Canada Iceland Foundation Inc.

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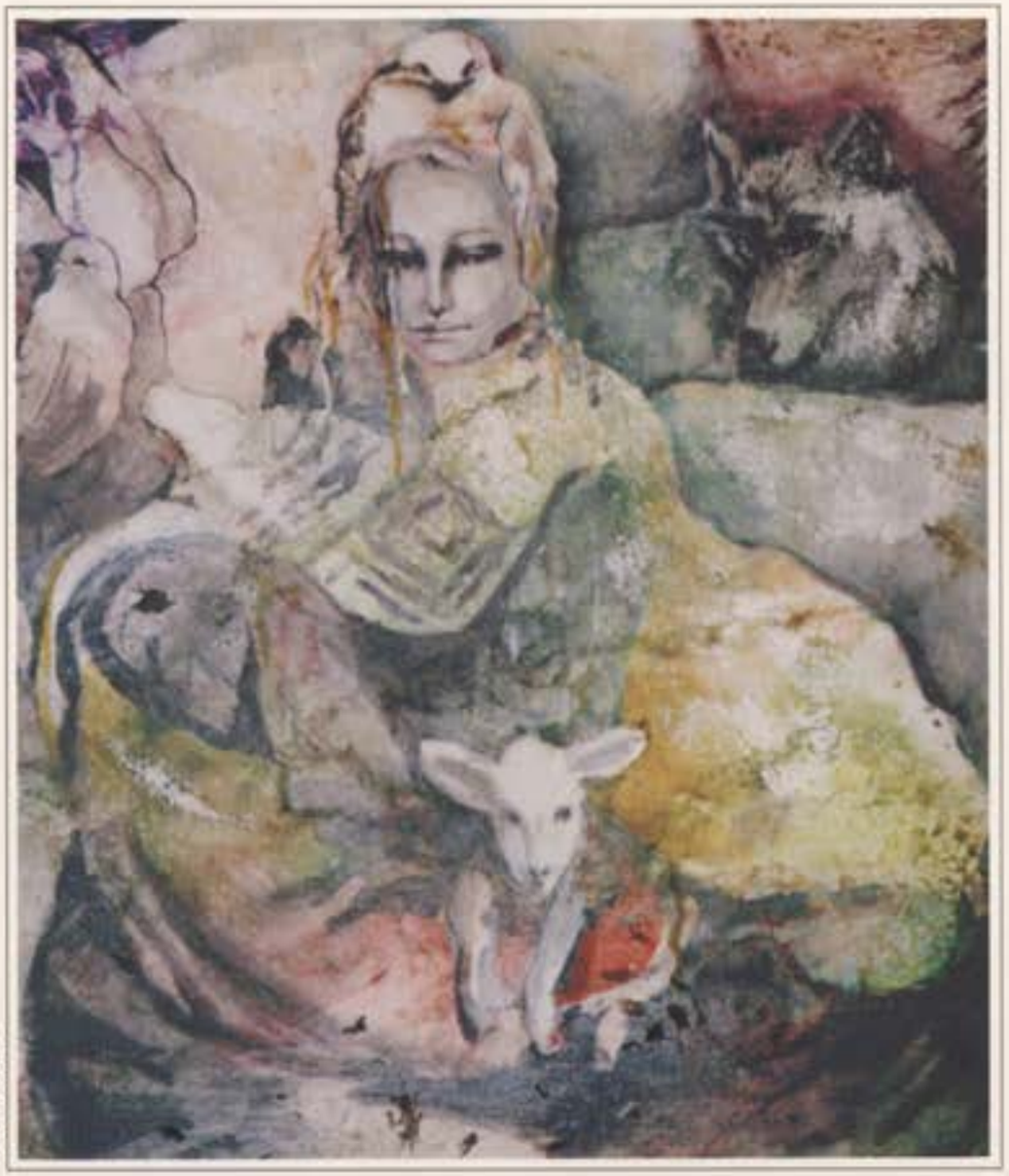
The ICELANDIC CANADIAN



ISSN 0044-8451

Fall 1994

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The Canadian/US committee that is working to help curling get started in Iceland is soliciting donations from interested Icelanders to assist with the project. Money is needed to purchase 16 pairs of rocks at a cost of approximately $450.00 per pair (Cdn) plus funds to assist in bringing four Icelandic curling enthusiasts to Canada for curling clinic instruction and also to have a qualified ice maker go to Iceland to instruct the local people in the art of ice making. Our target is to raise $18,000.00.

Donations should be made payable to *Lögberg-Heimskringla* and sent to the paper along with a note specifying that the money is for the curling project. We need your help to make this project fly.

The English Translation, in book form, of the entire 76 issues of the newspaper *Framfari*, which was published in New Iceland in the years 1877 to 1880 — $15.00 per copy plus $5.00 mailing costs within Canada, $10.00 mailing outside of Canada.

Contact:
Gimli Chapter INL, P.O. Box 1979, Gimli, MB, R0C 1B0

The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

VOLUME LIII, NO 1 • WINNIPEG, CANADA • FALL, 1994

Cover: Detail from Freyja's World *by Pat Peacock*

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

A North American quarterly published in Winnipeg, Canada, dedicated to the preservation of the Icelandic heritage.

Subscriptions, advertising & editorial correspondence:
The Icelandic Canadian
P.O. Box 21073
Charleswood Postal Outlet
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3R 3R2

Subscription Rates: $18 per year, single copies $5.50 (includes postage + GST)
Subscriptions if paid two years in advance, $34
Gift Subscriptions: three or more, $15 each

Advertising info: fax (204) 475-6853

Typed submissions of articles, book reviews, short stories and poetry are welcome. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope. The views expressed in all contributions which appear in *The Icelandic Canadian* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the magazine Board.

Publications Mail Registration No. 1909

Printed at 150 Wyatt Road, Winnipeg, Canada

EDITORIAL

By Sigrid Johnson

The year 1994 has been singled out as the International Year of the Family. It is a celebration of identity, of belonging and sharing and of being together. It is a year long celebration of 'who we are.'

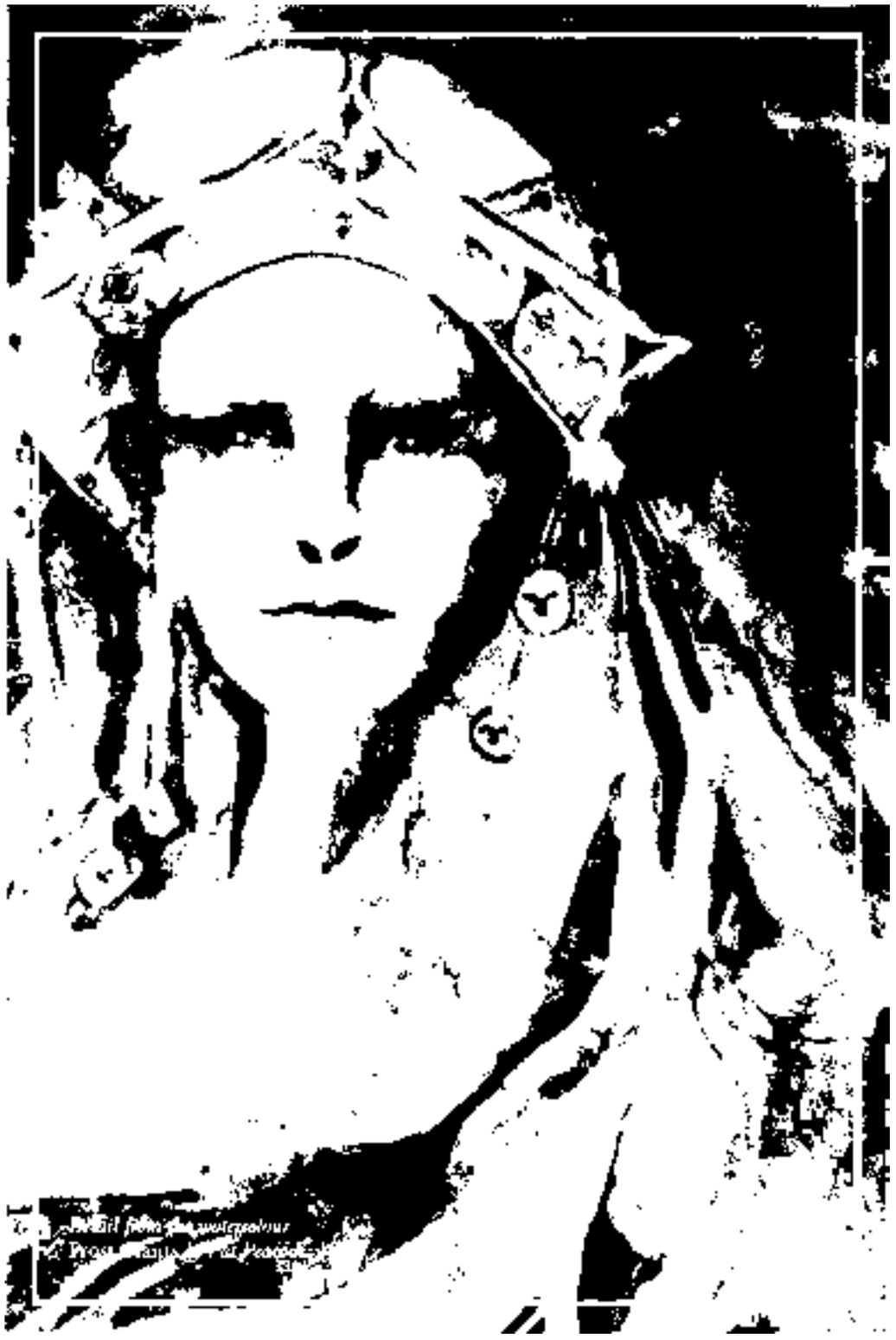
Those of us with Icelandic 'roots' have a better idea than most as to where we fit into the global family tree — or, family defined in the broadest sense. Throughout their history, the people of Iceland have maintained excellent genealogical records. The Icelandic nation's centuries old interest in family record-keeping has been fortunate for those of us of Icelandic origin in North America who have taken up the popular pastime of searching for our 'roots.' And, celebrate this identity we have done in many ways, but probably none more strikingly than through Íslendingadagurinn. Each year, at the beginning of August, for the last 105 years, people of Icelandic origin have travelled from throughout North America to attend this three-day festival held at Gimli, Manitoba. Indeed, Íslendingadagurinn has most often been referred to, in English, as 'The Icelandic Celebration.'

And, equally important to those of us with Icelandic 'roots' has been family as defined in a narrower sense — mother, father, son, daughter, sister, brother, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, cousin... and the various relationships that these terms imply.

In celebration of the International Year of the Family, the editorial board has selected for inclusion in this issue of *The Icelandic Canadian* several submissions that focus upon the family, and its relationships and celebrations. In his essay, *Fethgar*, Kevin Jon Helgason explores the father/son relationship. The Poem, *A Distant Pledge*, is Gunnar Benediktsson's tribute to his late grandfather, Jörundur Pálsson. Lady Margaret Elton remembers her cousin, *Thomas Leonard Brandson: 1915-1944*. And, in the short story, *Black Island & Blueberries*, Christine (Johannson) Best recalls a most memorable family vacation in Manitoba's Interlake.

Several of the magazine's readers have suggested that we include a feature article about Pat Peacock, the talented artist whose painting formed the cover of the magazine's Spring, 1994 issue. Not only are we pleased to be able to respond to that suggestion in this issue, with the inclusion of *Norse Mythology: Peacock's Artistic Medium* by Kristiana Magnusson, but once again, we are pleased to feature a Pat Peacock painting on the cover.

Also included in this issue is the second part of a two-part article by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir dealing with North American Icelandic; the translation by Thelma Guðrún Whale of the first chapter of the third (and final) part of Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason's *In the Red River Valley*; and reviews of two books of interest to all those who share or are interested in sharing a kinship with Iceland.



NORSE MYTHOLOGY
Peacock's Artistic Medium

By Kristiana Magnusson

Something mystical and mysterious about Norse mythology seems to inspire Icelandic Canadian artists to use mythology as a medium for their artistic paintings. Patricia (Pat) Peacock, of White Rock, British Columbia, has found freedom of expression in design and form through painting mythological personalities, deities and attendant sea forms.

Pat Peacock, daughter of James and Laura Guttormson, was born and raised in Gimli, Manitoba. There, in a community that stressed Icelandic heritage and tradition, she became immersed in Icelandic culture, folklore and Norse mythology. At an early age she showed artistic talent, in which she was encouraged by her parents, as well as by one special teacher.

During the years Peacock worked in Winnipeg for the Province of Manitoba, she frequented the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the School of Art Studio to learn about art design and form.

In 1967, Pat and her husband, Jim Peacock, moved to Richmond, British Columbia, where he was employed by Canadian Airlines. After their two sons and daughter had started school Peacock enrolled in the Fine Arts program at Kwantlen College and became a member of the Federation of Canadian Artists. In 1979, the Peacocks moved to White Rock where she joined the White Rock and South Surrey Arts Club. More recently she has been involved in the White Rock Summer School of the Arts, a workshop which promotes the arts and artists in the surrounding area.

Peacock has attended workshops on Salt Spring Island, art classes at the University of British Columbia, Langara College and Lance King Kwantlen College, as well as several art schools and workshops in the United States.

Norse mythology, Icelandic folklore and culture have played major roles in many of Peacock's watercolour and acrylic paintings. Her interest in the symbolism of woman in the role of nurturer and care-giver has evolved in her artistic works.

Soley, The Light of Iceland, symbolizes, as Peacock recently stated, "the strength, power and beauty of women, symbolically connected to the mystery, stark beauty and ruggedness of Iceland." She feels that there is an empowering, forceful connection between women — gracious and feminine, yet strong and enduring — that is akin to the rugged strength of Iceland.

Aphrodite Rising is a powerful picture where Peacock's ability has guided her hand to showcase Aphrodite, the Greek Goddess of Love, rising to Poseidon, the Greek God of the Sea. Around her swirls the enormous power of the ocean, with whales, fish and minor figures superimposed over the sweeping colours and

Freyja's World

forms. The dangling anchor held by Poseidon symbolizes an anchor of safety.

In the watercolour painting, *Freyja's World*, Freyja, the Norse Goddess of Love represents a matriarchal world; a time when women were more connected to earth and stability, perhaps a time when men were away at sea a great deal of the time. Symbolism is evident everywhere in this painting; the wolf creates a sense of community; several female forms, one a naked woman, another an elder weeping in the corner, suggests a group nurturing all of God's creatures.

Frost Giants represents three mythological figures. One is predominant in beauty and grace of bearing. She represents Gerda, a spectacular beauty often associated with Aurora Borealis.

