufficient supply in their hut. Now we asked them how far we had walked that day.

"Twenty-eight miles<sup>3</sup>," they said.

"Then we don't have far to go to reach our destination."

Then they asked for whom we intended to work. We said, "Murray." Then they began to laugh, but we told them what had been said to us. But they stated that that was an outright lie, for from the end of the rail to Murray's huts was about a hundred and eighty miles. We were absolutely

astounded and at a loss for words concerning the hoax and the shameless effrontery to which we had been subjected, in sending us out on this journey. Then they began to tell us ugly tales of Murray. No one wanted to have anything to do with him. No men stayed with him; they were always coming and going, and many who had worked for him had never again reached human habitation. The worst of it for us was that the huts were so far apart, and it was so difficult to obtain food for so many. We thought that this was exaggerated and did not believe it. We asked for lodging for the night and were granted that, provided that we could lie on the frozen earth floor. It was not an attractive prospect, in the severe cold at 40°F. below zero.

We were up early next morning, glad to be able to straighten up. We had not had much rest. We bought breakfast and set out

at the first ray of dawn into the uncertainty, with no provisions except the few scraps of bread that we had slipped off the table into our pockets without being much observed. We asked for food to take with us, but were not granted any. They said they did not have enough for that.

They knew of no huts nearer than thirty-five miles. It was a rather stiff day's journey, but we ate a few scraps of bread at noon, and that was our only relief for that day.

I was in the group at the front and that never changed during the entire course: three Icelanders, six Norwegians, two Swedes and one Belgian. They were experienced woodsmen except for us Icelanders. One of the Swedes later became our foreman. He was named Tor (Thor), a man of forty-five, big and handsome and, I believe, of fine character, though he happened off and on to curse Murray for his lies.

Throughout that day we plodded along slowly and steadily, and by nightfall we reached a hut. Ten men were there felling trees. There we met the same reception as in the former place, and heard still more abominable tales of Murray. They warned us of a lake that would be on our way, Lake Nipigon. If we went out on it, it would be all over for us. It was sixty miles wide. Twelve men had been lost there shortly before — Murray's men. To avoid it, we had to make a five-mile detour, which we chose to do. Besides we had to find a path packed by sleighs or horses, for now they knew of no huts. But Murray had one man in a hut to receive horses that were transporting hay and provisions to his men to the east. It was twenty-eight miles<sup>3</sup> away. It did not look promising to walk that far in extreme frost, for we had now all become stiff and found walking difficult. Most had lost hope of ever making the distance that lay ahead. But there was nothing to be done but to try to go on, whatever lay

ahead. It was not an attractive prospect to go the whole way back, now that we were penniless. No, that was impossible, and as matters stood we had to try to make it the whole way or else freeze to death.

So we set out early next morning with a piece of bread in our pockets, and according to directions we found a trodden sleigh track, and that was a great improvement. There is a great difference between walking a trodden road or wading through loose snow. The twelve of us still stayed together in a group. The rest were nowhere to be seen, and it was so all the way. We did not see them again on the rest of our journey. But they all turned up sooner or later except for seven, of whom no one knew whether they had turned back or been lost. Twelve were found on the road exhausted from hunger and fatigue, but were so fortunate that the drivers passed along this road and drove them the rest of the way.

The landscape had now changed: we had to go over hills and rocks alongside lakes. The weather was clear and bright with extremely severe frost. There was snapping and crackling through the entire forest that was tall and dense alongside our path. It was our protection, for when we passed over inlets we could hardly protect ourselves, as the wind blew so strong. By evening we reached the hut, which did not look big, but smoke issued from it, and that in itself was enough to gladden us, for we desired warmth no less than food.

In it was an old man who looked after the hay and the barn that housed eight horses. Although the hut was only 10x14 feet we pushed into it and stayed there that night. No more could have lain on the floor, for we had to stoke the heater all night and open the door occasionally to let in fresh air.

Though our bed was not good, we rested well there. We had to cook for ourselves, and the courses were rather few but sufficient, and everything was welcomed.

The old man was pleased to have visitors, for the solitude was driving him out of his mind. He never saw anyone except twice a month when men passed by there with horses and needed hay.

We asked the old man how far it was to the next hut, and he thought it was about forty miles. Now we did not like that prospect. Things were going from bad to worse. How were we to cover that distance, all of us stiff and weak from hunger and fatigue? However, it would not do for us to remain grounded there and to give up. We discussed the situation for a while and decided to continue the next morning in the name of the Lord. By morning the weather was good, but by noon the sky clouded over and the frost abated. That was a blessing for us as matters stood, for we were all becoming slack and walked slowly far apart in a long file. Once in a while we stopped, but only for a few moments at a time, or else we could not have continued on.

But now something happened that changed our train of thought. Thor being the first, a short distance ahead, saw some sort of heap by the roadside and began to stir it. It turned out to be a man frozen to death, who seemed to have been lying there a considerable time. According to his position by the road he appeared to have come from the east. He had nothing with him except a blanket tied over his shoulder. Thor searched in his pockets but found nothing except a pocket-knife. There was nothing to be done here so we went on. A long time passed. Then we saw another man in a similar condition. Still we continued, about a mile, and there we found the third one. He lay almost in the middle of the road. He had tumbled straight forward, with one hand under his face. This was an elderly man with a full beard. Thor rolled him over and searched his pockets for some identification, but found nothing except 75 cents, which were left alone.

We were now so aghast at all this that we forgot our exhaustion and no one talked of resting near these dead bodies. The day was now advanced, and we all plodded on. At four o'clock we saw the sun just as it was setting. It occurred to me that it was a farewell to us, for as matters then stood we were so exhausted and near the end of our resources that we did not expect to see another sunrise. We trudged on like this, steadily, in silence. Now a steady raw wind blew piercing cold in our faces.

We looked constantly for smoke or some motion, but saw nor heard nothing except the howling of wolves in the forest.

Yes, somewhere far ahead we saw smoke, but it was impossible to calculate the distance, for the land was so hilly that it concealed distances. By now we had lost all hope, to the point that it did not cheer us much to see this smoke. To us it was something far away that we could not possess.

We longed for rest and wanted most of all to lie down in the snow, but we knew

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that that meant it would be all over for us.

Now we saw a hut ahead, but everything there was cold and dead. Still we rambled on up to the hut and pushed the door open. In it there was nothing to be seen except a battered and rusty old heater and a bag with a batch of coal-black potatoes that had been thawed and frozen many times over, so that there seemed to be little food value in them. But the Belgian took the potatoes, sliced them into thin slices, and told us to find birch-bark and light the heater. We fried these blackened potato slices on the rusty lid and ate them with good appetite. We were greatly refreshed by this and we did not sit down to this meal, but stood around the heater.

Then we left the hut and set out in case we might reach human habitation. It was now turning dusk. We estimated that the smoke ahead would be five miles distant, but later found out that it was seven miles. Now we kept on, and when we had walked approximately four miles we found that the potato shavings were losing their effect and we were as weak as before. Now the silence returned and everyone staggered along by himself without looking back. If anyone had fallen he would have had to look after himself, for no one had any strength left to give to others. Now we began to stumble and fall. One's feet were numb, tongue dry and the whole body giving in. The hopelessness began to reassert itself, for we did not even know where we were going.

But something always comes to one's aid. Now a light appeared in front of us in the darkness, and it seemed to give us strength though our hope had become faint. We were now far apart. Each one seemed to be thinking only of himself, which was really all he could do. By late evening we reached this light. There were eight men there in a hut which was little more than barely sufficient for them. They invited us

in, and we immediately threw ourselves on the floor and received water to drink.

To this day I do not understand how we managed the last two miles. It has been incomprehensible to me, like a trance or a dream.

We revived on the floor and received a bite to eat, and the good news that we had only seventeen miles to walk to our destination. But we were so stiff that we did not think it likely that we could move the next day. We slept on the frozen floor as usual, and stood up next morning all awry like worn-out and rheumatic horses. But it all eased up, and we made those seventeen miles the next day. It was then considered that we had reached our destination (home), for at least Murray was there as ruler of his realm.

We asked the men where we had last stayed whether they had heard of the dead men on the road. Yes, they had heard of them, and said that it was nothing new thereabouts that men died in the woods between the vacant huts. Woodcutters were moved back and forth through the forest to look for good material, and then it was usually hunger that did away with them. "And it is Murray's rule to refuse absolutely to let any men who, ceasing work for him, to have food, and that you will find out if you stop working for him. These men worked for Murray, in whose employ you are. This is how he generally parts with the men who stop working for him: he pays them all by cheque, with no money and no food with them, nor can they buy food in his huts, so far as his territory extends through the forest. Then these men perish of hunger and cold, and no one is there to describe their distress. Revenge is shouted out into the cold night, their last on this earth."

