

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

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THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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On the Cover



Honourable John Harvard

Editorial

by J. Timothy Samson, Q.C.

It is a distinct pleasure to be asked to write the editorial for this issue of the Icelandic Canadian Magazine. My connection with the Magazine goes back to its very beginning in 1942. My father, John V. Samson worked in those days as a linotype operator for Viking Press, the publishers of Heimskringla and the printers for the first issue, and many subsequent issues, of the Icelandic Canadian Magazine. So my father would have set the type for that first issue and for many of the following issues. Later, in my teens, when I worked for the printing business then owned by my father and my uncle Ed Goodmundson, who then printed the magazine, I actually participated in its production.

It was my work as a teenager in the printing plant and my later involvement in the Icelandic Canadian Club that brought me into contact with Judge Walter Lindal the mainstay of the Magazine at that time. Judge Lindal was passionate about there being a publication that could speak to young people in the English language, and an organization, the Icelandic Canadian Club, that could serve those young people. Judge Lindal was always free with his advice and the telephone ringing at around midnight often heralded a call from Judge Lindal with mandatory suggestions for the Icelandic Canadian Club.

Walter Lindal and his contemporaries who founded this Magazine believed deeply in keeping the connections among the descendants of the pioneers from Iceland alive and vital so that the community they knew could continue. These founders of the magazine could envision the situation where young people not only lost a facility with the Icelandic language, but also lost their interconnection with the other descendants of those pioneers. The Icelandic Canadian Magazine and the

Icelandic Canadian Club stood for keeping those non-Icelandic speaking descendants connected to and a part of the community.

Today, we have an Icelandic National League and a newspaper, Lögberg-Heimskringla, whose proceedings and publication are in the vernacular. This has allowed the Icelandic Canadian Magazine to concentrate on cultural, historical and biographical material written by a multiplicity of authors some professional and some amateur, but all for the benefit of the communities and individuals it serves.

It is my view that the various institutions of our community, including the Icelandic Canadian Magazine, must stand together to keep the collective memory of our cultural background alive and to pass it on to yet another generation of young North Americans who can count a pioneer from Iceland in their family tree.

Iceland's interaction has become a vital part of this picture. The Snorri Program is an example of what can be done to inspire the interest of young North Americans in our community and in their Icelandic ties. Participants in the Snorri Program generally return from Iceland vitalized and, ready to participate in the cultural life of our community and connected with young people of similar backgrounds from other communities.

I like to imagine Walter Lindal and his contemporaries meeting for a discussion with the likes of those involved in 2004 in the Icelandic Canadian Magazine, Lögberg-Heimskringla, the Icelandic National League, the Icelandic Festival, the Snorri Program, and the Icelandic presence at The University of Manitoba, to name just a few. I can't but think that they would be satisfied with the results of the direc-

tions that they imparted to us and the resulting interconnections that we now enjoy among our expanded and inclusive communities.

While we have not fully succeeded in addressing the diaspora of the descendants of the pioneers from Iceland, and we will never reach them all, we have, I believe, in the circumstances, come further than the founders of the Icelandic Canadian Magazine and their contemporaries would have thought possible by the time of the first years of the twenty-first century. It is the challenge to the current generation of the descendants of the pioneers from Iceland to build on the foundations that have been created by those who long ago set the direction for our communities by providing a publication for the second, third and subsequent generations.



M.P. John Harvard speaking in the House of Commons

His Honour John Harvard

by Kevin Jon Johnson

Kevin Jon Johnson interviews the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, His Honour John Harvard, P.C., O.M.

Kevin: I would like to conduct this interview in a roughly chronological manner, but with more emphasis on your more recent activities. Was there anything in your childhood in Glenboro that helped prepare you or that perhaps foreshadowed your future life?

Mr. Harvard: Perhaps the only precursor was some of my activity in school. Public affairs, called civics in those days, always interested me. School organization or school politics attracted my attention. I served as student council President for a couple of years, and excelled at History and Geography. That drove me into journalism. People, and what they did, fascinated me. That took me into radio and television news.

Kevin: In terms of your education, whom would you regard as a major influence, and why?

Mr. Harvard: My major influence was my High School teacher, Ruth Mooney Christie, whom I featured at my installation. Ruth Mooney, later to become Mrs. Ruth Christie, inspired me; I looked up to her. She was my favourite teacher, and she brought out the best side of me. The great-niece of Nellie McClung, the well-known suffragette of Manitoba, Ruth exemplified the best in humanity; she motivated me. She taught Social Studies and History. She was warm and down to earth. It was common then, and is perhaps common now, for students to denigrate teachers, thinking that they do not understand student's problems and student's lives, but Ruth knew how to relate to young people. Her

enthusiasm for Canadian and Manitoban history rubbed off on me.