The Three Norns are the three Norse Goddesses called Skuld (Being), Urðr (Fate) and Verdandi (Necessity), closely related to the concept of the Fates of Greek Mythology, who, according to the book *Introduction to Viking Mythology*, sprinkled holy water every day on Yggdrasill so it would keep in top condition. With forceful, artistic motion Peacock has superimposed human and animal forms in the swirling artistic designs.

Peacock's *I Remember Gimli* series showcase Gimli's waterfront, with its old lighthouse, Post Office, fish sheds and colourful collection of fishing boats. She has recently completed paintings on native themes, relevant to native culture in British Columbia.

Peacock's paintings have been on display at numerous art galleries in the Vancouver area and during Expo 86 at the United Nations Pavilion. During

Aphrodite Rising

Expo 86 she was selected to jury the United Nations Children's Competition. That was also the year that her daughter, Jennifer, served as Icelandic Princess for the Icelandic Canadian Club of British Columbia. In 1988, Peacock's painting, *Canada Place Harbour*, was presented to Iceland's President, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, on the occasion of her visit to Vancouver.

Peacock has an impressive list of awards from exhibitions and juried shows in various galleries in British Columbia. In 1986, she submitted three paintings to the Surrey Arts Gallery Show, winning first prize for *Hangers Hanging* and honourable mention for the other two, one of which was *Icelandic Princess*. In 1988, she received honourable mention in the Federation of Canadian Artists General Members Show. More recently, in 1994, she won the People's Choice Award at the White Rock and South Surrey Arts Club Juried Show for her acrylic painting, *Autumn Forms*, as well as an honourable mention for another painting. And her *Hunters Three* has received an award from the Federation of Artists of Vancouver. As well, her design has won the Heritage Canada poster competition for Heritage Day, 1996.

Her published works include the dust jacket and book illustrations for the Guttormur Guttormsson poetry collection, *Aurora*, published in 1993 by Heather Ireland. Another book cover has recently been published by Transylvania Press.

Soley, The Light of Iceland, graced the cover of the Spring 1994 issue of *The Icelandic Canadian* magazine. The origi-

Frost Giants

nal painting of *Soley* was donated by Peacock to the Icelandic Canadian Club of British Columbia for a raffle prize. This prize was won by John Samson who generously donated it to Iceland House in New Westminster, where it is mounted above the fireplace. Limited edition prints have been made of *Soley, The Light of Iceland* and these are available from the Icelandic Canadian Club of British Columbia.

A limited number of photographic prints have also been made of Peacock's painting *Icelandic Princess.* A reproduction of this painting hangs in the dining room at Iceland House.

Peacock's Icelandic heritage has played an important role in her development as an Icelandic Canadian artist of worthy mention. Her knowledge of Icelandic culture, folklore and Norse mythology have helped to hone her artistic flair and style. That knowledge has allowed her imagination to soar and flow freely, creating in her art the sweeping symbolism that is such an integral part of her mythological series of paintings.

Pat Peacock

Two Western Icelanders on Sargent Avenue (Icelandic Main St. in Winnipeg): Finnur Johnson and Jón Jónatansson, poet.

Speaking NORTH AMERICAN ICELANDIC

By Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir

This is the second part of a two part, condensed version of a lecture presented at the University of Manitoba in March, 1994, and based on the author's doctoral research on the social and linguistic davelopment of North American Icelandic. The first part, which appeared in the last issue of *The Icelandic Canadian*, focused on the social context of the development of North American Icelandic and the possible reasons for its longevity. In the second part, presented here, efforts are made to give a short general linguistic overview of North American Icelandic, the only variety of Icelandic spoken outside Iceland.

Languages change at many different levels with the most obvious changes taking place in the lexicon. There are also more subtle changes in syntax, phonology and phonetics and other areas of grammar that cause languages to diverge into different varieties. In North American Icelandic these changes have two main causes: influence from English, and attrition caused by the narrowing functional range of North American Icelandic as it moved from being the speakers' only language to becoming a home and family language with English being used in the broad spectrum of speakers' lives.

An analysis of North American Icelandic is complicated by the different degrees of assimilation of English transfer into Icelandic amongst individuals, families, and communities. In 1903, Vilhjálmur Stefánsson studied the degree of influence of English on Icelandic spoken in tha area around Mountain, North Dakcta. He found that some speakers borrowed heavily from English while many used "scarcely one of the words" on his list (Stefánsson, 1903). The same variation in assimilation of loanwords is found in the speech of different individuals today. There is one exception to this; North American Icelandic family names and place names have become Anglicized and are not declined according to Icelandic morphological rules. Names retain their English characteristics in otherwise Icelandic speech parts.

The Lexicon: The Words of North American Icelandic

The lexicon of North American Icelandic reflects a changing culture — a changing way of life in the new world, demographically and diachronically. North American Icelandic has numerous 1exical additions, both borrowings and new words, mostly in semantic fields related to geography, technology, education, farming, and fishing as the settlers shifted from a coastal culture to an inland culture, from mixed farming and fishing to agriculture and lake fishing, from home schooling to formal education. Needless to say, almost all of the loanwords come from English. North American Icelandic also has numerous words found in older forms of Icelandic but no longer

exist in Eastern Icelandic. A description of the lexicon of North American Icelandic, including a list of characteristic borrowings, neologisms, and archaic words is presented in Bessason (1967) and in Arnbjörnsdóttir (1990) but we will turn our attention to the grammar.

Morphology: The Case System of North American Icelandic.

The most studied features of attrition in immigrant languages are their case systems. Kartunnen (1977) reported on the collapse of accusative and nominative case for Finnish in America, and Anderson and Martin (1976) for Pennsylvania Dutch. Also the loss of dative case in Greek (Seaman, 1972; Orlowski, 1971) and Pennsylvania, German (Anderson and Martin 1976). Several studies have shown regularizations of verb paradigms and loss of tense distinctions. North American Icelandic shows little of these and although there are indications that there may be some 'unrest' in the overt marking of case, there are no speakers who display a consistent loss of these distinctions. The case system of North American Icelandic does not differ in major respects from that of Icelandic in Iceland. North American Icelandic, like Eastern Icelandic has four cases: nominative, accusative, dative and genitive. Attrition is noticeable in the apparent confusion in the case assignment of a category of verbs called impersonal verbs. These are verbs which assign oblique cases to their subjects in contrast to the traditional nominative of subjects of regular, personal verbs. Subjects of verbs like *langa* (want/long for), *vanta* (need), and *gruna* (suspect) have accusative case as in *mig langar* (I want/long for), *mig vantar* (I need), and *mig grunar* (I suspect). Subjects of

the verbs *finnast* (*mér finnst*) and *þykja* (*mér þykir*) have dative case. Impersonal verbs do not agree with the subject in person — they are always in the third person.

The data from North American Icelandic indicates some preference for dative case for subjects of impersonal verbs. This phenomenon is also found in Eastern Icelandic. In North American Icelandic, the verb *langa* has retained its meaning and should retain the accusative subject but as seen in the examples below, the subjects have dative case which is in line with examples found in Icelandic in Iceland. This is known in Iceland as *þágufallssýki*, or 'dative sickness.' The standard Eastern-Icelandic form is given in parenthesis.

1. **henni** (dat.) **langaði**
[hana (acc.) langaði]
'she wanted'

2. **mér** (dat.) **langar** til að tefla
[mig (acc.) langar til að tefla]
'I want to play chess'

Some impersonal verbs seem to have undergone relexification and categorical shift in North American Icelandic, most likely as a result of transfer from English. First, the North American Icelandic verb *vanta* (need) has almost entirely been given the function of its English cognate 'want' and is used as such to cover the meaning of Icelandic verbs like the impersonal *vanta* which has an accusative subject, *skorta* (lack of), also with accusative subject, and the regular verbs *þurfa*, *þarfnast*, and *vilja*, all of which are regular verbs with nominative subjects. All the verbs mentioned above have the meaning of the English 'want' and are represented by the verb *vanta* in North American Icelandic.

3. **ég** (nom.) mundi ekki **vanta** að vera...
[**ég** (nom.) mundi ekki **vilja** vera]
'I would not want to be'

4. maður gerði það sem **maður** (nom.) **vantaði**
[maður gerði það sem **maður** (nom.) **vildi**]
'one just did what one wanted'

5. **hún** (nom.) **vantaði** aldrei að gleyma að tala íslensku
[**hún** (nom.) **vildi** aldrei gleyma að tala íslensku
'she never wanted to forget how to speak Icelandic'

Another instance of transfer of meaning resulting in changes in grammar is found in the following examples where the impersonal phrases have become personal. The phrases *að vera vel við* (to like), or *að vera illa við* (to dislike someone), have dative subject in Icelandic. In this case where one would expect the use of dative given the examples of dative preference found in examples 1-2, yet the preferred case seems to be nominative case.

6. **Þeir** (nom.) **voru** illa við úlfana
[**Þeim** (dat.) **var** illa við úlfana]
'they did not like the wolves'

7. **pabbi** (nom.) var þá alltaf illa við það
[**pabba** (dat.) var þá alltaf illa við það]
'dad never liked that'

8. **ég** (nom.) var alltaf illa við fisk
[**mér** (dat.) var illa við fisk]
I never liked fish much'

The verb *þykir* (seem to be/believe/find to be) also assigns dative case to its subject but here again the preference for nominative subject is clear.

9. **mamma og pabbi** (nom.) þótti voða gaman
[**mömmu og pabba** (dat.) þótti voða gaman]
'mom and dad found it enjoyable'

10. **unga fólkið** (nom.) þótti þetta erfitt
[**unga fólkinu** (dat.) þótti þetta erfitt]
'the young people found it difficult'

Sýnast is a reflexive form and means 'something seems/appears/looks to the speaker.' For example: 'It seems to me like he is ill' but not 'he seems to be ill.' *Sýnast* assigns dative case to the subject. The meaning in North American Icelandic has shifted from the first person perspective of the Icelandic form to the third person perspective of the English form, i.e., 'he looks like.'

11. **hann sýnist** ekki vera hlaupa
[**mér sýnist** hann vera að hlaupa]
'he doesn't look like he is running'

12. **það sýndist** ekki vera sérstaklega merkilegar búskaparaðferðir hjá karlgreyinu
[**mér sýndust** búskaparaðferðirnar hjá karlgreyinu ekki vera mjög merkilegar]
'it didn't look like the poor, old guy's farming methods were that remarkable'

13. **þetta sýndist** allt öðruvísi
[**mér sýndist** þetta vera allt öðruvísi]
'this looked totally different'

14. **þær sýnast** alltaf koma upp
[**mér sýndust** þær alltaf koma upp]
'they always secm to come up'

The results suggest that North American Icelandic speakers' assignment of case to the subjects of impersonal verbs involves three processes interacting; one is transfer from English: a semantic shift which causes a recategorization of these verbs as personal verbs (especially those that before had dative subjects). This process is not found

in Icelandic varieties in Iceland. The second is the collapse of meaning or relexification of several verbs into one, *vanta* (want) which has now become a personal verb in North American Icelandic. Finally, there seems to be a preference for dative subjects where accusative subjects are found in standard Eastern Icelandic although this may be changing.

Impersonal verbs seem to be changing to personal verbs in North American Icelandic possibly because they are marked or unusual verbal forms in the world's languagss. Speakers of North American Icelandic who are without the linguistic support afforded national languages are transferring these processes from their dominant language, English. This feature is vulnerable because it is linguistically marked and thus susceptible to simplification and loss. This might explain why the case system in general seems quite robust, apart from these impersonal verbs, contrary to what has been reported of other immigrant languages in the United States like Finnish and German. For further discussion of this phenomenon please see Arnbjörnsdóttir (1 992).

Case assignment by preposition has also undergone some attrition in North American Icelandic morphology in the speech of some informants. The Icelandic preposition *fyrir* functions in many cases like the English 'for.' The Icelandic *fyrir* can have the same meaning as 'for' in some cases but not in all cases. Similarly, the Icelandic preposition *af* functions as English 'of.' Although there is some attrition in this category, the influence of semantic transfer should not be ignored and waits further study. Below are a few examples of case assignment by preposition in North American Icelandic.

15. þegar ég var búin með University þá fór ég til Evrópu **fyrir tíma**
[þegar ég var buin með University þá fór ég til Evrópu **um tíma**]
'when I had finished University I went to Europe for a while'

16. ég lenti á spítala **fyrir tvær nætur**
[ég lenti á spítala **í tvær nætur**]
'I ended up in the hospital for two nights'

af: *In the sentences below,* af *assigns accusative case in North American Icelandic but dative case in Eastern Icelandic.*

17. ...eins og þeir gátu borðað af fisk_ (acc.)
[eins og þeir gátu borðað af fiski (dat.)
'...all thev could eat of fish'

18. svona hálfa teskeið af lvftiduft_ (nom. acc.)
[svona hálfa teskeið af lyftidufti (dat.)]
'about a half a teaspoon of baking soda'

til: *The preposition* til *(to) assigns genitive case in Eastern Icelandic.*

19. frá þremur til fjóruun (dat.) eða fimm mílur (nom.) (NAI)
[frá þremur til fjögurra (gen.) eða fimm mílna (gen.)] (I)
'from three to four or five miles'

yfir: *In sentence 20,* yfir *assigns accusative case in Eastern Icelandic*

20. ég man nú ekki nafnið yfir **þessu** (dat.) (NAI)
[ég man nú ekki nafnið yfir **þetta** (acc.) (I)
'I don't remember the name for this'

There are numerous examples in the data of the construction *á vetrin*. The older form is *á veturna*. It seems that there has been a change here by analogy. The words for the other three seasons of the year; *vor, sumar, haust* all belong to the same conjugation class which is different from the class *vetur* belongs to. With the preposition *á* they take the following forms: *á vorin, á sumrin, á haustin*, hence we get *á vetrin* which in Eastern Icelandic is *á veturna*.

Examples 21-22 show í *being used as English* in*:*

21. hún spurði mig **í ensku** (NAI)
[hún spurði mig **á ensku**) (I)
'she asked me in English'

22. þegar ég fór **í áttatíu og tvö** (NAI)
[þegar ég fór **áttatíu og tvö**]
'when I went in eighty-two'

In the North American Icelandic examples 23 -24, í *assigns nominative or accusative cases rather than the dative case as in Eastern Icelandic.*

23. ég var að vinna í kjötmarkað_(acc.) (NAI)
[ég var að vinna í kjötmarkaði (dat.)]
'I was working at a meat market'

24. við lentum **í slys** (nom.? acc.?) (NAI)
[við lentum **í slysi** (dat.)]
'we had an accident'

Subjunctive

Haraldur Bessason (1984a, 1984b) reports a loss of subjunctive mood by many speakers of North American Icelandic. This study revealed some loss of subjunctive often substituted by the word *mundi* which is a transfer from English 'would.' Sentences 25 and 26 are examples of this (subjunctive forms are in parenthesis).