We considered this an ugly tale and would rather have preferred not to hear any more accounts of this sort, but they added that it was thought strange that these men's

cheques were not found on them. We felt that this was more than enough, and thought that they were saying this out of spite toward the man. But, unfortunately, it turned out that a considerable part of it proved true, as will later be told.

And now this long journey was finally at an end. We had come the whole distance, in bad condition but not injured. There was a cluster of huts from a distance resembling a small hamlet: huts to sleep in and huts for cooking, horse stables and barns. It looked rather habitable there in a clearing in the forest amid tall trees with good shelter between them.

Many men were at work there, jolly and lively. We were excellently received and invited to a meal, with every sort of food of the best quality served, with all the fruit and desserts (sweet cakes) desired. The cooks wore white aprons and all were served in very clean fashion. This was such an abrupt change for us that we forgot all the past — at least for the moment.

The task on which these men were working was mainly the construction of a bridge over a marsh that seemed to be practically bottomless. Sixty-foot long trees were sunk into its depths with a pile-driver, and the bridge was built on top of this foundation. This swamp seemed to be over a mile wide, so it took much work and material.

Next morning the work with the axe began for us. The foreman went with us into the woods and asked us to cut braces 20 feet in length and at least 6 inches in diameter at their narrower end, and to pile them together with at least twenty in each pile, and to clear roads to them at the same time for the horses. We three Icelanders were together, along with one Scot, but he placed the other six some distance from us and assigned them the same task.

The wood was green tamarack solidly frozen, and that made the work more difficult. The frost was severe, and we worked rather hard to keep warm. The other six began by lighting a fire, and it seemed to us

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that they had to warm themselves rather frequently by it. In the evening the foreman came and counted the rails. We did not like the look of that, and expected that he would not think that we had done much of a day's work. But he said, "Not so bad for a beginning. You will stay on here. But those six I shall take elsewhere. They are 27 rails behind your count." But what work he assigned to them the next day we did not know. We had this job for eight days, and all went remarkably well, with no fault-finding or nasty remarks. We were highly pleased with that.

But now we became worried, for the time must come when we would be exposed for the bunglers we were in this trade. The foreman came with a double-bladed axe and told us to square enormous timbers with this tool. We had no idea how to do it, and soon it became evident that we were not the men that we had declared ourselves to be in Winnipeg. The foreman looked at us and took some papers from his pocket and asked for our names. Yes, it was all correct. These were the papers we had signed in Winnipeg.

"According to this you have been engaged as first class axemen, but I see that you know nothing of this work — in other words, you are not axemen at all!"

We could only answer this with silence and feel ashamed. He turned around and summoned a man, a gigantic fellow, and told him to square the timber. Then we saw what children we were beside this expert, who seemed to find this so easy that it was a delight to see him at work.

Then the foreman turned to us and said, "Now you have seen that you are no axemen, but you are still good workers, and I have other work for you to do, and it will not change your pay." We were quite pleased with that. He put the brothers to work on the bridge construction, but he gave me horses to pull the timber out of the

forest. "And now you will have to speak English to the horses, and look out for yourself not to be in the way of the trees that they smash when they push their way out of the forest." There were no ropes, just tongs hooked to the timbers. These were powerful creatures with human intelligence, and did instantly what they were told to do.

I had never driven such large horses and was a little afraid of them. Yet I said nothing, but thought that I would be their friend and try to understand them, for they knew the work if they were handled correctly. Such enormous exertion! They pushed through everything with those large trees behind them, and then it was safer not to be in their path.

What I found worst about this was that now I had to get up at half-past four in the morning to feed them and to walk a considerable distance in the dark to the stable. This was not without some danger. I was told to carry a gun, for the timber-wolves were in packs around there at night and walked on the roofs of the huts. Probably they were hungry and smelled food there. If something was left outside it was all torn to bits. To show how ravenous they were, I might as well relate what happened a short distance from our camp.

A certain farmer lived five miles from here, and had forty sheep in a hut. One night the wolves broke in and killed all the sheep. About the same time they attacked the postman, who drove a dog-train. All that was found was the sleigh, the dog-harness, one of the man's arms, and a few letters. But there lay ten dead wolves that the man had been able to shoot before he was overcome. It must have been a hard and terrifying battle for a man to defend himself against these large timber-wolves.

An Indian who worked with us had a trap and poison with him. He caught many, worked at it in his spare time, and profited considerably by it.

The relations between the men in the camp were good, though they were of various colors. They passed their spare time playing cards, and most Saturday evenings men played poker. Then there were the strangers there, most of them French, with large sums of money.

Our cooks were both French, and they were never missing from the card table.

We did not know where these men came from but they had probably come from some distance. One night we woke up as someone pushed the door open, and a shot went off outside the door. We put up a light and saw that this was actually the cook. He had a gun in one hand and a small canvas bag, the size of a large mitten, in the other. It contained money, probably gold, for we saw that they had much of it on the table when they were playing. They played every other Saturday in our dining hall, but we had no idea where they played the alternate day. He must have had a great deal of money and he appeared ready to defend it to the utmost. Whoever was outside shouted in a harsh voice and was answered in the same tone, but we understood nothing, for they spoke French. It was close to morning when he crept away from the door and out through the back door into the kitchen. Nothing more was heard about this. But he did not go outside after it began to grow dark in the evenings, and those poker-players did not come to the camp after that.

So the time passed and the end of March came. Now we had to talk to Murray and tell him that we would leave on the first of April for Winnipeg, for there we were hired for house-painting during the summer. He became furious and said that he did not understand how we would gain anything by ceasing to work for him. He intended to raise the wages of all who would work for him till next fall to \$85 a month, and fetching men from Winnipeg would cost him both time and money. He said that as matters stood he was far behind with the work, which was to be finished by a certain time. And the darned old fellow was moved to tears: so great was his need of us.

When he finished talking there was a long silence. We had not expected this. This was a good offer, and the pay was excellent for those times. Now we discussed this back and forth. We were bored in this place and were used to city life, not this life in a wilderness. In addition to all this we had been told that life became unbearable there in spring because of a plague of flies that devoured men alive by night and day. That, apparently, was no lie. The outcome was that all accepted the old man's offer except five: we three Icelanders, one Scot and a man from Vancouver, B.C., who had been a cook in those camps for a long time.

Now the old fellow turned to us again in a frenzy and intended to win us over. But

we stood firm by our decision and told him that he could see for himself that we could not stay with him after having been hired to work at our trade, and the time had now expired that we had signed for in Winnipeg. Then he said, "You can stay here one more month." There he showed his cunning, for if we did not leave immediately before the spring thaw the country would become totally impassable, with deep rivers and marshes. He must have thought that we had not considered this. Then he walked slowly away from us, with a dark look, and saw that he could not move us at all.

Then the great long-desired day dawned, April 1st, 1912, sunny and beautiful, almost without frost and dead calm. There was not much wrong with playing the April fool in such excellent weather with the spring ahead and everything coming to life, shedding the gloom of winter. Yes, that is how it looked then. We were all in good health and had no worries, for there was springtime growth in our souls and rejoicing over being free for a while and rid of the d--- old man.

In the morning we rose early and went to breakfast as usual, intending to pay for it if that were demanded, but that was not mentioned when we stood up from the table.

But the old man came in, rather stern-looking. He handed each of us a cheque for \$150 (a hundred and fifty dollars) to be drawn on a bank in Winnipeg. We asked him to alter one cheque and let us have five dollars (\$5) each so that we could buy a bit of food on the way. No, he said that it was none of his business how we obtained food. "Well, then you will let us have food for the trip."

"Oh, no, no more food from me, neither here nor in the other camps along the way."

Then we began to recall various things that we had been told, and to think that

there might be some truth in all the tales that we had found so unbelievable.

We gathered our belongings, which did not amount to much: one blanket and a small suitcase for each. That turned out later to be enough luggage. The cook was our acquaintance and intended to give us a bit of food to take with us as we were leaving. Probably the old man suspected that, for he watched over him till we had gone.

Now we walked quickly, for the road was in good condition. The remaining snow was so hard that footsteps left no mark on it.

We were happy, for we were going home to Winnipeg, where we had some acquaintances. It also pleased us to be finally rid of the old fellow.