Kevin: Has anyone in the Icelandic-Canadian community either inspired or assisted you in your career?

Mr. Harvard: Pastor Erik Sigmar confirmed me when I was twelve years old. As a youngster, I looked up to pastor Sigmar. Many years later I got to know Magnus Eliason. Although we did not always share the same political philosophy, I always found time for Magnus. A dedicated public servant, he worked always for the public good. He is a man that I respect greatly, and one whom I admire for his evident respect for his Icelandic roots and Icelandic heritage.

Kevin: Many Winnipeggers remember you as a radio host on CJOB, and later as a TV interviewer with CBC. How would you characterize these experiences in radio and on television?

Mr. Harvard: When young, before I entered into radio and television journalism, I saw the world in simplistic black and white terms. Through journalism I developed an appreciation of how much grey there is in life, of how complex problems are, that human situations very often defy explanation and simple solutions. To develop a comprehensive understanding, life requires a nimble and flexible mind, not a rigid and dogmatic one, because this particular problem may cry out for a particular solution, while another issue, that appears the same superficially, may demand a different solution. Through journalism I experienced and wrote about so many kinds of issues, and met so many kinds of men and women; journalism offers the best liberal arts education obtainable. It

was humanity in its full scope; over the years I commented on a myriad of human situations. Nothing is simple. I lost patience with rigid, dogmatic ideology. I am, ultimately, a centrist. I can see great value in most parts of the political spectrum. My experience in journalism made me practical and pragmatic. I did talk radio in the late sixties and early seventies for five years; at the beginning I really enjoyed it. I always enjoyed the air work. Over time, it became more difficult for me: in talk radio you have to be outrageous, sensational. To do that you need to adopt a black and white perspective. There can be no ifs, buts and ands in talk radio, but life is full of ifs, buts and ands - full of complexity. I found talk radio more difficult, because I could not be just straight on, black and white. The listening audience loves it when the talk radio host will brook no doubt; life is full of doubt. In life you have to make decisions, difficult decisions.

Kevin: This black and white mind-set was not true to yourself, as you matured and your vision became more complex?

Mr. Harvard: I have met all kinds of people in politics. Many people seek shelter in their ideologies; their ideologies are their scripts. They come to a problem and look to their dogma for the pat solution. Here it is, on page three! In some ways, you can be almost jealous of them. I resist that; I think that each problem deserves separate analyses, separate explanations, and separate solutions. You may not reach the correct solution, but should remain, as much as

possible, open-minded. With some fundamental values, such as our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, I am closed minded. These human rights are so fundamental to me, but beyond this framework of morality that informs how I treat my fellow citizens, it becomes an intellectual free-for-all for me.

Kevin: How many years did you spend in journalism?

Mr. Harvard: I spent my first couple of years in apprenticeship, learning journalism. I then worked in radio and television from the fall of 1957 until the late summer of 1988, so for almost thirty one years. In the first couple of years I learned how to use a microphone, and how to express myself on the air. I never wanted to be simply a voice on the air, or another pretty face. I always wanted to do something much more serious. I worked at the CBC for eighteen years. They have now changed the nature of the corporation, but in those days there was a news division and a public affairs division. I always worked in public affairs. Reporting the facts interested me somewhat, but taking the facts and providing the audience with some context, some understanding, some perspective, some opinion and analysis — that intrigued me. I do not want to denigrate news, an important part of journalism, but a newscaster simply reports on an event in an impartial manner, but I wanted to come in later. I wanted to come in and say, "All right, why did this happen? Did it have to happen this way? Is there a better way? Is there fault?"

Kevin: You have served sixteen years in Ottawa as a Liberal member of parliament for Charleswood-St. James.

Mr. Harvard: Yes, but the riding had three different names.

Kevin: Could you briefly summarize your main achievements or contributions in that period?