25. hann skrifaði þeim að hann **mundi ekki** vera kallaður í herinn.
[hann skrifaði þeim að hann **yrði ekki** kallaður í herinn.]
'he wrote to them that he would not be called into the army.'

26. ég **mundi** ekki vanta að vera
[ég **vildi** ekki vera]
'I would not want to be'

In some cases the subjunctive mood is replaced by verbs in indicative mood as in sentences 27-28 below.

27. þeir vildu nú ekki trúa mér að **ég kom** (kæmi) frá Kanada (NAI)
'they would not believe me that I came from Canada'

28. ég hélt að það **var** (væri) miklu kaldara (NAI)
'I thought it would be much colder'

Syntax: The Sentence Structure of North American Icelandic

There is very little change apparent in the syntax of North American Icelandic. There seems to be a slight increase in use of prepositional phrases at the expense of inflections. Examples 29 and 30 exemplify this:

29. Kannski við höfum **gefið það bara til Indjánanna** (NAI)
[Kannski höfum við gefið Indjánunum það] (I)
'Perhaps we just gave it to the Indians'

30. **flestir af krökkunum** töluðu allir íslensku (NAI)
[flestir krakkanna töluðu íslensku] (I)
'most of the kids spoke Icelandic'

Transfer of *do*

The auxiliary *do* is translated into Icelandic as *gera* (to make/to do). In Icelandic *gera* is a transitive verb which requires a following Noun Phrase. In North American Icelandic, the function of *gera* is extended and is used like *do*, for example in sentence tags.

31. við Marv gerum _ (NAI)
[við Marv gerum **það**] (I)
'Marv and I do'

32. Hún vildi ekki really tala við hana, en hún gerði_ (NAI)
[hún vildi ekki really tala við hana, en hún gerði **það**] (I)
'she didn't really want to talk to her, but she did'

It is

One of the more curious transfers from English into North American Icelandic is the borrowing and translation of *it is*. In English, the verb always agrees with the dummy subject *it*, and this is also the case for North American Icelandic. This translation has replaced the Icelandic expression where the verb agrees with the actual subject and not *it*. *It is* and *það er* have overlapping functions in English and Icelandic. In North American Icelandic, *það er* seems to function in all cases as *it is* . The verb agrees with the dummy deictic subject 'it' even in functions where there is no correspondence between the two languages. Some of the examples presented below are in passive voice and all need further investigation.

33. það er_ alltaf fimm spil
[það **eru** alltaf fimm spil]
'it is always five cards'

34. það var sett_ ís í kringum þetta
[það var **settur** ís í kringum þetta]
'ice was put around it'

35. það **var** brúkaðir hundar
[það **voru** brúkaðir hundar]
'dogs were used'

36. það var mest talað íslenska
[það var aðallega töluð íslenska]
'Icelandic was mostly spoken'

Adverb Placement

Another change in the syntax of North American Icelandic is the transfer of the English rules of adverb placement to Icelandic. In Icelandic, the adverb can come either before or after the verb. In sentences 37-39 the adverb precedes the verb in North American Icelandic as in English. It follows the verb in Icelandic.

37. hún var fjórtán ára þegar hún **fyrst** kom frá Kanada (NAI)
[hún var fjórtán ára þegar hún kom **fyrst** frá Kanada] (I)
'she was fourteen when she first came from Canada'

38. Ð **stundum** talar íslensku
[Ð talar **stundum** íslensku]
'sometimes speaks Icelandic'

39. **fyrst** við fiskuðum í norðurendanum
[við fiskuðum **fyrst** í norðurendanum]
'first we fished in the north end'

In the North American Icelandic data there are examples of inflectional markings which are no longer used in modern Eastern Icelandic (as seen in brackets) but were common in earlier forms of Icelandic. Some of these are:

40. þetta brúka **læknirarnir** (acc. plur. def. art.)
[þetta nota **læknarnir**]
'this is used by doctors'

41. við **komustum** (1. pers. plur. refl.) ekki á ís aftur fyrr en eftir jólin
[við **komumst** ekki á ís aftur fyrr en eftir jólin]
'we couldn't get back on the ice until after Christmas'

42. ef við **mætustum** (1. pers. plur.) eldri systkinin, þá tölum við íslensku
[ef við hittumst, eldri systkinin, þá tölum við íslensku]
'when we meet, the oldest siblings, then we speak Icelandic'

This construction is even found in words in North American Icelandic borrowed from Eastern Icelandic:

43. við **útskrifuðustum**
[við **útskrifuðumst**]
'we graduated'

Overall, the developments found in North American Icelandic are transfers reflecting the coexistence with English on the one hand, and simplification processes usually going from marked to unmarked features of grammar on the other.

Phonetics and Phonology:
The Sounds of North American Icelandic

Developments in the sound system of North American Icelandic also reflect a tendency to go from marked to unmarked features.

Simplification of Consonant Clusters

Simplification of the consonant clusters /hr-/, /hl-/, /hn-/ and /hv-/ in initial position is widespread in North American Icelandic. These clusters seem to be treated as a class and are simplified to /r-/, /l-/, /n-/ and /v-/. In most modern dialects of Icelandic /hv-/ is pronounced as /kv-/. Initial consonant clusters /kv-/ are common in English in words such as 'question,' 'queen,' etc. Yet in North American Icelandic the h & r, l, n, and v respectively are treated as a class and the simplification to /r/, /l/, and /n/ is extended to /v/ as well. Thus *hræddi* (scared), *hræðileg* (terrible), and *hreinsa* (to clean) become *ræddi*, *ræðileg* and *reinsa*; *hlaupa* (run), *hnota* (wood knot), and *hnepptur* (buttoned) become *laupa*, *notu*, *nepptur*. Also, *hvalur* (whale), *hvítt* (white), *hvasst* (windy), and *hvolpur* (puppy) become *valur*, *vítt*, *vasst* and *volpur* or *kolpur* (there are also examples of /xv-/, /xvas:/ and /xvi:tur/ which are characteristic of speech in southeastern parts of Iceland). This may be due to the fact that /r/, /l/, and /v/ are devoiced when preceded by /h/ and rather than produce devoiced sonorants ('l' and 'r') which are highly marked, North American Icelanders tend to drop the /h-/ sound and the liquids are regular voiced.

This phenomenon needs further scrutiny as the continuum /kv/—>/xv/—>/v/ came up in the speech of three genarations within the same family. This phenomenon may also have implications for a proposed universal sonority hierarchy in syllable structure.

Unrounding of (ö) to (E)

The unrounding of front rounded (ö) is very common in North American Icelandic, probably due to direct influences from English, which has no front rounded equivalent. These forms are also found in Eastern Icelandic, but may have been more commonplace in earlier forms of Icelandic which could be another explanation for their frequency in North American Icelandic. Examples such as *hnetturinn* instead of *hnötturinn* (the globe), *vekva* instead of *vökva* (water), *exum* instead of *öxum* (axes), *kjet* instead of *kjöt* (meat), *kekur* instead of *kökur* (cakes), and *mje* instead of *mjö(g)* (very).

Disappearance of Voiced Velar Fricative

In Icelandic /g/ in orthography is realized as a voiced, velar fricative intervocalically, and word finally when followed by a vowel. This voiced velar fricative is disappearing in North American Icelandic, especially in the speech of many speakers of Icelandic in North Dakota. Accordingly, words like *sög* (a saw), and *fluga* (a fly), are pronounced sö (sö:) and flua (flY:a). The voiced, velar fricative is always found in some more common words such as *eiga* (to own) and *auga* (an eye). This may be change in progress taking place in less common words first and with the sound changing last in the most frequently used words.

Flámæli

Finally, let us take a closer look at one particular characteristic of North American Icelandic phonology: *Flámæli*. *Flámæli* is the colloquial term used for the apparent mergers of the front, high /I/ and the front, mid /E/, and of the front, high, rounded /Y/ and the front, mid rounded /ö/ in Icelandic. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Icelandic Vowel System
The direction of the apparent mergers are indicated by the arrows.

	front		back
	-round	+round	- + round
high	i		u
	I	Y	
mid	E	ö	o
low		a	

The result of this phenomena is that such words as *skyr* (a milk product), and *sker* (islet); *viður* (wood) and *veður* (weather); *flugur* (flies) and *flögur* (tiles) are perceived as homonyms.

Speculation about the social context of *Flámæli*, which was widespread in three geographical areas of Iceland until a few decades ago, started only after it no longer existed in Iceland. *Flámæli* was found in the Eastern Fjords, Húnavatnssysla in Northern Iceland, and the extreme Southwest. The Eastern Fjords was one of the areas that saw most emigration to North America in the latter part of the 19th century so *Flámæli* would thus have been found in the speech of some of the early emigrants.

Flámæli is the only dialect feature of Icelandic which became stigmatized in Iceland and almost eradicated in a few decades from the 1940s to the 1960s, through negative public opinion and through the education system. Most people agreed, including education officials that this was sound change in progress and if it were not stopped, Icelandic would become poorer by two vowels. Today, only a few older speakers are known to have this feature in their speech. Studying *Flámæli* in North American Icelandic affords us a unique opportunity to view this sound change in progress.

In this study the vowels /I/, /E/, /Y/ and /ö/ were coded for their lowered or raised variants and the questions we asked were: to what extent do the following linguistic and social factors effect the occurrence or non-occurrence of *Flámæli*?

1) quantity; including short or long vowel. That is; has *Flámæli* spread to the short vowels as some linguists have predicted?
2) preceding segment; including pause, consonant or vowel. Does the sound that comes before the *Flámæli* vowel have an influence on the occurrence of *Flámæli*?
3) following segment; including pause, voiced consonant, voiceless consonant or vowel. Does the sound that follows the *Flámæli* vowel influence its occurrence?

The social factor groups considered were:

4) locality of informant; North Dakota or 'New Iceland'
5) sex of informant; male or female
6) age of informant; -50, 50-70, 70.

The study included fifteen factors and considered all environments where the lowering or raising of the variables could have occurred.

Results

The most favorable factor for the approximations of the *Flámæli* vowels was a long vowel. *Flámæli* was found in 28% of the 3,580 tokens of the long variants but only 3% of the 8,861 tokens of short vowels, indicating that there has been little or no spread of *Flámæli* to the short variants and that the phenomenon was still confined to long vowels in North American Icelandic. Preceding and following environments were found to be neutral to the occurrence of *Flámæli* except when followed or preceded by a pause, which constrains *Flámæli*.

This study of *Flámæli* in North American Icelandic clearly indicates that *Flámæli* spread diachronically, with a gradual increase in *Flámæli* from the oldest speakers to the youngest speakers. *Flámæli* of [I:] and [Y:] in North American Icelandic increases steadily from the oldest to the youngest informants indicating that it is spreading faster the further the speakers are in generation from the original immigrants. This is especially true for the immigrant community in North Dakota whose speakers had more *Flámæli* in their Icelandic than the informants from 'New Iceland.' The idea of the social network (Milroy and Milroy, 1980) is invoked to explain this difference. The immigrant communities in North Dakota are more isolated from the 'hub' of Icelandic culture in Canada, and Icelanders settled there amongst people of other ethnic origins. There is very little outward show of the existence of Icelanders in North Dakota.

Quite the opposite is true for 'New Iceland.' This community constitutes a dense social network. It is more isolated from the world than Mountain, North Dakota. Icelanders are in the majority in 'New Iceland,' and they were the first ethnic group to settle in the area. 'New Iceland' is the heart of Icelandic culture in North America and the Icelandic ethnic origins are advertised. Speakers have close ties to one another and thus create a better condition for language preservation.

The most dramatic language change is often seen in situations where two or more languages come into contact for two or more generations. Such is the case of North American Icelandic which has coexisted with English for up to four generations of speakers. The study of language attrition is especially interesting because it gives us a chance to study accelerated language change in progress, accelerated due to the narrowing functional range of immigrant languages as the host language takes over more and more domains of language use. The host language is used for educatlon, commerce and government, and use of the immigrant language is confined to the

home. When the forces which sustain fully fledged national languages, the forces that work against change, are no longer available, languages become more susceptible to change and the rate of change in progress is accelerated.

It is clear that despite its intense contact with English, Icelandic has survived in North America longer than most immigrant languages and thus provides a unique opportunity to study a community that, despite low numbers, has been able to assimilate fully and successfully while at the same time retaining linguistic and cultural characteristics of the old culture without seeing the two in conflict.

The author wishes to thank all the wonderful informants in Mountain, 'New Iceland,' and in Saskatchewan for their participation in this study. The author is currently investigating the development of bilingualism in the North American Icelandic communities, specifically, how perceptions about speakers' linguistic heritage and levels of literacy affected the development of sustained, inter-generational bilingualism. She is very interested in any information about North American Icelanders' early school experiences as non-English speakers and as bilinguals in an English dominant society.

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Thomas Leonard Brandson 1915-1944

By Lady Margaret Elton

It is fifty years since Lieutenant Thomas Brandson of the Royal Canadian Navy went down in the Bay of Biscay when the corvette, Athabaskan, on which he was serving was torpedoed, and an appropriate time to celebrate those that go down to the sea in ships, to evoke his memory, and to consider the influences which shaped his character.

The youngest child and only son of Dr. and Mrs. B.J. Brandson, he was born on June 28, 1915. I was eleven days older, and in a closely knit family we were brought up like twins. As first cousins and inseparable companions, we shared the life of the Icelandic community in the west end of Winnipeg, where children heard their elders talking Icelandic over coffee, or their grandparents reading Icelandic poetry aloud.

One of my early memories is of the old church on Sherbrook and Bannatyne where a pageant was being mounted, perhaps by the I.O.D.E. Somewhat incongruously, Tommy and I were to appear as Britannia. Mrs. Melsted pinned Union Jacks around us, but the flags were so scratchy we were convinced that she stuck the pins into us. In 1921, the First Icelandic Lutheran Church moved to the present building on Victor Street where we first started Sunday School, with Jennie Johnson as our teacher. On Christmas Eve we trudged through the snow to the children's Carol Service, and back to the Brandson house to gather around the Christmas tree, at that time still lit by candles.

My father taught us to read before we started at Wellington School, and always kept an eye on our studies. After a year at Principal Sparling where Jennie Johnson taught us in Grade Eight, we moved to Daniel McIntyre and remained there until we went to university.