"Yes," said the Scot. "I suspect that we are not rid of him, and that he will now pursue us as far as his camps extend, and that is some eighty miles."

It was about eleven o'clock and we felt hot, for the weather was good and the sunshine bright, so we took a little rest beside the road. Just then we saw a man coming behind us, driving a very lively horse. It was the old man.

As he dashed past us he said, "Well walked, boys." He had one hand on the lines but the other was hidden under a robe that he had over his knees. Of course he had a loaded revolver in case we should attack him. Yes, now we did not like the look of things. He was probably serious, and most of what we had heard about him true. We went on, somewhat concerned about our situation, and what would happen next. As we came around a little clump of trees we saw a camp, and there was the old man's sleigh by the stable wall.

The door of the camp was open and all were in there eating their noonday meal, doubtless about twenty-five men. The cook stood in the doorway and we asked him to

CHRISTMAS  
GREETINGS

*Philip M. Petursson,  
D.D.*

sell us food. He said nothing, but beckoned us to come in, which we speedily did and sat down at the table.

But now the old man was there at the centre of the table and he shouted, "Those men get no food here. Out with them!" We paid no attention to this; we were seizing on pieces of roast. There was much food on the table: meat and potatoes, bread and butter, cakes and pie. Then the old man shouted again, "Out with the men, I say!" Everyone hesitated, looking at one another. Then one of them, a big lanky fellow who sat next to the old man and was probably the creature selected as foreman, stood up and swept away our dishes. The rest did the same, so the table was empty in an instant. Gudmundur Filippusson seized a chunk of meat and stuck it under his arm. The big fellow saw that and was going to take it from him, but received such a punch that he rolled over. The rest of us seized scraps of food and thrust them into our pockets. It was good to be close to the door, for everything was breaking into a fight, and the old man was shouting from behind, "Beat them out!"

We seized our belongings and left. The others came out after us and were thinking of pursuing us, but we had guns and let the light flash on them. Then the others hesitated, but the Scot wanted to shoot at them. He was a rather hot-headed man. But we did not want to be the first to start on that game.

Now we were in such a pugnacious mood that we had no appetite left for this bit of food that we had seized. Indeed there was enough time for that, for there was a long way ahead of us.

Now we walked on and said little. But after two hours we became aware that the old man was still behind us. The Scotsman said that it would be best to attack him and tie him to a tree, then fell the tree on top of him, and seize the horse and travel on like

men. No one agreed with that plan; it would make a bad situation worse. This time he galloped past us at top speed and said nothing.

By evening we came to a camp and there was the old man's sleigh. We knocked at the door and out came a cook. We asked him whether he could sell us food. No, he said that he was not allowed to do that; the owner was there and had expressly forbidden him to sell any food. "Would we be allowed to lie indoors during the night?"

"No, that too is strictly forbidden." And then the old man shouted behind him, "It is only seventy miles to the next camp; if they have not stopped work and left, it will do you good to walk that distance."

The Scotsman said something not pretty to the old man, for they slammed the door. It meant, "Go to hell!" or "Good night," which was more fitting for the evening. Just as they were slamming the door we saw a man come out through the back door of the camp with a tray in his hand, and he

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STEPHANSSON**

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waved to us to come and handed this to us, saying, "I gathered this off the table while the old man was driving you out. It is only the scraps off the table and all that I had available. You are welcome to it." This was a man with his heart in the right place. He was moved by the old man's brutality.

This was helpful and was received with thanks. It was a kindly thought coming from a man who had no connection with us.

Now there was nothing to wait for and it was best for us to get away as soon as possible. It was practically certain that the old man would not pursue us into the dark, for night was coming on. Now we walked on, feeling this was endless, for we were dead tired and foot-sore from this long day's journey. Our only hope was to reach the hut where the old man had looked after the hay and rest there. Some time toward morning we arrived there, utterly exhausted. We tried the door. It was closed from the inside, so we thought that there must be someone in there. We were so fortunate that the old man was there. He should have left long ago, but for some reason had not been fetched. Murray probably thought that he had gone; else he would have pursued us there.

The old man was happy to see us; he said that he did not know how he would have managed there alone. All traffic had ceased, and he said that he was without food, which was bad news for us. "But you are heartily welcome to anything that you can find here," said the old man, "and the only thing that I ask of you in return is to be allowed to follow you to the next camp when you leave." That was a matter of course. Now we began to look into what provisions the old man had left, and after careful examination they turned out to be as follows: 12 pounds of flour, half a side of bacon, half a pound of tea, half a pound of lard, and two pounds of sugar.

The cook who was with us now put on a white apron, went swiftly into action and prepared a delicious meal of bannock and fried bacon. We ate it with good appetite, drank the tea with it, and considered it to be a feast fit for a lord. Then we all went to sleep and rested well.

The next day we set out with the old man with us. The first part of the day he was fairly spry, but then he began to lose strength, so we had to move along more slowly for his sake.

But the old man was so fortunate, and we too, that some man entered this road with a horse drawing a nondescript sleigh. He could take the old man and our suitcases. This was of great help, and now we thought that everything would begin to go better for us. That evening we reached a camp and were able to buy food, and there were our suitcases and everything in order. We lay on the floor in there all night. The next morning we left early, for we had a long day's journey ahead. There we were told that it was a full day's journey to a train. This was good news; everything comes to an end, however damnable it may be.

The train came twice a week, so it was not certain that it would be there, but just think, it was actually there. When we arrived it was twelve o'clock at night, so we boarded it and fell asleep on the benches. It was the surest way to avoid being left behind in the morning. We were told that it would leave at five o'clock. We saw a light in the station and thought that the agent must be there. The cook said that he thought that he knew him. He was so lucky as to find him there and be able to change a \$500 cheque. That was all the money that the agent had, so that he could not change anything for us. We thought that we could get change on the train and were not racking our brains about that. We thought that all our hardships were over,

and did not have the least inkling of the hardest battle of all being just ahead.

Now we lay down on the benches and slept soundly, contented in the hope that we had almost reached home. We no longer had to walk and work at top speed and strength, but could just sit and look at the landscape through the window. Now we slept so soundly on the train that we did not wake up until it started. We lay quietly. But a little later someone pushed us and said, "Ticket, please." We handed him our cheques, but he threw them back again. "Money, or you get off," said he. We told him the truth, that we had no money. "Then you get off the train," said he.

Gudmundur Filippsson now drew a bank deposit book from his pocket and showed it to the conductor. It showed that Gudmundur had a four hundred dollar (\$400) deposit in the Union Bank in Winnipeg, and he also had a mortgage on a lot on Portage Avenue in Winnipeg. Then he said, "Keep this and all the cheques until we reach Winnipeg." And Gudmundur's brother Filippus handed him another bank book, in case this was not sufficient. It was of no use to try any more. No, he shook his head, threw it all in Gudmundur's face and said, "Out with you!"

The train had now reached an uninhabited region and was speeding ahead. This wrangling had taken considerable time, and we had not even had a moment to look out through the window to notice that the weather had turned very bad, with a blinding snowstorm and severe frost as well. So we had no desire to go out and did

not move. Then he called the brakeman, and he came swiftly, seized two of our suitcases and threw them out. Luckily we were in the first coach, with many cars behind and the train was now barely moving, for he had signalled the engineer to slow down while we were being thrown out.

Gudmundur now leaped at the conductor and Filippus at the brakeman, but I went out to fetch the suitcases. I managed to get into the train with them a little farther back, and then walked forward to see the outcome. Now the engineer and the fireman had arrived, and the train had come to a complete stop. Gudmundur was holding the conductor by the neck with a grip from which he seemed unable to extricate himself, and with that hold he dragged the conductor back into the next car. There Gudmundur found our cook, who had been able to exchange his cheque the evening before, and had the five hundred dollars in his pocket. Now he begged him to lend us forty-five dollars until we reached Winnipeg. "Yes, with pleasure," said he, "under those circumstances." Not till he had the money in his hands did Gudmundur loosen his grip on the conductor.

Filippus and I had a hard battle with the others in the meantime. All our belongings had been tossed out and I was picking them up out of the snow and throwing them back into the train. The engineer dashed to the front of the train to set it in motion and get rid of us: but we managed to get hold of the railings by the doors. Then the brakeman came along and kicked us with all his

might, but Filippus leaped at him and threw him to the floor, and tossed in our luggage over them. Everything began to roll along. Then Gudmundur came along to find out whether all our belongings were aboard. If not they would have had to back up for them.