Mr. Harvard: Let me preface my remarks by commenting that as lieutenant-governor of Manitoba I am a little bit uncomfortable talking about political issues. In this office I cannot advocate any given political position; I am neutral. So let us tread softly! I find it difficult to set my experiences as a member of parliament in a strict hierarchy. My association with progressive causes provides me with some consolation. I worked on the progressive side of the Liberal Party. I established myself at the forefront of debate; for example in 1996 we changed the human rights act in another step towards ending discrimination against gays and lesbians. The legislation does not bare my name, and you will not find anything tangible, but when you are a politician and you are debating inside cau-

cus, you get deep satisfaction from associating with progressive policy and politics. Again, we did similar things in 1999 with respect to human rights actions and later when gay marriage came along as an issue; I agreed with those courts in support of widening marriage to include same sex couples. I supported public health care very strongly, and issues about the poor such as the child tax benefit in support of families.

Kevin: Were you surprised when Governor General Adrien Clarkson appointed you the 23rd lieutenant-governor of Manitoba on the advice of Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin?

Mr. Harvard: This is how it happened. In the middle of March the Prime Minister simply said to me, and there was never any pressure on me, that possibly the then mayor of Winnipeg, Glen Murray, would run for the Party. There was no vacant seat, and the Prime Minister said that he had to appoint a new lieutenant-governor. He thought that as the chief executive officer of the government, if I was amenable to this that he would like to see me as the lieutenant-governor, so that Mr. Murray could run in my seat. I discussed it with my wife,

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PHOTO COURTESY OF DEE DEH WESTDAL

In August 2000, John Harvard, MP for Winnipeg-St. James visited with President of Iceland, Olafur Ragnar Grimson. Also pictured here is Premier of Manitoba, Gary Doer (left).

Lenore Berscheid, and we both agreed that after sixteen years of me going to Ottawa, and with me being sixty-six years of age, that this presented a sterling opportunity for me to finish off my public career. So, I indicated to the Prime Minister that yes, I would be willing to make this change. Mr. Murray had some concerns handling his own affairs; I never spoke with Mayor Murray. A month later he cleared his deck, and on 27 April 2004 I agreed to become the lieutenant-governor. Of course I was surprised! Does anybody contemplate such a thing? How does one go about forming a strategy to become the lieutenant-governor? It is one of those appointments where all of the stars have to fall in line. If Mr. Liba's term had not ended for another year, or had ended a year earlier it would not have happened to me, it would have happened to somebody else. There is always luck in life. Sure you have to have talent, you have to bring certain things to the table, whatever the table is, but life does have its luck. Conservatives refer to Robert Stanfield as the greatest Prime Minister Canada never had! Why was he not Prime Minister? Because Pierre Trudeau was there. He ran against Pierre Trudeau three times, and he lost three times. Stanfield had bad luck. It was not a comment on his talent, but here was this formidable man Trudeau. I had luck, but I am humble about it.

Kevin: You are the second Icelandic-Canadian to hold the office of lieutenant-governor of Manitoba; His Honour, Dr.

George Johnson was first. How do you like the job so far?

Mr. Harvard: I love it so far. Today I approach the end of my third week, at the beginning of the learning curve, but I plan to enjoy it, because I believe in it! People need their collective expression; the state needs its collective expression. You can express the people's voices through an office like the lieutenant-governor's; this job can very often accentuate the positive. In this office you look for achievement, you look for success; you offer kudos and congratulations. Partisan politics is adversarial, competitive; nothing wrong with that, we need that. Sometimes it gets rough. My role now is much different, and, I think, necessary. Government has an extensive ceremonial side. If you did not have the monarchy, as we know it in Canada, who would do this work? It would fall to the Premier. The Premier is a very busy guy already. The monarchy offers a clear division between the head of government and the head of state; this position is non-political, as it should be. Partisan politics coloured my past, but no longer; nothing in me would cause me to show favouritism to one person or group of people because of their politics. I have purged myself of partisan politics. When you are a member of parliament, yes you are a partisan person, but when it came to case work – a tax problem, a pension problem, some problem with respect to government, not policy so much as just an individual case, I never asked them whether

they belonged to this party or that party. A person is a constituent – end of question. As lieutenant-governor, I want to serve all Manitobans.

Kevin: The former lieutenant-governor, His Honour Peter Liba, travelled widely through the Province. Do you also plan to travel?

Mr. Harvard: Definitely! While a little more than half the population lives in Winnipeg, we have a lot of outlying communities. I will make my first trip outside of Winnipeg on Thursday to open the Manitoba Indigenous Summer Games in The Pas. The day after I will go to Portage la Prairie, because some people are being inducted into the Manitoba Agricultural Hall of Fame. The day after that, I will go to Morris for the opening of the stampede. I want to make absolutely sure that I visit as many villages, towns and cities outside of Winnipeg as possible. All Manitobans are equal, whether they live here or six or eight hundred miles north of here, or west of here, or whatever.