Throughout our childhood, our eyes were regularly tested by Dr. Jon Stefanson, and when Dr. Joe Olson had to fill a tooth, he gave us a quarter.

At the age of fourteen, we were confirmed by Séra B.B. Jonsson after long and careful preparation. This forged a bond with those who were confirmed with us, Lillian Johnson, Gordon Stephenson, Eric Bergman, Herbert Henrickson and Baldur Bardal to name a few. In my experience, no one ever forgets his *fermingar bræður.*

Our grandfather, Jon Brandson, died in 1922, but we continued to make frequent journeys to North Dakota. Our great-uncle, Haflidi Gudbrandson, was farming in Gardar, and J.K. Olafson had taken over our grandfather's farm. He was my mother's and my uncle's best friend, for they had grown up together. We enjoyed being there at harvest time, and playing with the Olafson sons, Hermann, Teddy and Magnus. It is some tribute to these old bonds that Magnus and I are still friends, and he maintains our grandparents' graves.

We had another great-uncle, Sturlaugur Gudbrandson, in Minneota where we went once a year. He was a timber merchant and highly respected in the town. His daughter, Frieda, was married to the local druggist, so we had as many ice cream sodas as we could drink, and as many Hershey bars as we could eat. In retrospect, it was a great privilege to be familiar with two rural communities in North Dakota and Minnesota, and it enlarged our horizons.

Children whose families had cottages at Gimli had an incomparable education. It was there that Tommy first learned to swim, with such style and endurance that it was subsequently predicted he could qualify for the Olympic team. Endless pleasure during the long hot summers was balanced by responsibilities. Twice a day Tommy fetched water from a nearby well, and it was his duty to empty the pan of water beneath our primitive icebox. Kerosene lamps had to be filled, and the shades cleaned, and wood chopped for the kitchen stove. Margaret, Dodo and I washed the dishes, made the beds, and swept the cottage. One or two afternoons a week Tommy played chess with the elderly men at Betel, and brought home pails of fresh milk, for Betel at that time kept its own cows. We bought bread from an English baker named Mr. Newberry, and vegetables were delivered by Galician market gardeners, sombrely dressed in black, driving a pony and cart. Fishing boats came into the little harbour, and every Friday night we had pickerel fillets, but rejected the hardfish eaten by our elders.

The H.S. Bardal cottage, presided over by Lolo, was the centre of the Gimli world. The Bardal boys were all good at sports, and organised a volleyball game on Fridays, Icelanders against the Jews. Those who lost had to buy Coca Cola for the winning team. We made many friends among the large summer Jewish population, and learned a few words of Yiddish. Wednesday and Saturday nights there was a dance in the pavilion in Gimli Park, across from our cottage. Dodo and her friends, Esther Olafson and Signy Stephenson, taught us a few steps before we dared venture on the dance floor. More daring still was the spectacle of Dodo and Jon Bardal diving off the lighthouse at the end of the pier.

Íslendingadagurinn was the crowning festival of the summer. A stand was built for the Fjallkona, her attendants and distinguished speakers. As the flags flew high, we felt proudly that we were a race apart, not least because weekend visitors lavishly gave us dollar bills. Before Labour Day, bathing suits were put away, cottages boarded up, and we set off for home with some reluctance. But one year, during a polio epidemic, Winnipeg schools were closed, and we stayed at Gimli throughout September, finding it tedious as the days grew more chilly. Little did we know that Jon Bardal was to contract polio in a later epidemic. His courage and high spirits after he was crippled were an inspiration to us all.

Our childhood was coming to an end, and finally the great day came when we

went off to university. My father took Tommy and I to register. The fee was sixty-seven dollars each. In a sea of unfamiliar faces we stayed close together until we made friends among our classmates, but we contrived to go to university dances in the same party. I graduated in English and German, and Tommy with a Bachelor of Arts and Commerce degree. He was Senior Stick in his final year.

In 1931, Margaret had married a brilliant American surgeon, Dr. John Hillsman, who moved to Winnipeg and practised with my uncle. He tactfully gave us good advice as he watched us grow up, and broadened our outlook with his wise counsel. Subsequently, Dodo's marriage to Stewart Chevrier, a French Canadian, brought us a merry and enchanting elder brother.

When my father died in 1937, I moved into the Brandson house on Waverley Street. No one ever had a finer set of second parents than I did. My aunt was a true mother to me, and a profound influence on me to this day. She was a great worker for the church, and when her sewing circle met at our house, Tommy and I had to collect members and drive them home again. We ferried boxes of exquisite tea cloths, crocheted napkins and pillow cases, patchwork quilts and cakes to the annual Ladies Aid Bazaar in the church basement, where Gudny Paulson presided over the coffee. My aunt's father, Afi Benson, lived with us, but was no longer able to sing in the church choir as he had done for fifty years. We drove him to visit his old friends, or collected them to visit him. He considered that his grandchildren were not sufficiently musical, and before he died he gave me all his church music, carefully annotated. I have it still.

But the shadows were gathering over our little world, and war was declared in September 1939. Less than a year later, in June 1940, Tommy enlisted in the

R.C.N.V.R. It was a poignant moment when I first saw him in uniform, for he looked like the little boy I remembered in a sailor suit. We had a happy day in October, 1941, when he married Shirley Stewart, a beautiful and upstanding girl whom we all loved.

Owing to some ear trouble, he was not sent overseas until January 1944. I was living in Ottawa when he stopped off on his way to Halifax following his last home leave. We spent a companionable day together, and in the evening took a taxi to the railway station, holding hands, but not speaking. I saw him on to the train without a word, but with one last embrace. It was the last time we met.

When he was declared missing early in May, I went back to Winnipeg at once. My uncle, who had a serious heart condition, died within a few weeks. Months of anxiety followed before Tommy was presumed dead. My aunt was devastated — her first born son Jon had died in early childhood — and only the fortitude of her faith sustained her.

I promised her that I would always celebrate his birthday. She has been dead for forty years, but every year on June 28th, I still pick some peonies, her favourite flower, bring his photograph downstairs, get out the *Sálmabók* that was given to him by Asdis Henrickson when he was baptised, and have a cake with a candle on it. The silver mug Thomas H. Johnson gave him is always on my desk.

Even after I moved to England, Margaret, Dodo and I remained the closest of cousins. I was grief-stricken when Dodo died in 1976 and Margaret in 1985. So I am the last of the Brandson children, and the last to think upon these things, always grateful to the Icelandic community in which we grew up. But it is Tommy's brief life of twenty-nine years that I celebrate with pride and with joy. *For I in thy heart had dwelling, and thou hast in mine forever.*

7 April 1525

The investment of my love, though not an innocent desire, seeks to redeem us both in a breathing posterity. The lying celibacy that we have both embraced in dull allegiance to some creed in desuetude, may be put aside in the marriage of our interests in a temporal felicity, whose motive, as I have indicated, beyond pleasure is in a due succession. We have drunk too long from the tepid font of carnal negligence, and in you is still the lust and flower of a young and nubile grace, which to my greater age should be arrested.

I am older, and yet I can remember the gaudy Spring, and the soul, which is eternal, though furrowed and greying still looks with a child's eyes upon its love. So do not think it wrong that my love has a body as well as a soul, for Nature has suited you also for this purpose.

And should it be wrong that children are bred in joy, though borne in pain, for pleasure and pain are agnate in this world; we would not know the one without the other. Then let our marriage vow forget the others, which were assumed in a false allegiance, and let our passions overthrow us and win a pleasure that will be made richer by our fond abstention.

In love and faith,
Martin Luther

Fethgar

By Kevin Jon Helgason

Fethgar is a transliteration of an Old Norse word, *feðgar*, which means father and son, and it is from Old Norse that we get most of our terms for kinship, such as mother, father, brother, sister, son, daughter and, the warmest of the collective nouns, folk.

Although in the relationship of father and son there is no choice, sometimes there is a serendipity, for like it or not, we are made not only by our choices, but by our families, and the father ought to be the strongest model for a son, despite some unhappy changes in that convention in some modern families. Now, however most of us have fallen off somewhat from the model of perfection, and our fathers notwithstanding; there is much that is redeemable in my father, and there is little need to harp upon his deficiencies, such as a spirit which is capable of bland mendacities, a desire to be wealthy without the luck or aptitude, and a failure in his marriage which was arranged in the zeal of youth, with an eye more to beauty than rarer conformations. Yet such errors have been written much more grossly in others, and his faults, which he owes to his humanity, are diminished by his better qualities, and it is the arrogance and folly of a son to call upon the failings of his father, while he pretends to have grown more perfect by the bad examples, and taken up all that was good besides.

Though I have recorded some deficiencies in my father, such as that may be attested by others, and are often spoken about with less art and sensitivity, I will now delimit his better qualities, the which, have been foremost in his relationship with me, and for which I think I owe some gratitude, if I chance to resemble the better parts of him, as is my hope. From my earliest days he developed my ironic sense of humour by drawing pictures of a boy walking his pet hippopotamus, or by alleging that Jesus of Nazareth was a better man than Hitler, which is like the fabric of our more mature jokes. Like all good humour, I think that his jokes reflect a sensibility which is ensconced in the real world, although it is sometimes given to more Aristophanic flights. We joke about our failings and the more bestial aspects of our humanity, and about shallow, stupid and non introspective people, such as Lord Mountbatten, who claimed to have never made a mistake in his life. By this argument, I seem to aver that we are deep, wise and introspective people, my father and I, and that may be true as far as people are capable of such distinctions.

My father is also sober and serious, and probably as sane as John Gardner describes Geoffrey Chaucer. He is a person who, I believe, in his heart of hearts, values a man of character over a man of means. He also values education, and helped support me as I attended ten consecutive years in Canadian universities as a full time student. My current

15 April 1525

Dear Martin,

I have read and reread your letter, and I do not think worse of you to read what has already been spoken in candour to my blushing importunity. You know that I have left the Cistercian Order now, and seek a husband in this changing world, and wish to shed my Catholic vows and be a bride as my mother and her mother were.

We are immortal, but human as well, and it would be dishonest for me to deny my wish for maternity, and to pretend that I have not thought upon a wedding in this life, as opposed to the promise hereafter. Though some have put pleasure out of this life with a vow, and with Hildegard of Bingen have only put on a white veil and gathered a trousseau in practice for a marriage in the sky, I am sick of that denial now, and wish a married consecration.

You know also of the high regard with which I hold you, who are the root of our happy reform. You have taught us all of the hypocrisy of Rome, and stand in direct lineage with Christ himself as a great son of God and visionary of the German people. You will be remembered as a wise reformer of the Church, as a humanist who shared the stage with Erasmus, and most hopefully as the father of our children, who will take upon them our semblance and our heritage. If it is God's will that we should be parents, then I will be a happy mother, for it is my will to be your wife.

Faithfully and Respectfully,
Katherine von Bora

27 April 1525

Dear Kathe,

I am not often given to hebetude or doubt, and yet your latest letter was opened with some trepidation, as if I feared the spilling of my hopes in your unforeseen derision. My misgivings were soon allayed by your candid and gracious consent,

occupation, as a teacher, also reflects our veneration for learning, and he is no less interested in the higher elements of culture. Although he does not read as widely as me, he has a fair background in literature, history, politics, religion, business and art. I confess an interest in reading science also, and a great deal of the Classics in translation, and herein I take after my father's identical twin brother, my uncle Peter. Therefore, in a way, because my father is so twinned, I have had the benefit of two fathers, and hope to have taken the best of both, while discarding some of the deficits of each. My dad also appreciates fine music, art, sports, drama and good television, for we both believe in the often misapplied capacity for television to teach, profitably entertain and beguile.

Besides his interests in the higher forms of culture, he also values the Greek ideals of balance, perfectibility, and fitness, captured in the sublime Greek term, *kalokagathia*, which translates as having a beautiful mind and a beautiful body. We spend a lot of time walking together, golfing and he even continues to play football, despite his being around twenty five years older than my thirty. In this exuberance, I think he shows not only a belief in the ideal of physical fitness, but a desire which is proven by his choice and action, and thereby more deeply inculcated in me.

With his love for balance is a love of Nature, and in the distinct changes of our Canadian climate. He speaks as well of our clear winter air, as of our sunny Manitoba summers, our motley autumns, and our resurgent springs. His grandparents came from Iceland, the land of ice and fire, where the seasons are similar to our own. And although he was named after his grandfather, Helgi, he has always gone by his middle name, Carl, which is more conventional and more

widely accepted in our multicultural land. It is as a sign of my indebtedness to my father that I adopt as my *nom de guerre* my Icelandic surname, Helgason. Our normal surname, Johnson, was an unhappy Anglicization of his grandfather's Icelandic surname, Jonsson, and we maintain it because we prize our Canadian heritage as highly as our Icelandic.

My father has an interest in ideas, and has inculcated in me by both action and speech an affinity for high ethical life, such as was espoused by Jesus or Socrates. We believe in free will, the choice and reality of good and evil, the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and the significance and pleasure of a married life and the positive investiture in children or grandchildren.

I value honesty, and what I have recorded here about my father is true to my discernment, without being flattery or animadversion. Although my assessment may not be held equally by all who know my father, for who is esteemed well or properly by all of ones fleeting associates, but I know him better perhaps than anyone but himself, and am thankful for a father of such merit and value, and hope to think that I resemble the better part of him, which has always been in the forefront of our relationship. Nowhere have I pretended that my father is perfect, for it is our duty and interest to develop our own baseness and evil into a form which is most commensurate with the highest parts of ourselves, but howbeit, he is flawed, and often exigent in his stern treatment of myself, my brother and my sister; he sincerely loves his children and has done his best in rearing them, wherein he shares this positive value with a man whom he admired, Joseph Kennedy. That I am at least half of what he is, and striving to be better, may be attested by this panegyric, or by those who truly know me.

and there is not a happier man in all of Germany today; no, not all the world!

We took our vows with no provision for pleasure, and I have been tonsured in diligent studies which have, and God be thanked, removed the shroud off of the nidus of Papacy. I have been an instrument of the Lord in the freeing of our people and, with this new conscription of your love, we may take upon us the normal intimacies of married bliss, which custom and Nature both argue for our good.

My father shall have his wish, which he thought I had put upon a high and tenebrous shelf when I left the bar and became a monk, and if our parents and ourselves should be further blessed with living effects from our celebrated cause in matrimony, then my life will be balanced by study and paternal care. And neither shall I neglect you, but shall fill all of the offices of my love in a doting perfection, which is the surety I will invest in the purity of your nature, which is a beauteous muliebrity enhanced by a diligent and pious mind.