After this battle we were all shaking with rage from the thought of being thrown out into cruel weather, ill clad, hungry and exhausted. After a short time the conductor came, with a surly look and a red neck. "Out with the money!" he said. He received it and gave us tickets. Gudmundur thrust his clenched fist in his face and said, "Later on, when you are not wearing those buttons, we may meet again, and then this one will give you a thrashing." He left hastily and was not much around us after that.

Now this storm was past, and we could finally be ourselves and relax. We were almost certain of arriving in Winnipeg by 11 o'clock that night.

Later that day a man boarded the train. He had been cutting wood and had no money, only a cheque. He received the same treatment. But they had to stop the train, for he was a powerful man, and fought them. He gave one of them a black eye, and then we laughed. But out he had to go, the poor fellow.

Doubtless this had been their established custom, and they may have killed many men, who were simply lost.

That evening when we had reached Winnipeg and were outside the station the conductor walked past us. Not till he had come right up to us did he see who we were. Then he took to his heels, and that is the last that I have seen of that dog.

We were able to exchange our cheques and pay the man his loan. We parted from him at the C.P.R. station the following day. He was then far from sober. We gave him a bottle to take with him on the trip. He

was going west to the Pacific coast, and I know nothing more about him. The Scot who had been with us had stayed behind in St. John's: apparently he got work there. We stayed in Winnipeg as we had planned, and worked at our trade all summer. But now I am alone because the others have left. Filippus went to San Francisco, and Gudmundur returned to Iceland.

Vigdís Arnason

*Translated from the original manuscript by Sigurbjörg Stefánsdóttir.*

#### FOOTNOTES (by Dr. Leigh Syms)

1. CNR refers to the Canadian Northern Railway. The name Canadian National Railway did not come into being until about a decade later (editor).
2. This is a misidentification. It is not known whether he heard some other name incorrectly because of language problems or whether someone was playing a joke. While there were both a St. John and St. Johns on the east coast, a check of both a 1911 railroad schedule and of the post office records indicate there was never a community of that name in northwestern Ontario. We believe that this community was probably Nipigon (see map) because: a) the travel account indicates that it is about 1 1/2 days (cc. 50 miles) from Lake Nipigon and this is the only community that is so close, b) they stopped at a small community that had a very small hotel, and c) the community was "at the end line", i.e. beyond the stretch of numerous stops, a situation that would be created by the relative isolation of Nipigon (editor).
3. This day-by-day account misses one day or else the original, stated distance was exaggerated because the total distance described is 148 miles with an average of about 30 miles/day. The difference between this figure and the stated distance of 180 miles is 32 miles (Dr. Syms).

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## THE HIRED GIRL

by Stephan G. Stephansson

Translated by Paul A. Sigurdsson

"Fetch the horse, and quickly!" said I to the maid,  
"Out there in the pasture. Don't be delayed!"

Then light as a wood-deer she ran on her way.  
She tarried; I fretted about her delay,  
And counted the minutes. The thought crossed my mind,  
How weak was the law and how slothful mankind.  
I thought to chastize her for being so late,  
As testy and uppish as a fool in debate.

When finally she came with the horse down the lane,  
I hastened to meet her and grabbed at the rein.  
"I'll whip you, my girlie, and thoroughly too.  
That payment for carelessness is your due!"

She started, then murmured as quaint as can be,  
"Oh lovely new sunrise, you tarried me!"

Unthinking I faced her with scorn in my eye,  
"So what do you mean?" was my surly reply.

"Just this," she continued. "When sunshine is bright,  
So much that is precious comes into my sight.  
The dew of the morning is silvery kissed,  
And the valleys aslumber in soft blue mist,  
The peaks loom shadowy, stark and high,  
Like black-sailed ships in the morning sky,  
The treetops edge, like peaks in a row,  
And the heather's a mist where fishermen go,  
Where silken nets in the branches weave,  
And shine with a silvery make-believe.  
The school yard is teeming with child upon child,  
And swallow-birds frolicking carefree and wild.  
It's some celebration I think I should say,  
For no one is hindered from joining in play."

Just how she concluded I cannot say now,  
She brushed a stray ringlet away from her brow.  
I stood there in wonder, with melted heart  
From this morning song of her childish art.

## BÖDVAR BJARKI JAKOBSON: A TRIBUTE

by Lilja Martin



*Dr. Bödvar Bjarki Jakobson*

His parents, Bödvar and Gudlaug Jakobson, were pioneers who farmed and made their home in the New Iceland community of Geysir where Bjarki, two sisters Ingibjörg and Thorey and one brother Helgi, grew up as a traditional family unit in an atmosphere of Icelandic culture: prose, poetry, drama and music. His father was a poet and among his best friends were many of the renowned Icelandic authors in the district.

In this new world, the pioneers were allowed to preserve and nurture their Icelandic culture, while also adjusting to a new set of rules, learning a new language and adopting and supporting a new system of education.

Bjarki belonged to this bicultural community, sang in Icelandic choirs, recited Icelandic poetry and learned to play the violin. At the same time, he attended the local schools and participated in all school activities. Being a good scholar, he grad-

uated from high school with high honours. He remained on the farm, working for his father, for an additional five years. Influenced by this rich, complex environment, Bjarki developed a deep and permanent appreciation of his background: his rich ethnic culture, his identity, the land of his origin and the land of his birth, Canada. He absorbed the best of two cultures, allowing each to complement the other, truly an Icelandic Canadian.

Bjarki had, for a long time, harboured a dream of higher education, being interested in a career in aeronautical engineering. The time was right and the future then seemingly an open road. But fate intervened when polio threatened his very life and paralyzed his right leg. Void of bitterness and self-pity, he accepted his sudden disability as a challenge. He had the positive attitude, the faith and the determination that he needed to avert a handicap and restore his ability to walk by persevering through months of painful therapy treatments.

His case was unusual and as doctors, interns and medical students pondered unanswered questions he listened and learned. As a result of this contact and experience, he became intensely interested in the science and practice of medicine and entered the medical science class at the University of Manitoba. He received his M.D. degree in 1954. He became a fine physician and surgeon, greatly appreciated by patients and doctors alike. He had a keen perceptive ability to diagnose and assess a patient's condition, special talents and skills in operating techniques and a cautious approach to every case he encountered.

He was also a humanitarian, caring with compassion for all his patients. His medical practice was, above all, a calling to serve



the sick with the help of God, and he often served beyond the call of duty.

He practiced as physician and surgeon for two years in Moosomin, Saskatchewan, seven years in Whitewood, Saskatchewan and eighteen years in Neepawa, Manitoba.

He was Neepawa District Medical Examiner and Chief of Staff of the Neepawa District Memorial Hospital. He worked on the Planning Committee for the renovations of the Neepawa Hospital. With co-founders, Dr. T. B. Dobson and Dr. D. G. Dawson, dentist, he developed the concept of the Neepawa Medical Clinic and arranged for construction of the Neepawa Medical Dental Clinic Building.

He was the immediate Past President of the Neepawa Rotary Club.

He served as president of the Neepawa chapter of the SPEBSQSA (Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America).

His highest priority in life was his home, where Bjarki and his beloved wife, Borga, instilled in their family a spirit of love and unity. Mirrored in their children's personalities and characters are the sterling qualities of both their parents, who generated an atmosphere of warm welcome and hospitality to all.

He loved music in any form — solo, chorus or symphony. No celebration was complete without a sing-song. His music appreciation no doubt reached its pinnacle when he led his family — his eight talented young children — in a chorus of beautiful harmony (a vision to behold and a delight and a thrill to listen to). His children are Kristine (Mrs. J. W. Perlmutter), Gestur, Thora (Mrs. Pascal Delaquis), Irene (Mrs. James Marks), Karl, Glen, Alma (Mrs. Mark McCaffrey) and Lorna.

He joined choirs wherever and whenever he could. His talent and enthusiasm were an inspiration to all his fellow members. Particularly aware of this were the Neepawa Barbershoppers and the small

Icelandic Canadian Choir group in Brandon.

He was an active member of the Icelandic Canadian Club Falkinn in Brandon. At their 1980 Annual Sumardagin Fyrsta celebration, with his violin tucked under his chin, Bjarki shared very special mixed emotions as he bowed out some of his favorite Icelandic music. Again, in 1981, at a meeting of the club Falkinn, he demonstrated his nostalgic appreciation of his background in a presentation of poetry of Icelandic poets from the Interlake.