Kevin: I have read that the aboriginal people enjoyed it when His Honour Peter Liba greeted them in their native language.

Mr. Harvard: I want to do the same thing. In my speech in The Pas, in a couple of days, I have included an aboriginal greeting and farewell. One of my favourite words is inclusiveness. One has to reach out, one has to embrace all of the people; neither colour, gender nor any such difference matters. We are all equal. I reject exclusion.

Kevin: I would like to end on a more general, philosophical note. People of Icelandic descent are often characterized as realistic optimists. Would you characterize yourself as a realistic optimist?

Mr. Harvard: Yes, I think so. Many problems and challenges face us in this world, but I want to look at the world through a glass half full, not half empty. You want to believe that tomorrow will be

a better day. Despite the most strenuous effort, problems will persist. It keeps you going. You have to have faith, even though I realize that some problems are intractable, even permanent. One needs an unshakeable belief in one's fellow human beings. This country has come a long way; quite primitive one hundred and thirty years ago, Canadian society has more recently taken immense strides democratically, economically and technologically. Today we are a modern, rich country. I said it in remarks at the Order of Manitoba: this is no fluke; this is no accident. Decades of hard work, from people who have come from all around the world, has made Manitoba strong. Only a special type of person or family is willing to pick up stakes and move thousands of miles to another country; that is the story of Canada. People picked up stakes and left Iceland; they left Germany; they left Japan; they left China, and they came here. These were courageous people. They came to a country with no money, with only their hands or brawn to offer. These special individuals showed



In December 1981, John Harvard was the subject of an interview in Winnipeg magazine.

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courage; they wanted something better. They wanted security; they wanted more material things in their lives; they wanted a better future for their kids. They came here, and look at what they have done! In a sense, Canada has benefited from these people, coming from every corner of the earth, the cream of the crop. Canada has been very fortunate in this regard, therefore I have always strongly supported immigration. I have always believed in multiculturalism. I just look at Canada today and I say, "Why would we put a stop to that?"

Kevin: Canada, a multicultural society, may help show the way for the world.

Mr. Harvard: Yes. Unfortunately, in our history, our aboriginal people have been left behind. Many, both inside and outside of the aboriginal community, acknowledge this. Many sincere Canadians have endeavoured to improve the living



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conditions of our aboriginals; we have not yet found solutions for these complex problems. Overcoming some of the serious issues facing aboriginals remains our last frontier. It must happen. No one benefits from poverty; certainly the poverty stricken do not benefit! Neither do we, the more fortunate, benefit; it pulls the economy down. We all benefit when we can bring people out of poverty, and offer them a better future. The elimination of poverty, whether in the aboriginal community or elsewhere, is in the best interest of everyone.

Kevin: In your role as the lieutenant-governor are there things you can do to move this in the right direction, towards more inclusiveness for our aboriginal people?

Mr. Harvard: I announced some of my projects at my inaugural address. I want to work closely with people around the issue of early childhood development disorders, such as autism and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I do not have political power. Neither does this office have money; I cannot hand out money. I can, through this office, bring attention to these social issues. I plan to focus on these issues.

Kevin: What do you see as the future of Manitoba, and of your role in that future as lieutenant-governor?

Mr. Harvard: The future of Manitoba is limitless. Only our own creativity, imagination and efforts limit us. We can make Manitoba whatever we want to make of it; we have natural resources, some of the greatest people on earth here. We have hydroelectric resources; we have so many things. In the main, we have this repository of talented people and a good education system. There is nothing that may not be improved upon, but we have a lot going for us! I see no place for pessimism. We have some problems, serious challenges, but nothing should hold us back. We have the talent, the commitment and the political system. We have organization; we have democracy, a fully functioning, high level

form of democracy. The people have their freedom; they can express themselves, use their imaginations. They can work hard. So the future of this province is limitless.

Kevin: People sometimes regard the hand of Destiny in their lives; personally, I refer to this as the Hand of Providence. How do you see Providence working in your life so far?