Though young, you are not distracted by the odd tegument which we all wear as agents in this world, but with a more profound observation, you look upon my soul with more praise and pleasure than I am often wont to give in my darker introspections. In our next lives, we will lose these shells and be as fair or ugly as our souls. It is with this in mind that we should hope for some filial loves, for through the miracle of birth we make immortal things. And I hope that you do not take it as a sign of pride in me, that I proclaim the anticipated fruit of our union to be of an especial merit, to shine most brightly in the life to come, and please us in our present pilgrimage.

With more happiness and joy than I am able to relate, I will gladly have our banns proclaimed in the Castle Church in Wittenberg, and we shall be united with a vow in the House of God by the middle of this warming summer.

Love,
Martin Luther

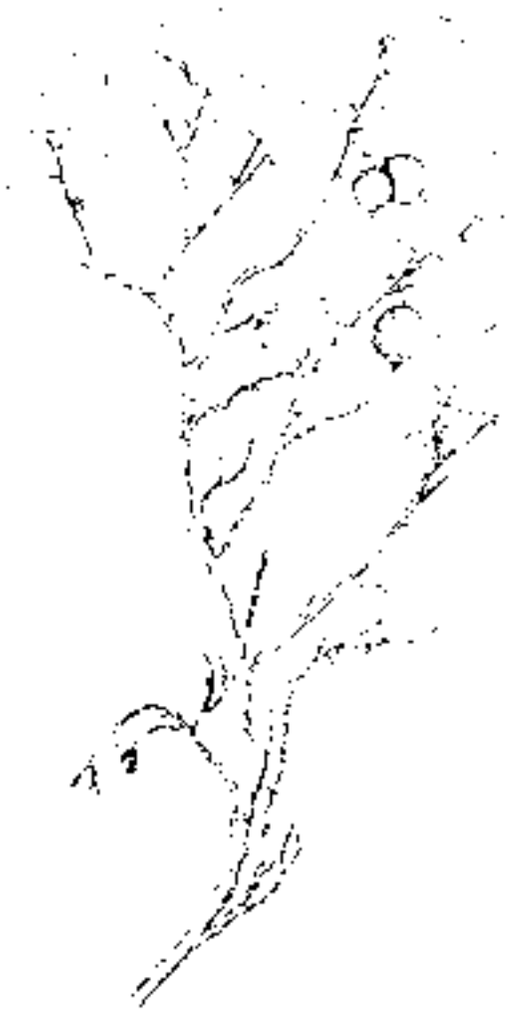

Illustration from Flora of Iceland, *Áskell Löve, 1983.*
Drawing by Dagny Tande Lid.

Black Island & Blueberries

By Christine (Johannson) Best

From Winnipeg the radio announcer's voice crackles over the airwaves. "Well, folks, it's mighty hot! Today a couple of fellows fried an egg on the pavement at the corner of Portage and Main."

The year is 1937, with no end in sight to the long depression. I am in my tenth year — the middle child in a family of five children. Jonas, fourteen, is the oldest, followed by Peggy, myself, Laura and little Paul who is just two.

The August sun feels like a furnace, it's relentless rays beating down on us. Maple trees form a shelter belt along the fence that fronts our acreage. Seeking relief from the heat, my older sister Peggy and I spread a blanket in their shade. Lying on our tummies we search the dry grass for the elusive four-leaf clovers we believe will bring us good luck.

"What are you going to wish for if you find one?" Peggy asks as she fingers through the grass.

"Oh, I don't know. Right now I'd love to dive into Lake Winnipeg, just to cool off."

Mother calls from the summer kitchen, "Girls, it's time to set the table for supper."

"Wait for me, Peggy." As the tiny plants separate to my prodding, suddenly there it is, the different one! With its extra leaf it is so very special.

"Found one! Boy, aren't I lucky. Now I can make my wish."

The summer kitchen is basically a shed. It is used only in the summer to avoid heating the house because all cooking is done on a wood-burning stove.

Two white enamelled water pails stand on the wood box. In one a long-handled red-rimmed dipper bobs in the cool water.

The oilcloth-covered table is wiped clean, as is the congoleum floor.

A basin and jug sit on the washstand in the corner. Partially hidden behind the stove is the slop pail, ringed with grease and offensive to the nose. Bright-eyed kittens stare at me from the Co-op calendar, nailed to a stud in the wall above.

From the rafters hang coiled and sticky flypapers. Mother's banners in her war against the buzzing insects.

Screened and shuttered against the flies and storms, this is our summer refuge.

At the supper table Father seems jollier than usual. His eyes twinkle as he asks, "Well, how would you like to go on a little holiday?"

Looking up, her mouth agape, Mother nearly drops the bowl of steaming potatoes.

"What sort of holiday could you possibly be thinking of, Siggi? Surely you are not serious."

Her voice rises to an unfamiliar pitch, disbelief in every syllable. She looks

Father squarely in the eye.

"You know we can't afford a holiday. I never heard anything so ridiculous. Where would we go with five children, and besides, you have to finish building the Johnson's house."

"Now, now, Helga." Father speaks slowly and calmly. "This opportunity may not present itself again."

Pushing her plate away, Mother rises hastily. Her back to the table, she fidgets with the pots and pans on the stove.

Five pair of expectant eyes stay trained on Father's sunburned face. Not another word is spoken, but Father's quick wink brings reassurance that Mother will be won over.

That night I listen to quiet voices coming from my parents' room. With my four-leaf clover tucked under my pillow, I fall asleep, wondering where we might go.

At the breakfast table many voices chime, "Are we going, Mamma? Where are we going, Mamma?"

Sitting down heavily, she responds, "Eat your porridge first, then we can talk about it." The glimmer of a smile crosses her face as she watches us quickly empty our bowls.

Speaking quietly, Mother continues, "Your Father has been offered the use of Uncle Ingi's fishing boat. Now that the commercial fishing season is over, the boat is lying idle at the Hnausa dock. Uncle Ingi will run the boat because he knows the lake so well."

With a note of resignation in her voice, the worry lines creasing her forehead, she finishes, "How we will keep Paul from falling overboard is beyond me."

"Where will the boat take us, Mamma?" I ask. Having been to the lakeshore many times, I recalled straining to see across to the far shore. To me, the lake was like the ocean — too big to be measured.

Mother's voice interrupts my thoughts. "Your Father told you that as a young man he worked freighting fish by horse-drawn sleighs across the ice from Black Island.

Well, that's where we are going. We will camp on Black Island. Jonas, Father and Uncle Ingi will catch fish for our supper while the rest of us pick blueberries."

Mother brightened at the thought of all the juicy blueberries we could pick. Now I understand how Father convinced her the trip was a good idea.

"We are to leave Friday evening and camp overnight near the Hnausa pier," Mother adds.

The time has finally come. 'Henry,' Father's Model A car, is loaded as we rattle along the rutted dirt road to the lake. Jostled together in the back seat, the five of us sing, 'Row, row, row your boat' and play 'I spy with my little eye' until the blue of the lake appears through the trees.

Driving into the lane leading to the pier, Uncle Ingi points out his boat and reassures his sister, Helga, "The Daisy Mae is a very safe boat — she's twenty-two feet long and sturdily built."

Before 'Henry' comes to a complete stop, we squirm into our bathing suits. Squealing with pleasure, there is a race across the still-hot sand. Splashing and laughing, we wade into the lake until we begin to bob, then turn back and let the waves carry us to shore.

Father soon joins us. Standing like a steady rock, his broad shoulders serve as our diving board. Mother and Uncle Ingi watch from shore, ready with towels and snacks when we have finally had enough.

"The night is clear," says Father. "Let's not bother setting up the tents. I'll build a bonfire on the beach. Each of us can roll up in a blanket and sleep under the stars."

Wrapped like mummies, Uncle Ingi, Father, Jonas, Peggy, myself, Laura, Mother and little Paul, lie side by side on the sand. The fire hisses and sputters, sending out sparks like fireflies, now here, now gone. At the end of the long wooden pier, the lighthouse beacon winks on and off.

The waves, quieter now, lap the shoreline with a predictable rhythm. Lulled, we nestle into the sand.

A nudge, and I awaken suddenly. Opening my eyes, I see Peggy's face with a finger to her lips.

"Shush!"

She points to the lake and there, partially shrouded by the early morning mist, I see two deer. Heads bent to the water's edge, they drink their fill. The nudging and shushing continues down the line until we are all sharing the magical moment. Too soon the deer perk up their ears and with white tails flying, leap off into the woods.

Uncle Ingi is first up. Lighting the fire and filling the billycan with water, he is anxious for his coffee. The sun is peeping over the eastern shore of the lake, burning off the mist and promising another hot day.

Father drives off, leaving 'Henry' parked in a farmer's field nearby. Breakfast is ready on his return. Eating hurriedly, we are eager to be off.

Proudly Uncle Ingi helps us onto his boat. We step gingerly off the pier across the gangplank to the wooden deck. Built for rugged service, the Daisy Mae belies her name. She is a working boat — no mistake! As Father lifts the cover to the hold, we are all reminded of this fact. The smell of fish still clings to the wooden planks of the now empty space.

The men carefully stash the tents, food, clothing and blankets in the hold. The heavy motor chugs with a steady beat. Father quickly steps onto the pier and unties the thick rope that holds the Daisy Mae fast. Just as quickly he's back on board, his smile reassuring Mother as she huddles on the deck, arms wrapped around Laura and little Paul.

We are off, heading north to Hecla Island. Gulls swoop and glide above us as the shoreline fades.

"What have you there in your hand, Anna?" Father asks me.

Not wanting to break the spell and explain about the four-leaf clovers and my wishes, I said, "It's a secret." Quickly I tuck the prized, if shrivelled, clover back into my pocket.

Uncle Ingi explains that we won't be stopping at Gull Harbour on Hecla Island, but will go on to Black Island. There is no dock on Black Island, but on the northeastern shore there is a good natural harbour.

The Daisy Mae cuts through the water making good time. With hardly any wind, the lake is calm and Mother begins to relax.

We pass by the pier at Gull Harbour and soon begin the turn around Black Island. Beyond a point of land we can see a boat, it's occupants waving desperately to get our attention. As we approach, Uncle Ingi waves back.

"That boat is overcrowded," he tells us. "They're having engine trouble and will have to be towed to land."

The people are Indian. With much gesturing from the elders, shy smiles from the children and constant loud barking from the dog, they show their relief when Father flings a tow rope within their reach. Once securely tied, we head for the harbour.

Through the trees we see the teepees and smell the wood smoke. Father observes, "Obviously we've landed at an Indian summer camp. It will be interesting for all of us."

Daisy Mae's engine is cut to a low putt-putt. Slowly we approach the shore where a large flat rock serves as a pier. On this rock lie long sun-bleached boards which Father slides into place across our bow. After securing the Daisy Mae by rope to a nearby tree, he quickly takes little Paul from Mother's outstretched arms. In turn, we each step carefully down the gangplank, carrying our camping gear.

Uncle Ingi manoeuvres the crippled boat into position. Thanking us with their smiles and laughter, the Indians scramble off, following us along the shore to their camp.

With a sigh, Father puts down his heavy load.

"This is a good place," he says. "We can camp right here on the beach."

Relieved, we drop our bundles and scamper barefoot to the water's edge. Like the shore birds that dart about, starting and stopping, we run in and out of the water daring the waves to catch us.

Meanwhile the tents go up, firewood is gathered, supplies are unpacked. Through the trees we catch glimpses of movement and hear voices from the Indian camp. Father promises to walk along the beach with us after supper, so we can have a closer look.

In the evening the lake is calm — the waves mere ripples, whispering to the sand. I beg, "Can we go now, Father? Please, please."

"Take my hand, Laura. You, too, Anna."

Jonas and Peggy trail behind us, often stooping to pick up mussel shells. Sneaking glances through the poplar trees, I think how tall the teepees are with their long poles protruding into the sky — how different from our brown canvas tents.

Then I saw it.

"Father. Look!"

There, hanging from a tree, wrapped and strapped onto a cradle board by leather thongs, was a real live baby.

"Jonas, Peggy, come and see!" Only in picture books had we ever before seen a cradle board.

Father said, "I told you this would be interesting. But come along now, we mustn't stand and stare."

Smoke hung in the air like mist, shrouding the camp. Tightening my grip on Father's hand, we continued our stroll along the beach. At the far end of the camp stood a large square wooden platform. Father pointed out the two poles attached, kitty-corner from each other. "Tonight we may have some music. This is no doubt a dance floor. Lanterns will be hung from the poles after dark."

Retracing our footprints we hurry back to tell Mother what we have just seen. With Paul asleep, Uncle Ingi and Mother are sitting quietly by the fire.

"Tomorrow we will look for blueberries, so it's early to bed tonight for all of us," says Mother.

I lie awake, thinking of the baby strapped onto the cradle board. How it would be fascinated by the dancing, whispering poplar leaves and how the birds would entertain it by flying all around and singing.

"Wish I could be that baby for just a day," I said to myself.

Morning comes and Mother is all business. "Father, Uncle Ingi and Jonas are going fishing," she says, "and we are going after those blueberries."

With empty syrup and lard pails attached to belts around our waists, we follow Mother and little Paul up the sloping hillside. Scattered over a large area, we see people bent low over the blueberry bushes that grow so close to the ground.

Not all of the berries go into my pail. Some find their way into my mouth.

"Just look at the size of these berries," exclaims Mother. "It won't take many to fill a jar," and she laughs. We smile our blue-lipped smiles.

The sun gets hotter as it rises high in the sky. Bushes and brambles tug at our pant legs and our pails become heavy.

"Just a little while longer," says Mother. Little Paul pulls at her skirt and whines, "Go, now."

From the hillside we see the boat lying at anchor near a huge black rock. To me it looks like a sea monster, leaping out of the water. I wonder if Father has caught the catfish he says lurks at its base.

"The men will soon be coming into shore for lunch," Mother says. "We had better take our berries and go back to camp."

She hands Peggy her pail and lifts Paul up into her arms. We pick our way between the bushes and rocks down to the sandy beach.

The Indian boys and girls splash and squeal in the lake. A dog bounds out at us, stopping to shake himself dry and thoroughly spraying everyone. The children stop to stare at us. Smiling, we wave to them.

We hear the motor before we see the boat. Laura and I, with Paul in tow, run along the shore to meet it.

While Father and Uncle Ingi secure the Daisy Mae, Jonas trots down the gangplank carrying a large fish, its tail thrashing from side to side.

"It's still alive," Jonas explains to our questioning eyes.

"What is it?" I ask.

"Why, it's the catfish that Father told you about, of course. Ugly, isn't it!"

"Just about the ugliest thing I ever saw," said Laura. "I'm not going to eat any of that fish, that's for sure!"