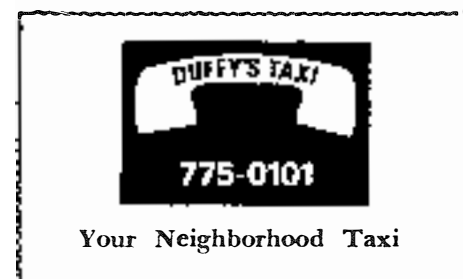
Bjarki was very fond of children, and his only grandson, David Perlmutter, was a special joy and delight to him.

He was an outdoor man who enjoyed fishing, hunting and sight-seeing, as he appreciated nature's wonders. He liked to travel and one of the highlights in his life was a trip to Iceland with Borga and some of his children.

His personality radiated a glow of friendship. He rejoiced with the rejoicing and successful and showed compassion for those less fortunate. He never displayed superiority to anyone but rather realized with interest qualities and talents in all people. He was unassuming, loving, caring and understanding — a true friend to all whose lives he touched.

Heart failure took away his last breath. He loved life, having allowed no one concern for his serious heart condition.

*The passing years have been kind friends to you.*



## THE "SAPPHIRE KING" OF LUNDAR, MANITOBA

by Linda Collette



*Joe Sigurdson*

Johann (Joe) Straumfjord Sigurdson was born at Otto, Manitoba May 22, 1912, son of Ingimundur and Asta Sigurdson. Ingimundur's parents were Sigurdur Sigurdson from Midhusum in Akranes and Bergthora Kristin Bergthorsdottir. Johann was named for his maternal grandfather, Johann Straumfjord, from Amyrum under Bjarnarhafnarfjalli. His grandmother was Kristbjorg Jonsdottir from Hlid in Hnappadal. Johann Straumfjord emigrated from Iceland in 1874 to Kinmount, Ontario; in 1876, he settled first on Hecla Island and later on "Engey" (Meadow Land - Goose Island).

Ingimundur and Asta farmed at "Brekka," six miles east of Lundar, and Johann attended "Nordur Stjarna" (North Star) and later Lundar School. In his teens he became interested in the mink that Leo Hordal, his neighbour, was raising and bought three

dark mink in 1930. This was the depression era and the financial returns were greater from mink than from cattle. By 1936, the mink numbered 150, but disaster struck, and one morning he arrived to find only a single surviving mink. Despite this setback, Johann, in true Viking spirit, started again, raising mink and farming.

In 1945, he established his mink ranch at Lundar, increasing the number and mutations, always striving to improve the quality and colour of the mink. His efforts resulted in the development of several of his own phases including silver-blue and a new sapphire mutation which was recognized from coast to coast in Canada, earning him the title "Sapphire King". The Lundar ranch operated under the name Silver Flash Fur Farm until Joe acquired a second ranch at Stonewall to become Sigurdson Fur Farm Ltd. With the mink numbering in the thousands, he employed several men on the ranches. As well he designed and improved tools, mink pens and sheds, and at pelting time, in assembly line fashion, cleaned and stretched pelts for marketing in Montreal and New York.

Success at the mink shows and in the fur markets led to leadership in various mink organizations. Joe had previously served as President of the Manitoba Fur Breeders Association and has recently been re-elected for another term in office. He was President of the national organization, Canada Mink Breeders Association, in 1967 and 1968, and representative at the International Mink Association conference for two years. In 1967 and 1968 he attended the World Fur Fair in Frankfurt, Germany. In all, he has been ranching mink for over fifty years.

After moving to Lundar, he took an active interest in community affairs serving as a school trustee, a member of the Grettir Athletic Association, and the Agricultural Society. He served as Reeve of the Municipality of Coldwell from 1966 to 1980. Joe worked diligently for improvements in the village and rural areas. He was consecutively a director of the Interlake Judicial District and a Vice-President of the Union of Manitoba Municipalities who presented him with an honorary life membership; executive member and Vice-President of the Interlake Development Corporation for several years; Chairman of the Task Force on sewer and water for I.D.C., submitting briefs to the government resulting in a provincial sewer and water program for towns and farms. He was executive member and Past President of the Manitoba Good Roads Association; member of the Interlake Tourist Association; President of the Icelandic National League of North America for the past three years, as well as President of the Lundar Chapter. Joe was Chairman of the Board of Reference for the Manitoba Department of Education and continues to serve as a member of the board.

In the Lundar community, he serves as Chairman of the Lundar Development Corporation, member of the Health Services Board, member of the Lundar Community Club, Vice-President of the Lundar Senior Citizens' Home, Chairman of the Western Interlake Planning Board, member of the Veterinary Clinic Board, and Vice-President of the Lundar Historical Society. His efforts were instrumental in achieving a golf course, airport, museum, and the Greater Canada Goose statue, symbol of the Lundar community.

On a visit to Iceland in 1974, he became interested in the nearly extinct Iceland dog and raises several on the ranch. He was honoured by a comment from Sigridur

Petursdottir that he has many colours not available in her country.

He married Helga, daughter of Sigurdur and Sigridur Holm of Lundar in 1942. They have two daughters: Linda Fay married Sergeant Neil F. Collette, in Winnipeg; Sandra Julia married Dr. Theodore R. Heidrick, in Edmonton: two sons, Johann Straumfjord and his wife, Joanne, in Winnipeg, and Lorenz Willard and his wife, Katherine, in Pasadena, U.S.A. There are five grandchildren.

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## TOAST TO ICELAND

At the Icelandic Festival (Islendingadagurinn), Gimli, Manitoba, August 2, 1981

by Paul A. Sigurdson

*Mr. Chairman, honored guests, fjallkonan frida, ladies and gentlemen:*

When I was growing up in the wild hill country known as 1-6, or Brown, I was frequently given the impression that Icelanders were the best people, that Icelandic was the best language and that — you've guessed it — Iceland was the best country in the world. No doubt some of you are smirking now. You find the statement absurd, or foolish and narrow-minded. Perhaps it is, but let me hasten to add, it is also very human.

I was born into a community of first generation Icelanders many of whom had been born in Iceland and all of whom, although quite articulate in English, spoke Icelandic as their first tongue. Naturally they were more Icelandic than Canadian; their early impressionable years had been spent in the midst of a pretty close-knit Icelandic culture. They had consequently acquired a strong and underlying love for what was their own. Is it then so absurd, so foolish and so narrow-minded to hold an undying affection for all those experiences which moulded your mind and your heart and soul? The very essence of your character? Look for a moment into your own hearts. I would not be surprised if each of you found you have a little secret corner there that tells you how pleased you are to be what you are. This I suppose is an old tribal instinct, to be proud and comfortable with what is one's own. The fact is, we like best, and trust most, that which we can intimately identify with. If we grow up with perogies, we learn to love perogies; if we grow up with haggis (Lord help us) we learn to love it, and if we grow up with "vinarterta" we learn to love it as well.

All of us are subject to prejudices. To

cling to what is our own, and to cherish those influences which have formed our characters is very human, indeed. It is very human and it is also very good. It only becomes a liability and a fault when we become arrogant about it, and when we try to impose our ways and values on others. That, ladies and gentlemen, is not the purpose of this speech. We are here to celebrate our heritage, to share it with you, and hold it up for modest display.

I would like now to say something about the soul and the psyche of the Icelandic people to try to help you understand why they are different, and yet the same as all peoples . . .

I know it is always risky to categorize a people. It is too simplistic a way to deal with the godly complexity of the human heart. But it does seem that, when we do study different cultures, salient features do emerge. We regard the British as reserved and indomitable; we say the Italians are flamboyant and passionate; we view the French as convivial and artistic; the Germans as industrious and frugal. There is a joke which the Norwegians like to tell which goes as follows:

The Norsky says, "Do you know what is wrong with the Swedes?"

You answer "no" and he says, "They are perfect!"

Well, that is carrying generalization a bit too far, isn't it. But I will go on record to say — of course somewhat grudgingly — that Icelanders are not perfect; we still have regrettably, a bit left of that original sin. We are the same as all people, black, red, yellow, brown or white; but we are also different. And isn't it just that paradox which makes the human family so in-

triguing? We are all different — and yet we are all the same.

If there is one factor which gives a people unique characteristics it could be the factor of isolation. The more isolated a people, the more likely they will develop in their own unique way. If we regard the British as insular, could it not be that it is partly because they lived on an island, an island frequently threatened by external forces? The Newfies are also islanders. They too are fiercely independent, insular and stamped with colorful individuality. Iceland is also an island, a remote island; and in its thousand years its people have developed with very little influence from abroad.