Mr. Harvard: I think I have been a very fortunate person. I have a humble background; my mother and father farmed. In middle age my father, also a carpenter, became a building contractor. I am a first generation Icelandic Canadian. My father was born in Vopnafjörður in 1891; he came here in 1903. My mother was born here in 1897, just shortly after her parents arrived from Iceland. I am number eleven of twelve in a very large family. I came from humble beginnings, and luck has played a part in my life. When a teenager, my mother told me to join a young profession, one with a bright future. Given my interest in public affairs, back in the late 1950s I thought that radio provided the best opportunity for me. I have no regrets; I was lucky. I grew with the industry, the radio business, and then with television. I obtained my own radio show back in the late sixties. I obtained my own television show in the seventies. As a result, my name became a household name in Winnipeg, and that I later parlayed into a political career. Now I am the lieutenant-governor. Is that Destiny? I guess. Is that God's hand? Who am I to question that? I do not know how to describe these things. For me, very often, the stars have lined up properly. I am thankful and humble. I do not know who writes these things down or who decides. As part of my centrist philosophy, I do not attempt to make attributions. I only know that some very good things have happened to me. I do not know why. I know I have worked hard, but there is more than that. It is not just me that made these things happen; fortunately I married a wonderful woman, and I have a wonderful family, great friends, a lot of supporters in my life. I like the title of Hilary Clinton's book, *It*

Takes A Village, about raising a child. That can apply to adults as well. It takes a community, or it takes a country for you to find your way. I am thankful for what has happened to me, but there are a lot of people I have to be thankful for.

Kevin: By every measure, your life has been a great success. What do you think will be your most lasting contribution?

Mr. Harvard: I do not know that. I hope that after five years I will be remembered for some work I have done in this office. I hope to have directed attention to these early childhood development disorders. Hopefully, through my hundreds of speeches through five years or more, I will have left a greater appreciation of this province and its history. In my speeches, I intend to focus on certain events in Manitoba's history, on certain personalities. I have not developed a strategy yet, but I do want a strategy that will incorporate some of the history of the province in my speeches. Manitoba's history is fascinating. We did not get to the place we are today by accident, numerous key events occurred. I want to remind Manitobans, as much as possible, about their beginnings and of their history. I have a lot of work to do yet.

Kevin: In closing, on behalf of the Icelandic-Canadian magazine, I would like to offer my congratulations on your appointment as Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba.

Mr. Harvard: Thank you.

Kevin: Are there any final words you wish to address to our readers?

Mr. Harvard: I am a very proud, first generation Icelandic Canadian. While I am a Canadian to my very core, a Canadian born and bred, I am cognizant of my heritage, cognizant of my past. I am proud of the Icelanders who came here well over a hundred years ago, back in the 1870s, courageous people. They faced unbelievable adversity, cold climate and disease

before the turn of the twentieth century. Look where they are today! I have enjoyed the benefits of belonging to this family, the Icelandic Canadian family. They have a particular fortitude, a particular strength. Icelandic Canadians honour their heritage, but they live in the present, and live for the future. Icelanders integrate, adapt and adopt. Clearly, though, their allegiance is to this great country. Canada benefits when her citizens retain something of their unique cultural heritage, blending it into a new land. I am proud of the family I belong to, but I am Canadian to the absolute core! I do not think that makes me exceptional at all. Other Canadians feel and think exactly the same way. That is one of the reasons why Canada is so great. Unfettered, we can give our all to this country, as citizens of Canada, and yet we can use our backgrounds as an aid, to give us a broader perspective in our own country. It is a good blend.

This interview was conducted on Tuesday, 20 July 2004 in room 235 of the Manitoba Legislature, the Lieutenant-Governor's office. For more details on the office of lieutenant-governor, please consult their website at www.lg.gov.mb.ca.

Editor's Note: The Honourable John Harvard, P.C., O.M. was recently invested into the Order of St. John of Canada by the Chancellor of the Priory Council of Canada. The Investiture Ceremony took place at Government House in Winnipeg, Manitoba on Wednesday, September 29, 2004.



PHOTO COURTESY CHRIS PROCAYLO

John Harvard during his time as a Member of Parliament with Prime Minister, Jean Chretien.

Mitsu No Shima

by Glen Jakobson

Being a Western Icelander, I grew up (like many of us) with an interest in one day visiting the island of my forefathers. Luckily, when I graduated from university, an opportunity presented itself not only to visit, but to live and study there, when I was offered a scholarship to the University of Iceland. I first set foot on the island at the beginning of the 1980's, and enjoyed the experience of living abroad so much that I was quite prepared to apply when later, a chance to live and work in Japan came my way. Off I went, and this experience too, has been positive enough that as I write, I am still sitting on Shikoku, the smallest of the four major islands of Japan. This island I set foot on at the beginning of the 90's, and I've often been struck by the similarities, as well as the obvious differences, between it and Iceland. It has been my home for the past twelve years, though I return to Canada often. These days, when I do return, it's usually to Vancouver Island, to visit family. I suppose it's there that I'll end up, when I finally decide to leave Japan. In short, Iceland is my past, Shikoku is my present and Vancouver Island seems likely to be my future. And that's why I agreed, when it was suggested that I should write something to compare them. It's also the reason for the title above, which in Japanese means simply, "three islands."