The afternoon sun is blindingly bright. It glints off the incoming waves and promises to burn the skin off our backs.

Wearing their sun hats, Jonas and Peggy build a sand castle for Paul, complete with towers, turrets and a moat that refuses to be filled. The sand sucks up pail after pail of the water hauled from the lake.

"Paul will certainly sleep well tonight," says Mother.

Two little figures catch our attention as they totter towards us. Wobbling on high-heeled shoes, dragging long skirts in the sand, they approach slowly.

"Looks like we have visitors," says Mother. "Show them the sand castle and I'll get some cookies to give them."

Fascinated, we stand and stare.

"Come closer," says Jonas, gesturing in case they don't understand. The girls, coal-black hair falling over their dress-up clothes, edge towards the sand castle, apprehension in their dark brown eyes.

Mother appears, carrying the cookie tin in her outstretched hand. Taking a cookie each, the girls nod a thank you and without a word turn and stumble up the beach.

"Perhaps they will be back," says Mother. "We should save some cookies, just in case."

While Father and Uncle Ingi savour the boiled catfish, we gladly roast weiners over the bonfire.

The fire glows brightly as darkness closes in and the moon casts its ribbon of light, directly to us across the still water. My back shivers in the damp evening air while my face flushes from the heat.

Our fingers become sticky as we spear marshmallow after marshmallow onto long willow branches and plunge them into the flames. Scorched black, they taste of smoke with the sweetness of honey.

The sound of music drifts across to us from the Indian camp. I picture the lanterns hanging from the poles on the dance platform, the people twirling to the fast-paced reels and polkas. Father explains that not all of the people in the camp are Indian. Some of them are Metis and it is their music we are hearing.

Clouds are threatening in the morning when we awake.

"Let's pick some more blueberries first thing, as we may have to leave this afternoon," says Mother.

All available containers are gathered for our last session of picking. We work quickly, glad of the cool weather. Father keeps an eye on the gathering clouds and soon the men leave to break camp and ready the Daisy Mae. Tingles of excitement run through me as I look forward to the boat trip home.

Rain is falling as Uncle Ingi steers the Daisy Mae out of the harbour. Dark clouds gather in the west. Coming around the point we head into the storm, leaving Black Island behind.

There is a thud and a spraying of water. The Daisy Mae drops into the trough of each wave as it looms up before us.

"It's like riding a roller coaster," I say to my Father. Mother, together with Peggy, Laura and little Paul, has disappeared down into the hold. Jonas and I stand beside Father, facing the bow, wind tearing at our clothes. Gulls ride the currents in wide circles above our heads. The boat slaps into trough after deeper trough. Uncle Ingi grins at us as he grips the wheel, holding the Daisy Mae on

course. Father pats me on the head, calling me his little Viking, as I thrill to the rise and fall of our ride.

Water is spilling across the deck now, threatening to run into the hold.

"We had better go down below," says Father. "Mother will be frantic!"

He was right. There sat Mother and Peggy hanging onto Laura and Paul for dear life.

"Thank God you're here, Siggi. The water is spraying us. We'll soon be soaked."

"We'll be alright, Helga, don't worry. It's just a bit of a squall."

Picking up the heavy wooden lid to the hold, Father tilts it at an angle, holding it to partially cover the open hatch. The lid protects us from the spray, yet allows some air to enter the smelly place.

Father's presence reassures us all as we ride the waves with the Daisy Mae.

"This is nothing new to your brother, Helga," says Father. "Lake Winnipeg is a shallow lake and the fishermen are quite used to rough water in sudden storms. The rain is easing off now and I can see the clouds racing to the east."

Mother relaxes her hold on Laura and little Paul as the plunging and heaving of our boat subsides.

Letting down the lid, Father rubs his tired arms. "I'm going up on deck. It would be good for all of you to come up for some fresh air. The Hnausa dock can't be too far away."

Peeping through the receding clouds, the sun warms us and dries off the slippery wet deck. Uncle Ingi points to the southwest where the lighthouse tower on the Hnausa dock is barely visible.

"We'll soon be on dry land, Helga," says Father. "Henry will have us home by supper time."

The engine sputters as our speed is cut and the Daisy Mae glides smoothly through the entrance to the harbour. Uncle Ingi steers her beside the pier, the starboard side bumping the dock, rocking us. Stepping across the gang-plank, our arms loaded, we straggle down the pier on unsteady legs.

Mother calls after us, "Do be careful not to spill the blueberries."

Having secured the Daisy Mae to her mooring, Father, Jonas and Uncle Ingi are last off.

"I'll go and get Henry," says Father and he heads down the lane to the farmer's field.

In a way of celebration, Mother sends Jonas to the well for cold water. "We'll all have lemonade and cookies when Father returns," she says. The rest of us run barefoot at the water's edge. Paul doesn't hesitate to sit down in the water, soaking his clothes. Nothing worries Mother, now that we are safely back on land.

Jonas calls to us, "Here comes Father now."

What a surprise when 'Henry' comes closer. Mother, Uncle Ingi and Jonas are dumbfounded.

"What in the world happened to the windows?" Mother asks, noting that only the canvas framing is left intact.

"Well, Helga, you might not believe this, but the farmers' horses chewed out the celluloid. They obviously found it a tasty treat," and he laughed.

Uncle Ingi, slapping his thighs as he joins in the laughter, says, "I've known horses to do some wacky things but this takes the cake."

"Oh, well," says Father. "The trip was well worth the price of a bit of celluloid."

Back on the rough dirt road, we head for home. Again we sing all of our favourite songs, including 'Row, row, row your boat.'

I feel for the dried-up clover deep in my jacket pocket and I know that wishes do come true.

In the Red River Valley

Part III, Chapter One
By Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason
Translated by Thelma Guðrún Whale
Continued from Summer 1994

Mabel

At the beginning of 1886, there were quite a few changes at the crooked house in Point Douglas. Kjartan and Anna were married about that time. Although she was poor, my cousin Sólrún held a small reception for them and there was great joy. Afterwards, the newlyweds moved to the western part of the city, and they came to the crooked house only on Sundays when the weather was fine. Sólrún and I felt the house was empty. Barney and Barði shared a room all that winter, but in the spring Barði went home to Iceland for good. Perhaps he was happy there for only a short time and disappeared to the South Pacific Islands as he had often planned. We never heard from him after he went home, and he is now out of this story.

Whenever anyone left the crooked house, someone else came in his stead. More people wanted to be Sólrún's boarders than had the opportunity. None of the eleven rooms she managed were empty for more than one or two days. Even people who were not Icelandic sought to get board and room there, although, in Winnipeg in those days, it was seldom that people of other races lived with Icelanders.

The day after Kjartan and Anna moved out of the crooked house, there arrived a girl who said she was English and that her name was Mabel Campion. She was about twenty years old. She was tiny, short in stature and lean of body. Her face was extremely pale; she had very dark hair, small black eyes, a pretty mouth and a small chin. Her nose was her most distinctive feature. It was rather long and prominent and very thin. She always appeared to be thrusting it forward unconsciously, feeling her way with it.

It was on a Saturday, about noon, that Mabel Campion, or whatever her name was, first set foot in the crooked house. It

was one of the coldest days of the winter, 40 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit. A chill north wind was blowing, dreary and bitterly cold. It was I who happened to open the door to this strange and mysterious girl. I remember being startled when I saw her standing on the landing outside the door, thinly clad and shivering with the cold.

"Please come in," I said immediately, before she spoke.

"Thank you," she said, walking into the hall. I could see she was very cold. "Is the lady of the house in?" she asked after taking off her mitts, which were very thin, and running her hand over her face as if to warm it, although the hand was white and trembling. I guessed by her appearance and her speech, for she addressed me in English, that she was not Icelandic.

"Yes, she is at home," I said.

"May I speak to her privately?" said the girl, in a low, plaintive voice.

"She has a lot of trouble speaking English," I said, "And she would not be able to talk without an interpreter."

"Are you her son?"

"No," I said. "But I am her cousin."

"Then I know that you will be so kind as to translate what I say to her into her language."

"That I shall do with great pleasure," I said. "Now I shall go and tell my cousin that you wish to speak to her."

"I thank you," murmured the girl, bowing slightly. I walked into the dining room. My cousin was there. I told her an English-speaking girl was in the hall and wanted to talk to her.

"What business can she have with me?" said my cousin. She became a little confused and looked down at her dress. "I can' t appear before English people in this old rag! Bless you, talk to her while I put on another apron and fix my hair."

But just as she said the last word, the girl entered the room and bowed before my cousin.

"My name is Mabel Campion," said the girl, looking directly into my cousin's face. "I have come to ask you to let me stay here until spring."

I was now the interpreter and I translated everything that Mabel said into Icelandic and everything my cousin said into English.

"I can't allow any more people to stay," said my cousin.

"I shall pay in advance weekly."

"All the rooms are occupied," said my cousin.

"I work at the Albion laundry and make a dollar a day and can easily pay my way."

"I don't doubt that you can pay," said my cousin. "But I don't have room for any more people than are here. Also, I do not board any but my own countrymen."

"I am English," said Mabel Campion.

"Yes, I know that the English are good people," said my cousin, smiling. "But this place is not fancy enough to have English folk living here."

"I eat simple food — oatmeal in the morning, if you please, and I can sleep in a small cot."

"You need a room for a cot, however small it is," said my cousin.

"I shall make myself comfortable in the kitchen, if I may."

"But I don't speak English," said my cousin. "I am Icelandic and know no other language. Therefore I can only have Icelandic boarders."

"Then I shall learn to speak Icelandic."

"It would take you a long time."

"We shall see. Please be so good as to do me this favour."

"I simply cannot do it."

"I will fetch my suitcase right away."

"I told you I could not possibly let you stay."

"I will have my trunk brought on Monday."

"You don't understand," said my cousin. "I am telling you clearly and frankly that you cannot stay here."

"Yes, I understand," said Mabel Campion. "But I am moving in here, whatever it costs."

"You cannot move here without my permission," said my cousin.

"Yet I know that you will not chase me out when I come with my trunk."

"I forbid you to bring your trunk here," said my cousin, her blue eyes looking rather severe.

"I am still going to move here."

"Why do you say that when I forbid you to come?"

"Things are so hard for me!" said Mabel Campion, her voice breaking. "So very, very hard!"

"What is wrong with you?" said my cousin, her eyes softening.

"I have no mother, no sisters or brothers, no cousins, no friends. I have no one — no one but a cruel stepmother. I am an orphan!"

Mabel let out a deep sigh and her eyes filled with tears.

"Poor girl!" said my cousin to herself and I saw that she felt sorry for the girl. "The poor thing. Things are hard for her."

"I can see that you are kind," said Mabel Campion. "Oh, please, don't send me away! Let me stay in your house. Oh, be my mother!" She ran to my cousin like a little girl to her mother, put her arms around her neck and buried her face against her cheek. Oh, let me stay here!" she said, tears streaming down her face. "Oh, let me stay! And be my mother, my dear!"

My cousin's eyes filled with tears. She wrapped her arms around this forlorn, sickly girl with motherly affection, kissed her on the cheek and said, "Yes, my dear, you may stay here since you want to so much."

Thus Mabel Campion came into the crooked house. Two hours later, a driver brought her small trunk and large suitcase. And although she was not happy about it, my cousin allowed her to share her bedroom as her daughter Anna had done.

The longer I knew this girl, the more peculiar and puzzling I found her character. There was something about her manner and behaviour which I had never noticed in any other person. Sometimes she seemed clothed in such sensitivity that she felt sorry for anyone in trouble and she seemed to want to look for those who were in sorrow so that she could console them and help them. But now and then she seemed extremely cold-hearted and almost cruel, bitter and sarcastic.

She always talked a great deal but asked few questions and said little of her own affairs. She wanted mostly to talk to me and my cousin. It was amazing how well she and my cousin understood each other, even the first days they were together. Sometimes the three of us sat alone in the kitchen in the evenings, when my cousin had finished her housework, and talked of many things. I often marvelled at how much English my cousin understood and how Mabel could understand Icelandic words and even whole sentences in that language. I quickly saw that Mabel was determined to gain my cousin's friendship and approval. Mabel was often cross with some of the boarders, thinking they did not behave very well, that they paid little attention to table manners and always spoke too loudly. "There is no gentleman in the house but you," she told me sometimes. I knew she said it because I was Sólrún's cousin. Sometimes she said to me, "All Icelandic men but you are ugly." I knew she had an ulterior motive. I knew she could not consider me handsome because I had never been called that. Once Björn tickled her under the chin when he passed her in the dining room. He was always so cheerful and did it very innocently. But he was punished for it. Mabel hit him a violent blow on the cheek. "I have to teach you some manners," she said. "A box on the ear would have been better!" said Björn, going to the mirror to examine his left cheek. "Well, she must have had a ball of iron in her hand." There was a bruise on his cheek the next day. Björn certainly did not tickle a girl under the chin again.

One Sunday morning, shortly after Mabel Campion moved into the crooked house, old O'Brian came to see me. We talked together in the dining room and while we were there, Mabel walked into the room briefly. O'Brian pretended not to notice her. Outside the door as he was leaving, he said to me, "I see a little pigeon has flown into your house and I see by her nose that she did not come from Iceland."

"Do you mean the girl who came in a while ago?" I said.

"Yes," said O'Brian. "What is her name?"

I told him her name, mentioned that she was English, had no family and that she worked at the Albion laundry. That was all I knew about her.

O'Brian scratched himself under the chin and thought for a moment.

"Strange girl that," he said all at once. "She resembles the women who have acted for a long time in tragedies on stage in a large city."

"You are always so full of jokes, Mr. O'Brian," I said.

"But I am not joking now, my son," said O'Brian, looking very serious. "I shall tell you something. I once saw a girl who was so like this Miss Campion in appearance and build, that two girls could not be more alike. That was in Ireland, many years ago."

"Was she also English?"

"Yes, she was English and had acted the heroine in Shakespeare's tragedies for many years."

"What was her name?"

"I don't remember. She came to northern Ireland one fine day and lived there for a time. A few months after she came, all the young men had disappeared from there and fled to the most southerly point of land. They had not been there long when this English actress went there to live for a year or two. Then all the young men fled to the northernmost point of land and existed there on raw shell fish like savages!"

"Were they afraid of the girl?" I asked.

"I don't dare say anything about that, dear son. But something must have put the boys to flight."

Old O'Brian took leave of me with a hand shake and set off home. I heard him crooning to himself as was his habit. And the verse went like this:

When daylight is no more
And Death knocks at the door
and calls, "Come!"
Then the answer is "A toast to you!"
And they pour brandy, too,
Or rum.