Now let us look at some of those critical influences which helped mould the Icelandic soul. First their early ancestors were freedom-loving viking chieftains who refused to knuckle under a tyrannical king, and who chose to leave their homeland to remain free. They lived a thousand years in near isolation on a small and often inhospitable island. They have experienced a thousand years of the Christian faith; they have endured two centuries of Danish exploitation. They have had for their cultural bread, 800 years of reading some of the finest literature penned by man. They have suffered and often starved enduring a climate more capricious than a flirt, and often more cruel and fierce than a wild beast. Add to this the fact that they have lived on the doorsteps of dozens of massive and destructive volcanic eruptions and in a land one-seventeenth of which is covered with glacial ice; you get an idea of some of the blows on the anvil of fate which shaped their lives.

Was it the dramatic contrasts of ice and fire, of midnight sun and dark winter days, of beauty blended with harshness, of the sea's life and sailor's death, or of Christ contrasted with the pagan, which made Icelanders a poetic people? Or was it the old

tongue, so rich in metaphor, so rich in poetic tradition, so hard and clean and yet so flexible, so sonorous and strong, that it can sound like a rolling of the sea? Did that make them a poetic people? At any rate, if the Icelander is anything, he is first and foremost a poet.

It is safe to say that there are more poets and more poetry books published in Iceland than you would believe. For decades a poetic game called "Bottoming" was played in Iceland. It is now dying under the encroachment of so-called civilization but is still part of the culture. In Icelandic the game is called "ad botna".

It was common throughout the island and widely practised. The idea was to throw out a spontaneous line of verse as a challenge. The second man was to pick up the challenge and finish the thought, or the idea, by "bottoming" or completing the idea or twisting it to his own advantage. This is rarely found in English, but I can give you one example — probably spurious — which comes to mind. It is supposed to be an exchange between the poets Thomas Moore and Bobby Burns. And the story goes thus:

Thomas Moore, dressed as a fine gentleman, walks into a stable where Bobby Burns happens to be drudging as a stablehand. Abruptly Moore thows out this challenge:

"Life up your broom, you Scottish groom, and let Tom Moore pass by . . ."

And Burns, in a wink, gives this rejoinder:

"There's room to pass, you Irish ass, betwixt the wall and I."

That is how it is done. Now it is remarkable that such an intellectual game should develop in Iceland and become a popular exercise, not just for noted poets but for the common folks as well. Among the farmers it was especially popular. Even in America the art was practised by the early settlers. An old beloved uncle of mine told me a

true anecdote of a well-known example of "bottoming". It has stuck with me all these years, and if you'll bear with me I'll share it with you.

Here is the story:

Two North Dakota Icelanders liked to rival one another at the game of "bottoming" one quite brilliant, the other less bright. The lesser one, having been beaten time and time again in this battle of wits, was itching to get the better of his antagonist. One night he saw his chance. He was riding home on a country road when he suddenly spied his nemesis in the distance riding towards him, obviously drunk, weaving in the saddle. This was his moment! He would throw out his challenge and flatten him good! Feverishly he worked out his line, rehearsed it and polished it off. When they passed he threw it out. He didn't care if it was mostly nonsense. It had a good lilt to it, and it was the best he could do. And this was it:

"Thu ert skaftur, tryggdum taftur, torgulundur . . . and the besotted man shot back:

"Haltu kjaftinn a thjer aftur eins og hundur."

The translation? Well, nothing very profound. The challenge was, as I mentioned earlier, mostly nonsense, a very rough translation might be, "you are a meat-head," but the fellow who put the "bottom" on it definitely won the exchange. In short he told him to shut his trap like a hound.

Now you will argue, and argue with justification, that it is no great intellectual accomplishment to tell a man to shut his mouth like a dog. But when it is done spontaneously, and in a fairly involved poetic structure, paralleling the structure of the challenging line, you have to admit that it must take a pretty keen and lively intellect, and a consummate mastery of words and rhymes to pull it off.

I will be the first to admit this is not great

poetry. But what it does demonstrate clearly is how this art shows the appreciation and understanding of the poetic process at the grass-roots level. It is poles apart from the games we play in America; and may I go as far as to say that perhaps "bottoming" requires a bit, just a wee bit more flexing of the brain than Intellivision and Atari?

There was another characteristic I found in the people I grew up with in that community and that was a great respect for the individual regardless of his status or his shortcomings. There was a warmth which pervaded the whole community. It resembled the warmth of a large loving family. There were of course isolated cases of ill-feeling but there was a general wholesome spirit of friendliness and goodwill. There seemed to be an awareness of the preciousness of the individual, and an acceptance of him for what he was. Whether he had a problem with drink, whether he was a slacker, whether he was a pompous ass, or a chronic complainer, a fool or a deviant, each was accepted, warts and all. But his faults were not blindly overlooked. Indeed he might be joked about in an honest, but not malicious way. I don't remember any member of the community ever being ostracized, but I do remember the odd die-hard ostracizing himself because of his unyielding stand on some controversial local issue.

My own father demonstrated this warmth in a clear way. He was a contractor, and a man who had done all kinds of hard labour in his day, yet he could be gentle as a child. A short anecdote will tell you a bit about his humanness. The local store was only half a mile from our home, and yet whenever he set out to fetch something there he never failed to take his two small children in his arms one by one, and his wife, to speak words of endearment as if he were seeing them for the last time.

Some of you may find this old-fashioned, quaint or even overly sentimental, but let me remind you that if there were more fathers with this kind of sensitivity there would be fewer children alienated from their homes walking the paths of disillusionment and cynicism. We all know it is good to be loved, and it warms the heart, and soothes the soul, when we get demonstrations of love. My father's is not an isolated case, it fits the pattern of the community I knew. There was a lot of love, a lot of coffee and a lot of fellowship and song.

Another characteristic I have found in the Icelandic people is their appreciation for that which is intellectual. They like to flex their minds as my previous "bottoming" story shows. They read prodigiously. Per capita the number of books published in Iceland leaves every other nation miles behind. Do you doubt it? Check the statistics. When I lived in Iceland I can recall at least five daily papers. Five daily newspapers! And the total population of the island is less than half of Winnipeg.

Let me recall another incident which happened to me in Reykjavik. We were walking down Laugavegur one day trying to locate an art exhibit — not an uncommon occurrence in Reykjavik by the way. If I recall correctly the name of the place was Unahus. I spied an old codger working with a shovel with a street gang and I asked him to direct me to Unahus. With that he put aside his shovel, led us to Unahus, entered with us, and then spent ten or fifteen minutes commenting, in a knowledgeable way, on the works of art! You might say that this was a fluke, a thousand to one shot, but I saw many similar examples of general intellectual awareness on my travels through the land. One old farmer in Skagafirdi had only just met me when he launched into a profound philosophical thesis on Gunnar; Gunnar is one of the saga's heroes who has a battle with his conscience when his humanness conflicts with

his need to kill to honour the code of revenge.

Also, Icelanders love the games of bridge and chess. In the early days of Winnipeg there was a joke going around that the best players were the "chosen" and the "frozen". And what other nation of 250,000 people can host an international chess championship and make it as popular at Wimbledon or the World Series?

I would like to conclude with some comments about the third characteristic which I believe is the most pervasive, and it is probably the one which provides the climate for all the others. Iceland is a peace-loving nation, and the Icelandic people abhor violence. One of the frequent admonishments I got from my parents when I was a child was "cherish the peace." It is a strange paradox that this characteristic has developed when we look at the violence of the viking history. Let me tell you you don't read many pages in the sagas before you encounter blood and gore. And as the story moves on, heads are axed off and limbs are hacked off every few pages. If I remember correctly it was that old popular hero Egill Skallagrimsson who, on taking offence at his host's behaviour, showed his displeasure in a very convincing way: he simply vomited a lot of beer over his head. I suspect most of you will agree that that is not really a very graceful act, and not one that would encourage peaceful relations.

Yet it is a fact that violence and crime up until the end of the second world war was indeed rare. I don't think there was even a police force. Minor offences were handled locally. Iceland has never had an army. When the King of Denmark claimed the island in the 18th century he forbade the natives to bear arms. The great poet Stephan G. Stephansson writes that that decree was a blessing to the people. No doubt the geography has also helped in this peaceful development. The people were

isolated, climate was severe. It was a struggle just to remain alive. They had no rich neighbor to envy, nor to plunder. They had to look inward and rely on themselves. It has helped develop a resourceful and independent people and a gentle people. I hope those characteristics endure.