When I started to consider this question, what struck me first was that the three of them are so neatly arranged on a map of the world (at least the version common here), from east to west and north to south, like uniformly plotted points on a graph. Japan is at the lower left, Iceland at the upper right, and Vancouver Island somewhere in the middle. What I found more fascinating though, was how many other factors associated with these places seemed

to fit into the same pattern. Take, for example, such a basic as the size of the people. The average height here in Japan is not, let's face it, at the upper end of the scale, even when compared to neighbours such as China and Korea. I'm 6' 3", and in Japan it is extremely rare to meet a local of the same size. In Iceland, however, despite the fact that there were not the same numbers of people around, it was an everyday occurrence. In fact, when I first arrived, two cousins (different families) dropped over to visit. I was the smallest. Of course, if one were to go to Vancouver Island, you'd find that the average height falls somewhere in between. The pattern seems reproduced in the people.

Other aspects of peoples' appearance seem to go the same way. The Japanese are uniformly black of hair and brown eyed, while Icelanders are as blonde and blue eyed as any people on the face of the earth. Vancouver Islanders are at neither one extreme or the other, but, on average, neither as dark as the Japanese nor as fair as the Icelanders.

What about the mindset of these people? The Japanese are often characterized as being group oriented, a "consensus society." As students, although they score very well on math/science type tests for which a recognized right answer or method can be studied, they are often at a loss when asked to give their own opinions on specific topics or issues. They seem to want to be told what the correct opinion should be. How do Icelanders compare? They are probably best described by the title of Laxness' famous novel, "Independent People"...a conglomerate of strong-willed free thinking individuals, who aren't shy about expressing their opinions at all. In fact, at times one might even be forgiven for taking some of them to be positively "opinionat-

ed." And Vancouver Islanders? As far as I can tell, they're right there between the two extremes again. Quite capable of being opinionated, but only to the extent that in the end no consensus can be arrived at.

At some point in my musings on these three islands, I borrowed a Japanese atlas to take a closer look at how their geographic locations really are related, since this pattern seems to be mirrored in so many other things. I got out a ruler and put one end of it over Reykjavik and the other over Matsuyama, where I live. There was that graph-like appearance that I had been visualizing all right, but I was honestly quite amazed when after some time I realized that the line formed by these two points passed right through the middle of



Nanaimo, (my usual destination on Vancouver Island), sits at 49 N, which turns out to be (I'm not making this up) exactly between the two. While in the process of doing all this, I had been reading a book about synchronicities, (meaningful coincidences), and this was starting to seem like it might fit the bill.

Once you start looking at a map with this configuration on it, you begin to ponder all kinds of things. You notice that the physical area of each island increases as you go from left to right (Japan to Iceland). At the same time, the population decreases. In fact, though I have no figures for the other two islands, not being countries, the population density of Iceland (rounded to the

Vancouver Island. And I was astonished when I measured the distance between the two points and found that the exact center of the line was there, too. Now, I realize that this bears no actual relationship to the real distances or directions that one would find on a sphere such as our Earth, but in a sense that only made the coincidence that much more striking to me. That these three islands should end up forming a perfect sequence when translated onto the flat surface of the map that I happened to be using, was to me almost more coincidental than if their actual distances and locations had matched just as well. Aside from that, there was no getting around the fact that when I checked their latitudes, Matsuyama's was 34 deg. N, while Reykjavik's was 64N .

nearest person per sq. kilometer) is only three. For Japan (as a whole) it's three hundred and thirty three. It jumps exactly a hundredfold. In a very similar way, the hours of summer sunlight increase left to right, while the average summer temperature drops. Another point you might notice is that Iceland is the only part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge above water. In other words, it sits in the middle of the Atlantic, just where two huge plates of the earth's surface are splitting apart. Shikoku sits on the edge (not middle) of the Pacific (not Atlantic), just where two of these plates are slamming into each other. Next, the Japanese Islands are famous for the profusion of different plants and trees that grow

there, from the cedars and pines that we are familiar with on Vancouver Island, to bamboo and innumerable varieties that we have never seen. Iceland, of course, at the other extreme, has lots of lush green grass and lots of sheep to eat it, but not much more in the way of vegetation. In fact, it is the near absence of trees, not their variety, that is so striking. Then there is the fact that Japan's is an ancient civilization, part of the spread of man from further south towards the east, out of Africa and on into Siberia and then Alaska. Iceland is at the extreme end of man's other migration route, from Africa to the north and west. Far from being an ancient cradle of civilization, it could well be the last habitable area on earth that humans populated, having been settled not much more than 1000 years ago.