Mabel Campion worked in the laundry on weekdays, and every Saturday night, she paid her board and room for the next week. But on Sundays she always went to church — usually about noon. The church she attended was in the extreme southwest end of the city. If she went in the evening, she asked me to go with her. I always did. On the way back from church, she had a lot to talk about but avoided, like the plague, mentioning anything about herself. Once when we were going home from church in brilliant moonlight, I asked her if she had ever appeared on the stage. I was always so curious, as the reader knows.

"Why do you ask that?" she said.

"I think that sometimes you have the presence and the movements of an actress," I said. I was a long way from seeing anything like that but I felt that old O'Brian was very discerning. Still, it was sometimes hard to separate his serious words from his jokes and pranks.

"Have you, young fellow, known actors so well that you can see by the appearance and walk of a twenty year old girl, whether she has been on stage or not?" She laid special emphasis on the words, 'young fellow.'

"I have seen people on the stage," I said.

"There is a difference in the way actors behave on the stage and how they are at home or on the streets."

"Have you never been on the stage?" I said.

"Yes, I was once on the stage in London, but that was only once, and I said only a few words. It is impossible that five years later, I carry with me the signs that I have acted in a theatre."

"What was the play?" I asked.

"Macbeth. I was Lady Macbeth's servant, and did it quite against my will."

"Was it painful, what you had to say and do in the play?" I was thinking of what O'Brian had said about the English actress who went to Ireland.

"Have you not read Macbeth?"

"Yes, but I don't remember what the servant-girl or court lady has to say."

"She comes on stage at the beginning of the fifth act and talks with the doctor. She tells him that she has seen Lady Macbeth rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon it, read it, afterwards seal it and again return to bed. And then she sees Lady Macbeth come walking in her sleep with a candle in her hand. Oh, ghastly! Horrible! Dreadful! She hears Lady Macbeth talk about a spot of blood and the smell of blood and awful things. Oh,

terror and dismay! Fear is the terror of darkness. I would have done anything to avoid taking part in that evil play — in that terrible, hideous, bloodstained play. But I was forced to act in it."

"And who drove you to it?"

"Oh, stop asking questions!" she said in a trembling voice. "I had a cruel stepmother who was an actress. Stop asking about it, I say! No one has the right to question me and make me bring up the most painful and blackest of sorrows. Stop! Stop asking!"

She stopped for a moment and stamped her foot hard and savagely on the ice on the sidewalk. I saw a strange gleam in her eyes.

"Forgive me, Miss Campion," I said. "I had no intention of causing you to dredge up your sorrows. I didn't know this would open old wounds. Forgive me. I shall never ask you again about this."

She quieted down immediately, but bit her lip and stared into space.

"I know you did not know about my troubles," she said a bit later, drying her eyes. "We shall forget it altogether. Let's talk about something else."

We continued along the street in the bright moonlight, but did not talk much until we got home to my cousin's warm, bright kitchen. There, excellent coffee and pastries awaited us. Mabel and I began to converse as usual, with as much enthusiasm as before, and no one in the house knew that she had been so agitated on the way home.

However, I thought about this incident for a long time after and drew various conclusions about it which amounted to nothing.

As the winter passed, I noticed that, on occasion, my cousin was not as happy and lively as she normally was. Sometimes I was aware of her staring fixedly at Mabel when she was talking to someone in the kitchen or dining room. Afterwards, my cousin remained in deep

thought for quite a while, it seemed to me. I often asked her if she were ill or lonesome. But she laughed and seemed to awaken from a dream and said there was nothing wrong with her. However, I had my own opinion about that.

Then it so happened that one Saturday evening my cousin and I were all alone in the house for a few hours. We were both sitting in the kitchen. I was reading the evening paper and she was polishing spoons. I felt her looking at me from time to time.

"Say, cousin," she said when I laid aside the paper. "Since we are alone here, I want to talk to you about something."

"Yes, cousin," I said. "I'll listen carefully. What is it?"

"It is about Mabel," she said in a barely audible voice, looking around as if to make sure Mabel was not around. "Do you notice peculiar about her?"

"No, I don't think so," I said. "She talks intelligently and I think she is a nice girl. However, she is given to teasing and is sometimes quarrelsome, but that is all very innocent."

"I know she is a fine, intelligent girl," said my cousin, "and she is exceptionally kind and good to me; that I give her. But do you not find something strange about her behaviour, her voice and her eyes?"

"No, I have not really noticed that," I said. I still did not know what my cousin was getting at. "Certainly, at times she becomes a bit excited and anxious, as you know, but I think that is normal."

"Don't you think there is something wrong with her, that she is ill? Don't you see how pale and thin and lacking in appetite she is? And don't you notice how easily she cries?"

"I have never thought of it before. I know she is small and delicate and very emotional. But I have never imagined that anything is really wrong with her."

"But I can tell you, my cousin, that several weeks ago, I found out there is something terribly wrong with her and that something horrible happened to her once."

"You make me curious," I said, looking wonderingly at my cousin. "Has she told you anything?"

"No, she never tells me anything about herself and even if she had told me something, I would not understand it fully. But I have seen her do something which is strange and unnatural."

"What did you see her do?" I said, full of curiosity.

"I have seen her walk in her sleep."

"Walk in her sleep?" I echoed, completely astonished.

"Yes, I have seen her walk in her sleep more than once," said my cousin, very faintly, looking around. "And I have heard her talk a great deal in her sleep, night after night. It has even happened that she has dressed herself in her sleep, shortly after midnight, and gone out. She leaves so quietly that I know nothing about it until she comes back to bed, ice-cold and shivering. I wake up, then, and try to warm her. Then she awakens also, with a start, begins to cry and pray and then falls asleep, and sleeps soundly. Sometimes she gets up shortly after she has fallen asleep, puts on her white shawl, takes paper and pen, sits down at the little table, writes a long letter, stares at it for a long time, folds it, puts it in an envelope and writes on the outside. I leave a light burning till midnight and sometimes all night. And when she has sealed the letter and put it inside a book, she begins to talk about some frightening thing which happened to her, calls various names and prays. I have seen her examine her hands and say, 'There is blood, blood, blood!' Sometimes she says she smells blood and sees blood running out into the Red River. Then she suddenly shouts, Gold! Gold! Gold! I see it! I see it! I see it! By the Red River. By the Red River. Come! Come! Come! Come!' And she always prays as she does that. But in the morning, when she wakes up, she takes the letter, tears it into small bits and burns it. Then she hugs me and kisses me, calls me her mother and asks me to forgive the trouble she has caused me. She talks a lot about this sickness of hers but I understand little of it. I do understand when she tells me she has walked in her sleep since she was a child. And I understand when she asks me not to tell anyone about her illness. She has shown me medicine which the doctor has given her. And, cousin, I would never have said anything about this and would have kept it secret all my life if there were not something about this that makes me truly depressed and afraid."

"Is it this awful talk of hers about blood?" I asked.

"No, it is not exactly that, although it is terribly disturbing to hear that. But it is the other which frightens me so; every time Mabel comes from outside in her sleepwalking stage, there is mud on her hands and a smell of earth from her, as if she had rolled herself in it or been digging a grave."

When my cousin told me this, I was close to being afraid of the dark. It reminded me of stories I had heard about witches who were respectable women by day but spent the nights out in graveyards in their true forms.

"Have you never followed her?" I asked.

"No, never. I did not dare. Also, I seldom know she has gone out until she comes back in."

"Where do you think she goes when she goes out at night?"

"I really don't know."

"Maybe she goes down to the graveyard?"

"That's not likely. It is so far away."

"Then where can she be going?"

"Heaven knows!" said my cousin, sighing wearily. "Oh, how I wish this girl had never come into my house! I am afraid of this behaviour of hers although I know she cannot help it. I am sure that something dreadful has happened to her to cause this. I am sorry for her, yet I am afraid. What am I to do?"

I had many ideas, most of them foolish nonsense. But I could never in my mind believe that Mabel was insane. Neither could I believe she was a wicked person. It seemed logical to me that she walked in her sleep and talked about what was uppermost in her mind when she was awake. She had acted the part of Lady Macbeth's lady-in-waiting, according to what she told me on the way home from church, and seeing and hearing Lady Macbeth in the play had awakened fear and trembling in her. And now she was acting that lady in her sleepwalking every night. There seemed nothing strange about that. But many ideas came to me.

"Tell me something, cousin," I said after I had wracked my brains for a while. "Do you know what is in the letter she writes every night?"

"No, she is silent while she is writing and then she seals it. Even if I saw it open, I could not read it or understand it. But I know to whom she is writing because every morning I see the name on the envelope."

"And to whom is she writing?" I asked.

"Strange to say, Mabel is in her heart virtuous and devout because all the letters she writes in her sleep are addressed to the Son of God. On every envelope stands in beautiful handwriting, "J. Godson, Esq., Winnipeg, Man."

"Godson?" I said. "Are you absolutely sure that she writes the name Godson on every envelope?"

"I am absolutely sure," said my cousin. "And it is Godson she calls on when she talks about gold in her sleep. I have often heard her say, 'Gold, gold, gold, I see it! I see it! I see it! By the Red River. By the Red River. Come, come, come, come!' She always says it four times. Oh, come, Godson!"

Again I began to think. And now something entirely different came to mind.

"Do something for me, cousin," I said all at once. "Let me know, somehow, the next time you become aware of Mabel leaving the house at midnight. I am going to follow her."

"I will do that," said my cousin. "I will knock softly on the door of your room and wake you up. But I shall go with you."

"Well! Let us wait calmly until then," I said.

And we talked no more about it then.

Three or four weeks passed. The snow was gone, the ground had thawed and the grass was becoming green. One night, shortly after midnight, I was awakened by a gentle knock on my door. I dressed quickly and walked into the hall. My cousin was there wearing a dark coat.

"Mabel just went out," she whispered.

We crept out onto the landing outside the door, waited a few moments and then went down the steps very quietly. The stairs creaked and groaned and the handrail always shook when someone was going down. Therefore we had to go cautiously so we would not be heard. It was calm and mild outside and rather bright, although there was no moon. Nothing could be heard but the babbling of the Red River. It rolled onward, dirty-brown and swift, its banks almost overflowing as was usual in the spring. It continued onward, whatever the fate of man, like the stream in Tennyson's beautiful poem. "Men may come and men may go, but I go on forever," said the stream.

As has been told in the first part of this story, no one lived in the downstairs rooms of the crooked house after it was damaged during the flood in the spring of 1882. All the windows were boarded up and the front door locked. It has also been mentioned that there was a cellar under the house which had first been deep but had now collapsed and was never used. In two or three places, it was possible to crawl under the house, below the beams, into holes which were caused by the flood. No attempt had ever been made to fill up these holes or hide them and they grew larger and larger as time passed.

My cousin and I walked around the house, peered in every direction and listened. We also looked under the house. There was nothing but darkness there and no rustling or scratching could be heard. We walked up and down the river bank for a while, but nothing happened. No one could be seen anywhere and nothing could be heard but the murmur of the river and now and again the clatter, of a steam train travelling west of the city. We then started for home, thinking it useless to search any longer. But, just as we got to the stairs, we heard the sound of iron striking stone under the house, not far from the north gable.

"She is under the house," whispered my cousin, taking hold of my arm. "She is digging under the house."

We went to the largest space under the beams and looked in. It was very damp and chilly and so dim I could not see. But I soon realized someone nearby was rooting in the mud.

"Miss Campion!" I said in a low voice. "Are you there?"

"Yes, I am here," was answered. It was Mabel.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Well, I am just digging, digging, digging! Why shouldn't I dig? Who will prevent me from digging?" She sounded quite distraught.

"Come out to my cousin and me," I said. I really did not believe she would heed my command.

"What do you want with me?" she asked in a disturbed voice. She came towards me holding a small spade in her right hand.

"What do you want to tell me?" she said.

"Come out," I said.

She obeyed without grumbling and crawled nimbly out.

"What do you want?" she said again.

"Why are you digging here in the cellar?" I said.

"I am digging for gold, sir," she said. "Can't you see I am digging for gold? There is gold under this house; there is gold and diamonds and pearls and emeralds! Don't you know that? Can't you see that? There! There!' She pointed. "It is under the northeast corner of the house, in a big iron trunk. There is hidden treasure under this house."

"Who says so?" I said.

"I say so. I know that with absolute certainty because I can see it. It is in a large trunk with five diamonds on the lock. But there is also blood, blood, blood, running into the Red River, and the Red River runs out into Lake Winnipeg and the Nelson River runs out of Lake Winnipeg and out into Hudson Bay. Isn't that terrible! But who is this woman?" She pointed to my cousin. "Lady Macbeth! Blood spot! Blood smell! Frightening! Go away!" she cried out.

"Mabel, don't you know me?" said my cousin in Icelandic.

"Come, come, come, come!" called Mabel. "Come, Mr. Godson." She threw the spade under the house and covered her face with her hands. "I'm afraid! Who will help me? Help!" she shouted.

She raised her hands, stepped backwards and sank down, uttering a piercing cry. "Oh Mother! Where, where, where am I?"

She began to cry pitifully and my cousin took her in her arms. We carried her up the stairs and into my cousin's room. In a moment, she was fast asleep.

The next day, Mabel did not go to work. She was ill and later in the day, she became delirious. That night a doctor was called. He said she was suffering from meningitis. She was ill for a long time but was never taken to hospital. My cousin looked after her and nursed her like the best of mothers. She hired someone she knew to do the cooking and cleaning in the meantime.

It was July before Mabel could return to work. After that she never again talked or walked in her sleep. She was fully recovered. While she was ill, no one came to ask about her, except the doctor, and she never indicated that she wished to see anyone. But she became fonder and fonder of my cousin.

The day after Mabel became ill, I crawled under the house to see what she had been doing. She had done a fair amount. First she had cleaned up the northwest corner of the house. She had just begun to loosen a large stone which stood in her way. And she had done all this with a small iron spade which was still lying where she had flung it. I left it there. It remained there all summer and far into the fall. Mabel had definitely not gone under the house after that.

None of my cousin's boarders ever found out about this incident. I did not, for my life, dare to tell O'Brian about it until much later. Of course, it would have been wiser for me to tell him immediately. I might have known that he would think it worthy of attention that a girl who had the name Godson on her lips was looking for hidden treasure under the crooked house while she was asleep.