So we pause today with our heads held high because, as Ulysses said to his loyal comrades "we are what we are". And we take time today to remember that far off misty island, that island of ice and fire, of endless June days and long winter nights. We think now of the sea which cradles it and which has claimed so many of its fair young men, through the centuries, and we remember its unpolluted sky which has touched the souls of all its poets and inspired them; and we remember the swift glacial rivers which twist and crash through canyons of basalt; and the clear streams which weave in infinite somnolescence

through the grassy plains bearing on their streams the promise of lasting peace. We think all these things because they are a part of the marrow in our bones. And all of us can share a similar thought in our own way, no matter what our nationality, because we are all sprung new and unique from the soil and roots of our heritage, whatever it may be.

In conclusion I want to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity and privilege to speak to you on this 93rd Islendingadagur. I hold up for you now the golden beaker containing the nectar of the gods, to toast that much blessed little isle with the words of one of her best loved poets, Jonas Hallgrimsson. His words challenge his people to take heart in difficult times, and to rise to greatness, prophesying that the land will grow more beautiful and the people will ever remain free.

## TO ALL ICELANDIC ORGANIZATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

The **Icelandic-Canadian** would like to publish a list of the names and addresses of **all** Icelandic organizations and publications in North America, including:

- Icelandic-Canadian Clubs
- Icelandic-American Clubs
- Icelandic-oriented publications
- Icelandic-oriented organizations

If you are an officer or a member of any Icelandic-oriented association, or if you know of one, we would be very grateful if you could forward its name and current address to: Eric Jonasson, Icelandic-Canadian, Box 205, St. James P.O. Winnipeg, Manitoba R3J 3R4

names and addresses received will be published in a forthcoming issue of the **Icelandic-Canadian** for the benefit of all subscribers, and we shall endeavour to include lists of this nature in at least one issue of the magazine each year.

## THE SON OF THE EARTH FALLS BENT, AND IT IS SILENT ALL AROUND

by  
LaDonna Backmeyer

### Foreword

The following poem is about a good man, Black Elk, who wanted to do nothing more than to "love and serve his fellow men." It is a poem about the conflict within the heart of collective man, and about the choice that man is forced to face, or so I believe. I guess one would have to say that it is my poem, but that it could not have been written had Black Elk not narrated his story and told of his vision of the two paths.

I've used an Anglo-Saxon fertility chant to head the poem because I wanted the form of the poem to make one complete circle, and because, to me, this chant falls somewhere between the beliefs of the various Indian cultures and the way of life my own people led. My people did not call the earth their mother, but they did respect and love the land they walked upon.

In the first stanza of the poem I've attempted to portray, largely in symbols, the life that Black Elk was born into. He was born into a world that was already at war, one in which both cultures, the red and the white, looked upon one another as the "other," a being to be feared. But Black Elk was wrapped in an ancient cloak, the old way of life, and he probably was not aware of the fear until his father came home from the Battle of the Hundred Slain. It was then that the soft-curved moon, the womb of the old way, was broken. Ragnarok, the twilight of the Gods, was a nightmare that he would have to deal with throughout his life. But, oh, it was beautiful all around, and at nine years old Black Elk had the vision that was to bring him to knowledge many years later.

The second stanza, too, contains many symbols, but all the symbols can be contained within one symbol, the mandala, the circle with four quarters. The four ways that man can see are love, introspection, knowledge and illumination, and the four colors within the nation's hoop represent the four colors within collective man. The sacred tree is the center of love and understanding, and that *is* beautiful.

Going on to the fourth stanza, there is a cross within the mandala, the cross that creates the four quarters, and that is the cross that creates the two paths that man can walk. Man must suffer at the center of each path, but it is better to suffer the path from love to knowledge than from death to birth. Black Elk suffered the black path, the path of war and trouble, not for himself but for his people. This is the tragic path, and it leads to a greater chaos. But Black Elk does not want chaos; he wants unity. So he weaves a book from the chaos of man and attempts to mend and braid the hoop of the world. However, there is darkness all around and in his suffering he cannot close the circle. In the first chapter he has said: "Great Spirit, my grandfather, all over the earth the faces of living things are all alike:" but he reveals the division within his soul in the last chapter when he cries to the Six Powers: "O make *my* people live!" He claims that the center is no longer and the sacred tree is dead. But is it? Black Elk has saved the good of his vision and the knowledge of the evil that destroyed his world. Someday we will see the morning of a new world, a new religion braided from the golden chessmen, the truths, of all religions. Or perhaps we shall see the end.

"We see into a mirror dimly, then face to face" can be found in I Corinthians: 13,12, though not in those exact words, and to me this means that first we see the division within the world, then we come face to face with the division within our own souls. When that happens, the self-confrontation, there is sorrow all around, but there is also a great and good knowledge.

I have followed the self-confrontation with a prayer for unity and with the fact that we are then doomed to choose. Even if we do not make a choice we have chosen, for in that case we have chosen not to choose, i.e., we have chosen to ignore the responsibility that knowledge has given us.

Going on to complete the circle, I have ended the poem with an optimistic view of the future. The beginning of the poem represents, hopefully, the beginning of a new religion, and the end of the poem represents the beginning of the new cycle completed. Part of the stanza that begins: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," is my own, and part of it has been reworded from I Corinthians: 13 and Revelation: 22,12. A new day has dawned and man is walking

the good red path. The universe is filled with love and understanding.

You might be wondering why I chose to ignore the Ghost Dance. I didn't mention the dance because I see that as a part of the chaos that occurs at the center of either path. When one can not bear the suffering that leads to knowledge and responsibility, one attempts to grasp for a vision of a peace and unity with no division. However, that is not possible in the world we have created. We can not go back to the past. We can only look to the past and learn from the wrongs we have committed; and after we have finished with our meditation, we can go on to the future. I guess I will have to say that I don't see the ghost dance as a significant part of Black Elk's vision, and it is Black Elk's vision that I attempt to complete in my poem. I want the vision of his circle to be unbroken, so I will continue to work on the shape and the content of this first draft. Then, after the circle has been mended, I will probably go on to create another poem, this one centered upon the ghost dance and the tragedy of a people.

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### THE SON OF THE EARTH FALLS BENT, AND IT IS SILENT ALL AROUND

Erce, Erce, Erce, Earth Mother,  
 may the almighty eternal Lord  
 grant you fields to increase and flourish,  
 fields fruitful and healthy,  
 shining harvest of shafts of millet,  
 broad harvest of barley . . .  
 Hail to thee, Earth, Mother of Men!  
 Bring forth now in God's embrace,  
 filled with good for the use of men.

—an Anglo-Saxon fertility chant —

Born to a world made wretched with wounds,  
 and wrapped in an ancient cloak,  
 in a sheltering tepee formed from cloud  
 at the center of Ragnarok,  
 a child emerged from the womb of the world  
 (where hunger was unknown),  
 then wasichus with guns crept forth  
 and broke the soft-curved moon.

It was beautiful all around.

Nine summers passed since first he braved  
 the greening Mother Earth;  
 then sacred voices called to him:  
 "Behold. The nation's curse."  
 There are four quarters to the world  
 four ways that man can see  
 four colors for the nation's hoop,  
 at its center, a sacred tree.

It is beautiful all around.

There are two paths that man can walk  
 to find the middle earth,  
 the red from love to knowledge  
 or black from death to birth.  
 From the west the winds of the wounding war,  
 thunder and beings of might,  
 to the eastern way of the daybreak star,  
 wisdom and morning light.  
 The black path is littered with sorrow and strife,  
 the nation's blood reddens the clay,  
 and the dead croon a song to those lives yet unborn;  
 the hoop of the world he must braid.

But there is darkness all around.

And a sibyl speaks from ages past:

A new nation will rise from the ruins,  
 and an eagle will soar over rushing waterfalls  
 seeking fish from the craggy heights.  
 Corn will grow where none has been sown,  
 and people will gather  
 to talk wisely of the evil from the past.  
 they will find the golden chessmen deserted by the Gods,  
 lost, but lying there upon the grass,  
 and the merciful Son of the Gods will return  
 walking the good red path.

It is morning all around.

"Great Spirit, my grandfather, all over the earth  
 the faces of living things are all alike . . .  
 O make my people live!"

We see into a mirror dimly,  
 then face to face

and there is sorrow all around.

O Great Spirits of the four quarters  
 let the unit that exists within the universe  
 be known unto the people of this world  
 from play to love and introspection;  
 through introspection to knowledge and illumination.  
 Let us walk the good red road  
 and braid the nation's hoop  
 beneath the sheltering tree of understanding.

We die in unity or in chaos;  
 it is time to choose the path.