One final comparison that could be made regards the languages spoken on these islands. The grammar of Icelandic is notoriously complicated, but writing it is very easy since words are written phonetically, so that with few exceptions, words are spelled as they sound. Japanese provides (once again) the mirror image, since its' grammar is extremely simple but writing the language is not. It involves the use of thousands of Chinese characters with Japanese suffixes and particles, all of which must be learned individually. Thus, Icelandic is difficult to speak but easy to read or write, while Japanese is easy to speak but very difficult to read or write. In keeping with our pattern, English falls neatly between the other two on the scale of difficulty, both when speaking and writing the language.

So many things fit into our pattern of coincidence, but what is it that shapes them into a synchronicity? What is the message that makes the coincidence meaningful? To me the message is that no matter how different we may appear to be at first glance, in reality we are much more alike than we know, and we're all tied together with numerous threads that at first we're probably unaware of. That seems to hold true for the two extremes of the scale we've been looking at, because Iceland and Japan have much more in common than first meets the eye.

Look at these two countries, where everyone seems to eat fish almost daily. This practice seems to do the inhabitants some good, since they have almost identical figures for life expectancy, the highest in the world. Also highest in the world are their figures for literacy, supposedly 99% for Japan and 100% for Iceland. Look also at these two peoples who enjoy natural hot baths so much, and enjoy such an abundance of them. Like most Icelandophiles, I know that the blue lagoon, not far from Reykjavik, is becoming one of the most famous new hot spring spas in the world. However, I was unprepared when I arrived in Matsuyama, to find that it is home to the oldest and most famous of the hundreds of Japanese spas, with a history of close to 3000 years! To be sure, both countries share the benefits of natural hot water, as well as the dangers posed by volcanic activity, which is of course the source of all that heat. Come to think of it, how many places in this world have, in recent years, had new islands forming in clouds of steam and ash off their shores? These two have. Then take a look at the national sports of Japan and Iceland. Sumo wrestling and glima wrestling? You've got to be kidding. The one looks almost like a negative image of the other.



But the most striking of the threads that join these two extremes together in my New World consciousness is that between two representations of their founding figures. That thread is like the arrow straight line across the map from the one to the other, through the heart of the third island, my new world. On the coast of Shikoku, stands a statue of Ryoma Sakamoto, the revolutionary samurai who led his countrymen into the modern era.


On the coast of Iceland, stands a statue

of Ingolfur Arnason, first settler, who led his fellows into a new era as well. Each of them was the instrumental figure in bringing his people out of a feudal society and into a new democracy. Each was a man of foresight, who could perceive a different future, with new possibilities. Each was willing to take on very real risks and strike out into the unknown, rather than stay in a situation that was, to him, grown unacceptable. The figure of the one now stands, still seemingly farsighted, gazing out onto the Pacific. The other, with much the same air of seeing into the future as much as into the distance, gazes out on the Atlantic.



No, whatever our differences appear to be worldwide, and no matter how huge the gulf seems between cultures and mentalities, when it comes right down to it, we're all one. We are much more alike than we know, and eventually we have to come together. It's true that in this troubled time of terrorism and "pre-emptive" war, nations and peoples seem sometimes to be going in very different directions. But if we persevere, I think we'll find that we're closing the gap, just as those ancient migrations of men took them further and further apart only to allow them to meet again on the other side of the globe. There, after an epic journey on a scale of tens of thousands of years, they came face to face. The participants couldn't have realized the significance of that meeting, but it was one of long lost brothers, transformed from north-east Africans into peoples as different as Icelanders and Greenlanders. Perhaps it's time for us to realize that we're all just variations and improvisations on the same theme, and give real meaning to the term "United Nations." After all, we are really just the various products of the same, millennia old struggle for survival. Can we

really be so foolish as to threaten each others' survival now, just when we have the chance to finally recognize and greet each other for what we are—family?