A Distant Pledge

By Gunnar Benediktsson

Grandfather
Grand indeed.
I remember him, husky and bold —
his baritone rumble a silent
echo in my brain.
I was young,
No, young is too weak a word.
An infant, pink with new gloss,
shining ignorant smiles at the world around.
He stood at the top of winding
stairs to infinity,
and his piercing gaze
mock-challenged my perception,
my own brand of reality.
I see him on a bay stallion,
Although the photo was black and white,
And the noble steed was, like as not,
a gelding.
In my mind's world,
He rides the Icelandic horse
like heroic farmers of another age.
His fingers, gnarled and lithe,
Guide the brush in its merry dance
across the canvas.
His pictures,
The motherland in haunting flashes;
a window into my past, and his life.
And now he is gone.
I am in some way gone for him too,
These words my tribute,
This life his memory.
It is my promise, belated but fulfilled.
And I will remember him as he was,
His works shall light my heart
the way to heaven.

BOOKS

Star Myths of the Vikings

By Björn Jónsson. Swan River: Björn Jónsson, 1994. Pp. 218. Reviewed by Vidar Hreinsson.

A medical doctor would hardly be pleased if a literary scholar were to open a medical clinic in his neighbourhood. Some literary scholars may frown, as well, when they see a book on a literary subject, written by a medical doctor. There is, however, some difference between these two fields of knowledge. Fortunately, the humanities seldom imply direct questions of life and death, and there is nothing that prevents nonexperts from working on various subjects within the humanities. They have, however, limited access to the book market, the academic milieu and the publishing houses. Often it is a pity, as enthusiastic amateurs may well offer some unusual insights and understanding.

Dr. Björn Jönsson, a retired medical doctor from Swan River, Manitoba, is obviously one of those weird Icelanders who gets an idea and does not give up until he has realized it. He has earlier published an Icelandic version of this thesis (*Stjarnvísi i Eddum*, Akureyi: Skjaldborg, 1989). *Star Myths of the Vikings* was originally written during 1983 and 1984, but appears to have undergone extensive revisions since that time. By publishing the book himself, the author has escaped the somewhat slow procedures of the academic presses. The disadvantage of such a publication is of course a few shortcomings that occur with regards to proofreading, the reproduction of illustrations and so on, but despite that, the author deserves praise for his initiative.

In the field of Old Norse studies, the author is breaking new ground. My knowledge of astrology and astronomy is less than none. I am not qualified to judge that side of this work, but it is certainly assuring that the author has enjoyed the assistance of Ian Cameron, Director of the Lockhart Planetarium, University of Manitoba. Judging by the style and discourse of the book it is apparent that the author is not trained in scholarly research and writing within the humanities, however, he is successful in expressing himself with simple clarity and makes clear-cut points. The author points out energetically and with considerable consequence, what he regards as apparent

correspondences between the movements of the stars and the narratives of the Old Norse mythology.

Research into ancient cultures and cultural expressions is always problematic. One has to keep in mind that the entire frame of mind is completely different. Stories and storytelling had functions in pre-literate societies that were different from the literary market of a modern society. Stories were indeed told partly in order to preserve and communicate knowledge of various kinds, both practical and sacral. Cultures change constantly, but on the other hand, the firmament don't change that much in temporal terms of human history. These are the cornerstones of Dr. Jónsson's work, the firmament and ancient stories. He goes straight to it, and describes various correspondences between the two. This of course creates various problems. To recognize fully the relation between the myths and the firmament, a thorough cultural analysis is required. Dr. Jónsson relates to various studies of this relationship in ancient Mediterranean and Oriental cultures. On the other hand, and here again is the difference between ancient and modern cultures — it is hard to imagine the actual astronomical knowledge of ancient non-technological cultures, not the least because they often communicated their knowledge indirectly through stories. It is not enough to walk out into the night, when the sky is clear, and attempt to systematize the chaos up there until you develop a stiff neck. The illustrious figures of the firmament, the zodiac and the various constellations, did not take shape the moment someone began to study the sky. Our ancestors accumulated their knowledge and communicated it from generation to generation, and the medium may well have been myths. Additionally, much of this knowledge was embedded in it's practical use in daily life as well as in warfare and explorations. No one questions the geographical knowledge of the Icelanders from the 12th to the 14th centuries. During that period, they wrote works like *Landnámabók* and the bulk of the sagas, but the first actual description of Iceland occurs in the mid 14th century. This is not due to lack of knowledge, but due to the fact that knowledge circulated in different ways in this ancient culture. Astronomical knowledge was closely connected to chronology, and therefore some of it is preserved in encyclopaedic works, revealing original and independent development of this knowledge, indicating an extensive knowledge in this field. Of course, a society of seafarers had to know the stars fairly well.

These are but a few questions raised by *Star Myths of the Vikings*. It is perhaps too much to demand that the author provide a full treatment of the cultural context in its entirety. In a brief introduction, he quotes a passage from *Snorra Edda*, interpreting it as an indication of a connection between the ash (askur Yggdrasils) and the firmament. He refers as well to the close connections between astrology and religion in other cultures, as well as to the tendency of medieval man to build his world view upon extensive systems of belief.

Chapter one, 'Applied Celestial Mythology,' deals with the celestial phenomena and their 'correspondents' or myths

on earth, mainly based on Robert Brown Junior's works, but with occasional, somewhat confusing references to Norse mythology. The main task is to clarify how the constellations lay the basis for the myths, with regard to the stage itself, that is the firmament, the powers and qualities embedded in movements and positions interactions between planets, and finally the single actors on the stage.

Chapter two reviews briefly the cultural role of astronomy (-logy) in earlier societies, by referring to scholarly works in the field, as well as to religious texts. It is somewhat confusing which term should be used, as practical knowledge and religion were intertwined in ancient cultures. The author mentions (pp. 33-34) the astronomical knowledge of the Icelanders, where extensive practical knowledge mingled with the general medieval astrology. The reference to *Alfræði* and 'Rímbegla' is rather inaccurate (p. 33). 'Rímbegla' is a part of a larger enyclopaedic work preserved in a 14th century manuscript, but parts of it can be traced back to the 12th century as the work of the remarkable man, Stjörnu Oddi. The conclusion of the chapter states that:

> It seems very likely that the Northmen, because of their extensive contact with European and Near East civilizations, became familiar with Indian, Euphratean, Anatolian and Arabic cosmic concepts, and later the classical Græco-Roman views having acquired this information at widely separated times and places in their history. (42)

This chapter thus constructs a fairly firm ground for the comparison that follows of the firmament and mythology. One can almost be astonished that these relations have not been studied before.

Chapters three and four deal with the basis of the whole framework, the world-tree, the ash (askur Yggdrasils), as the mythical image of the firmament. This 'location' of the origins of the Norse cosmology is further strengthened by references to similar phenomena in other ancient Indo-European cultures. For a stranger to astronomy, someone who has never paid attention to the dramas of the firmament, this is rather convincing. The cosmology of the Ash thus constitutes the ground for the remainder of the thesis, which is an analysis of some of the stories/myths of *Snorra Edda*. The story of the 'fence builder' Loki, Thor's trip to Útgarða Loki, Thor's fishing trip where he catches the serpent, Baldur's death, the binding of Loki, Skaði's laughter, Ragnarök, Thor's treatment of giantesses, and some other minor stories. It is impossible for the present reviewer either to verify or reject these comparisons. Some of the analyses are convincing, others are not. The large time span seems somewhat suspicious, as the myths are supposed to refer to factual events on the firmament, from the 7th to the 12th centuries, while the myths belong primarily to a single scholarly work from the first half of the 13th century. The question arises, whether Snorri Sturluson was aware of this celestial meaning of the myths or not.

The entire cosmology of the Old Norse mythology appears, according to Jónsson, on the firmament, which then is a huge scene, or screen. It is both the static stage, and various stories appearing on this stage. When this cosmology is thus located on the firmament, it is possible, by means of modern technology to locate and date the various happenings. It is, however, not always made quite clear, if these stories are visible for the human eye or not. For clarity, the author has provided an appendix, listing the various correspondences between the mythical phenomena and the firmament.

On the whole, then, the book raises many questions, but fortunately, it does not pretend to give the final answers. Dr. Jónsson simply points out a rudimentary context and some very interesting corre-

spondences, without claiming the right to the final truth. He does not write in an assertive style, and does not exclude other possible interpretations. For a literary scholar, *Snorra Edda* contains material which has been, and can be interpreted in various ways, all equally valid. Every literary text is a manifold of meanings or possible meanings, a meaningful whole. It is, in fact, amusing, that in the cover illustration, which is by Jakob Sigurðsson, from the so-called *Melsteðs Edda* from 1760, we can see the words 'Eddu dæmisögur,' that is, 'Eddaic allegories.' In later centuries, the myths of the *Eddas* were to a large extent regarded as moral allegories. That is one possible approach, just as is the astrological, which Dr. Jónsson has now added to the field.

Star Myths of the Vikings is an interesting contribution to the understanding of such texts as the *Eddas*. It provides a possible extension of the field of Old Norse studies. Therefore, this contribution might just turn out to be more innovative than the life-work of some traditional scholars in the field, even those who enjoy more academic success than the outsider Björn Jónsson. His work certainly deserves the serious attention of trained scholars, who would be able to submit these ideas to scrutinizing criticism, and then carry them into the present scholarly discussion of Old Norse studies — to provide these ideas with the necessary cultural and historical context.

Iceland from Past to Present

By Esbjörn Rosenblad and Rakel Sigurðardóttir-Rosenblad.
Translated by Alan Crozier. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1993. Pp. xxi, 438.
Reviewed by Anne Brydon.

Judging by the number of foreign-language books on Icelandic history and culture found in Reykjavík bookshops, explaining Iceland to outsiders seems to be as much a national pursuit as drinking coffee or talking about the weather. A reader might be forgiven for showing scant enthusiasm when handed another such book: at least, that was my initial reaction. Yet soon after an initial flipping through pages, I became engrossed in looking favourite subjects up to see how well the authors handle them. For the most part, I found the results satisfying.

I have enjoyed reading *Iceland from Past to Present* and am delighted by the straightforward and intelligent quality of its writing. Having examined many books of its type, I would rank it the best English-language introduction to Icelandic history and society written for a general audience.

Chapter One, "Historical and cultural background," surveys Iceland's history, with special attention to the Commonwealth era (pre-1262) and the beginnings of nationalist politics (beginning ca. 1830). The intervening years are less thoroughly documented, but this reflects an area of relative neglect in historical scholarship and is nothing for which this book can be faulted. The authors do an excellent job of balancing their account between discussions of intriguing and influential personalities on the one hand, and of social and cultural forces on the other hand.

Chapters Two and Three, 'Eddas and sagas' and 'Folk beliefs and folktales,' present familiar material with an engaging freshness. Some stories are related in detail, while others are placed in the context of a detailed overview. Chapter Four, "The cultural heritage as a source of inspiration," surveys the art, literature, and music of the 20th century, with primary emphasis on established artists such as Halldór Laxness and Johannes Kjarval. But more recent achievements are also documented, such as the paintings of the prolific Erró and the American-based Louisa Matthíasdóttir. Translations of poems intersperse the text of this chapter.

Chapters 5 through 10, comprising half the book, provide an excellent, up-to-date account of contemporary Icelandic society. Unlike most nationalist accounts, this book takes an international perspective on issues such as NATO and security policy, ecological problems, the cooperative movement, foreign debt, and foreign affairs. This perspective may be a product of the Swedish background of one author (Esbjörn has lived in Iceland since 1977 and served in the Royal Swedish Embassy), although it also reflects the more international outlook of younger generations of Icelanders. The economy and politics are clearly described with reference to current considerations.

The absence of any discussion of the women's movement is one disappointment. Neither is there any discussion of social problems or reference to issues which are hotly debated within present-day Iceland. The authors aim for and achieve a smooth, unruffled portrait of their beloved country. New insights from specialists are frequently introduced into discussions of less heated topics. The authors attempt a balanced view in certain areas of controversy, such as the question of Icelandic ethnic origins, or the radiocarbon-dating of settlement-era archaeological finds. This attention to differing opinions is to be commended.

Despite the book's emphasis on informed discussion, nowhere does the text become dry or overly detailed. The authors have a talent for educating and entertaining the reader simultaneously. Endnotes to each chapter provide additional information for those wishing to pursue a particular topic. An extensive bibliography of books in English (only a few journal articles are cited) will be useful for students of all ages. The listing of films, both silent and contemporary, is a wonderful addition.

Unlike the usual high cost of Icelandic books, this hardcover text is available for the reasonable price of 2.394 Ikr. (US $33.50). Whatever the gift-giving occasion; consider this book as a present for that person you know suffers from, in Sir Richard Burton's phrase, "Iceland on the brain."

Contributors

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Gunnar Benediktsson is the son of Guðrún Jörundsdóttir and Hallgrímur Benediktsson. Born in Iceland, he emigrated to Canada with his parents, settling first in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The family now resides in Calgary, Alberta and Gunnar is a university student.

Christine (Johannson) Best is interested in preserving the Icelandic culture through her short stories. She grew up in the Interlake area of Manitoba and now makes her home in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Anne Brydon holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, and is a professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Western Ontario. During her years of teaching at the University of Winnipeg she served on the executive committee of the Icelandic National League and she has frequently contributed to *The Icelandic Canadian.*

Lady Margaret Elton is the elder daughter of the late Doctor and Mrs. Olafur Bjornson, and the widow of Sir Arthur Elton Bart. She lives in a medieval manor house which the Eltons built in 1709, and has three grown up children, Julia, Rebecca Adalbjorg and Charles Abraham, but includes in her family Nanna Margaret Hillsman, daughter of her cousin, Margaret. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, she is a historian, and her first book is soon to be published.

Kevin Jon Helgason, son of Helgi Carl Johnson and Lorraine Rawn, is on his father's side the grandson of Jon and Rosa Johnson. His mother is of Norwegian descent. Kevin, who uses the pen-name of Helgason, is a Manitoba teacher, who graduated in 1987 with the Honours Degree in English from the University of Winnipeg. His poetry has been published in *The Icelandic Canadian* and in *Lögberg-Heimskringla.* He has recently published a chapbook, entitled *Page Break.* He is on the executive of the Icelandic Canadian Fron.

Vidar Hreinsson holds a mag. art. (equivalent to a North American Ph.D) from the University of Copenhagen. From 1992-1994 he was an assistant professor in the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba. He is presently at the helm of a major project involving the publication of a new series of English translations of the Icelandic sagas at Bókaútgáfan Leifur Eiríksson in Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Thelma Guðrún Whale was born in Winnipegosis, Manitoba to Kristinn Vigbald Stevenson and Margrét Ísleif Guðmundsdóttir. She holds degrees in Arts and Education from the University of Manitoba. She is now a retired educator and is keeping up her Icelandic (her first language) through reading and translation. In addition to *Í Rauðárdalnum*, she has translated *Eiríkur Hansson* and *Brasilíufararnir.*