It is beautiful before me:  
 it is beautiful behind.  
 It is beautiful below me:  
 it is beautiful above.  
 It is beautiful all around me.  
 In beauty it is finished.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega;  
 I am the root and the daybreak star.  
 Prophecies will pass away  
 and tongues will cease to be.  
 But when the perfect comes  
 that will never end  
 for I am perfect;  
 I am love.  
 Enter the cleansing rainbow to life."

And creatures wake to see the light  
for it is day.  
The earth is embraced by the heavens.

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## THE CANADIAN IN ME

by Gus Sigurdson

Said the man from Manitoba:  
I was born between the lakes  
In a lovely bushland country  
Yet my heart it often aches  
For the wide and open prairies,  
Stretching out towards the west,  
Where the grainfarms and the dairies  
Have survived and won the test.

Said the man from Manitoba:  
I have travelled near and far  
East and west across the world  
But no matter where you are,  
There is nothing more appealing  
Than horizons on our plains,  
With that Manitoba feeling  
Deep imbedded in our veins.

Said the man from Manitoba:  
When the eyes are free to scan  
All the wide and open spaces  
Made fair by God and man:  
There is nothing more enchanting,  
There is nothing more sublime,  
And no better seed for planting  
Into true poetic rhyme.

Said the man from Manitoba:  
I have lived upon the coast,  
I have drunk eternal beauty,  
But the taste I long for most  
Is the touch of prairie breezes  
On the trail from Calgary  
To Winnipeg — It pleases  
The Canadian . . . in me.

From Mr. Sigurdson's book  
"The Canadian In Me"

## BOOK REVIEW

by G. Kristjanson

**HELGI EINARSSON, A Manitoba Fisherman** (translated from the Icelandic by Dr. George Houser) published 1982 by Queenston House, Winnipeg, Manitoba. 147 pp. Cloth \$15.95. Paper \$8.95.

\* \* \*

This most interesting autobiographical account of the life and experiences of a colourful pioneer of Manitoba's fishing industry is a somewhat edited translation by George Houser of Helgi Einarsson's memoirs as set down from time to time during the period from 1920 to 1952 and published in Reykjavik in the original Icelandic in 1954. (The Centennial Issue of *The Icelandic Canadian* (1967) carried an article on Mr. Einarsson's achievements. His death occurred in 1961.)

Helgi Einarsson's childhood and early life are summarized in the first few pages of this book, then the account uses Helgi's own words (as translated). His family (including his father, mother, and a brother) emigrated from Iceland to Canada in 1887. Helgi was seventeen years of age at the time. He gives his impressions of the trip across the ocean, disembarking in Quebec, the long trip across northern Ontario and the arrival in Winnipeg. After a brief sojourn in that city, the family settled in the Interlake district east of Lake Manitoba. While Helgi worked at many jobs during his career, his principal activities centred on fishing and trading in fish. This automatically meant he had to acquire skill as a sailor. The skill which he acquired as a boat captain (both on sailing boats and on mechanically driven craft) served him in good stead, not only for transporting loads of fish, but also in piloting the government boat used by the Indian Agent to make his rounds of the Indian reserves around Lake

Manitoba, Lake Winnipegosis, and Lake Winnipeg. In fact, some of the most exciting incidents in the autobiography deal with the disasters and near disasters that overtook them as they voyaged on the lakes.

The figure that emerges as we read these pages is somewhat akin to that of a saga hero. This may not be surprising, since Helgi may well have seen himself in that light. As a boy in Iceland, he had steeped himself in the literature of the old Icelandic sagas. And, when one considers the independent spirit, initiative, and resourcefulness which he displayed when coping with storms and other challenges, this view may not be altogether inappropriate. There is something of a latter day Viking about him.

As well as describing his triumphs and troubles as a fish dealer and entrepreneur, he deals — albeit rather briefly — with some of the hopes and disappointments of his own personal life, including an unsuccessful love affair and — much later in life — his eventual union with a native woman who bore four sons by him.

In the Preface to the book it is conceded that "Helgi had little feeling for formal structure. He makes frequent digressions and his diction is that of a well spoken fisherman . . ." This is one of the few weaknesses of the narrative. It rambles a bit. It does tend to make digressions and might have been better organized. At the same time one must remember that Helgi probably wrote his thoughts down more or less as they occurred to him and did not pretend to be a man of letters.

Generally speaking, while the portrait it provides of a man of pride and resourcefulness is in itself reward enough for read-

ing the book, its principal value lies in the picture it brings to us of what life was like in those days — when Manitoba was a pioneer province and the fishing industry was in its infancy, when men had to endure very considerable hardships and dangers, when transportation, mail service, and many of the amenities of life as we know

them were uncertain or nonexistent. Often-times a personal account will give us much more of the real flavour of a society than a well researched historical account, and Helgi Einarsson's memoirs bear this out. If you wish to get the flavour of the northern Interlake settlements at the turn of the century, you will want to read this book.

## BOOK REVIEW

by Dr. John S. Matthiasson

**MARTHA BROOKS, A Hill for Looking.** Queenston House, 195 pp., Cloth — \$14.95, Paper — \$7.95.

\* \* \*

In some respects it may not be appropriate for this writer to review this particular book, for it is far too personal to me. It is a volume about a year in the second half of this century in which the author and I were locked into two separate parts of a shared social environment: the world of Ninette Sanitorium, a hospital in western Manitoba for tubercular patients. In 1955, she was the young daughter of the medical superintendent of the sanitorium, and I was a patient in it. It was a year in my own life which I have often wished to erase from memory, and yet, for some deep-seated psychological reasons which I have never fully understood, have held on to tenaciously as a set of memories of an experience which has inevitably influenced my life since.

Patients at Ninette knew there was an existential world inhabited by the staff and members of their families, but we were not, for obvious reasons, privy to it. We knew that a large house stood at the top of the hill above and beyond our buildings, but we were not permitted to walk up the hill. The sanitorium was placed in a setting of considerable natural beauty, with Pelican Lake on one side and heavily treed hills on the other. Patients often appreciated the

vistas seen from rooms in which they were kept for months or years, or on circumscribed walks they might be allowed, but it was an appreciation tinged with irritation and frustration. Most of us had lives beyond which we were being deprived of because of constraints imposed by our illness, and the luxurious setting of our temporary existence gave little solace.

The world inhabited by Martha Paine in 1955 was a part of the sanitorium world, but one seen from a different view. She lived in the house at the top of the hill as a young girl experiencing the excitements and pains of growing up. I recall patients watching her with curiosity as she moved easily on her bicycle about the complex arrangement of buildings. For good reason she was not supposed to mingle with patients, yet she did, and in doing so met some fascinating individuals such as the aged black man who assisted her when she fell off her bike one day. Martha met the patients, and in her encounters touched a resource of human experiences which the doctors who treated them seemed to keep distant from.

Martha's position was an anomaly in the context in which she found herself. It was an adult world to a large extent, and she had to make do with that. On the other hand, there were other social groupings, such as that of the children of the nearby town of Ninette, with whom she attended school, and who resented her position as

the daughter of the medical superintendent of the institution which employed most of their parents.

Martha, then, lived her pre-pubescent years in a social milieu composed of varied components, goals and expectations. As an attractive youth running between them, and yet interacting with all, she pulled them together in a composite of her own. She has taken the disparate experiences of those years and, in this charming book, encapsulated them in her description of one of them, 1955. It was an exciting year for her, and yet, from her description, also frightening in many respects.

What she has given us in her book, which was written for a teenage audience, is at the same time a documentary of life in an institution, viewed from the perspective of a member of the family of caretakers. It is a joyful testimony to a young girl's time of coming to know and understand people, pain, inspiration and life in general, and beginning to put it all together. Young readers will enjoy reading it because they will identify with much of it, for her fears of peer rejection, of the mysterious behaviour of boys testing their masculinity by fighting with girls, and other shared concerns, will touch them where they live at present. But, her world in 1955 was an unusual one.

I sat down one Saturday afternoon to read this book, and found that evening had overtaken me before I could close it. As I

warned the reader, I have a personal interest in the time and space Martha has described. I recall children who were patients looking out of their windows watching Martha on her bicycle, for children can succumb to tuberculosis as well as adults. In another setting she and they might have become playmates.

**A Hill for Looking** would make an ideal Christmas gift. The book itself is a beautiful production, with lino-cut colour prints done by Martha's father, Dr. Al Paine, which are worth the price of the book in themselves. It should have special interest for persons of Icelandic descent, for Martha Brooks' maternal grandparents were Rev. and Mrs. R. Marteinsson. I recommend that you buy a copy and either give it as a present to a special youth, or keep and cherish it yourself.

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