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Margaret Ann Bjornson and the Making of Iceland on the Prairies

by Gene Walz



Margaret Ann Bjornson

PHOTO COURTESY REBECCA ELTON FITZSIMONS

What follows is an excerpt from the memoir *One Man's Documentary*, a new book by Graham McInnes. The memoir is a vivid account of the formative years of the National Film Board of Canada – 1939 - 1945 by one of its first employees, an accomplished novelist and broadcaster. McInnes, son of Angela Thirkell and brother of Colin MacInnes, both famous British novelists, had previously written four other memoirs and two books on Canadian Art.

During the early years of the NFB, Winnipeggers played an unusually large role in the creation of a Canadian film culture. Ross McLean was instrumental in establishing the NFB and served as its first vice commissioner, and the Honourable Joseph Thorson was the politician responsible for overseeing the Board's operations as Minister for Wartime Services for Mackenzie King's liberal government. Two western Icelanders are especially noteworthy – Gudrun Bjerring and Margaret Ann Bjornson. Both women had a profound impact on the then largely male bastion of Canada's documentary filmmaking.

Gudrun Bjerring is the more famous of the two women filmmakers, though perhaps not outside of a coterie of documentary and/or Canadian film buffs, historians and academics. In 1945 she made an influential documentary film called *Listen to the Prairies* about the annual Winnipeg Music Festival, a work that broke with the insistent propaganda style of the NFB at that time. As writer, director or producer she contributed to dozens of NFB films, most notably *The People's Bank* (1943) about a Starbuck, Manitoba credit union, *Opera School* (1952), and *The Stratford Adventure* (1954) about the founding of the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Theatre

and festival as well as many films in the "What Do You Think" and "What's Your Opinion" series. She had a special gift for making films about and for children. For a while she served as the head of the Education Unit at NFB. With her husband Morten Parker (a fellow Winnipegger and University of Manitoba graduate) she formed Parker Film Associates in the 1950s, a company that made award-winning documentaries.

Margaret Ann Bjornson was the daughter of Dr. Olafur Bjornson, Professor of Obstetrics at the University of Manitoba School of Medicine. She was part of an extraordinary cohort of students of English literature at the university when Graham McInnes recruited her as a researcher for the movie *Iceland on the Prairies* in 1940. Her success on this project led to permanent employment at the NFB, principally as a researcher for Stuart Legg on the two major film series of *World War II: "Canada Carries On"* and *"World in Action."* In keeping with film commissioner John Grierson's policy, her name is not found on any films produced during this period, and little about her can be found in NFB archives.

After the war Grierson, who had resigned from the Board, sent her to England to work on various of his post-war projects. There she met Arthur Elton, an outstanding documentary filmmaker who had gotten his start as a protégé of Grierson at film units associated with the Empire Marketing Board and General Post Office in the 1930s. As Lady Elton she published *Annals of the Elton Family, Bristol Merchants and Somerset Landowners* shortly before her death 1995.

In the accompanying excerpt from *One Man's Documentary* Graham McInnes recounts the story of the making

of Iceland on the Prairies. Margaret Ann Bjornson served as researcher, the infamous Frank (Budge) Crawley was cameraman and director, and McInnes producer and scriptwriter. In a later section of the book McInnes describes Margaret Ann's contributions to the social life of NFB. Just before the section on Ms Bjornson, McInnes talks about Ms Bjerring's arrival at NFB's Ottawa offices in the winter of 1942 and some of her subsequent film work there. The book, *One Man's Documentary*, edited and with an Introduction by Gene Walz is now available from the University of Manitoba Press.

Following the occupation of Iceland by Allied forces, including Canadians, there had been some suggestion that the Icelandic community of Canada, which had been established in Manitoba since the 1870s, would be interested in a "Canada Carries On film" about its ancient homeland. A by-product of the research connected with the film was the discovery that the Icelandic community was itself well worth a film as an example of our immigrant mosaic which, while retaining a strong individuality, had adjusted successfully to the Canadian social pattern, and of whom, along with other pieces of the mosaic, sacrifices were now expected. The fact that the Chairman of the National Film Board, Hon. Joseph Thorson, was an Icelandic Canadian, may also have had something to do with it. His knowledge of the Winnipeg community was wide and deep. In due course, therefore, having just emerged from a film about gun production, I received instructions from Grierson to go and see Joe Thorson. The Minister suggested that I get out to Winnipeg at once and make contact with Miss Margaret Ann Bjornson.

She turned out to be a girl in her early twenties with a lovely figure and magnificent head of silky golden hair (though her father, curiously enough, was one of the "dark" Icelanders). But she had also, and unexpectedly, a seriousness of manner and intellectual approach which was frankly frightening. She had also a delivery of speech so mannered that at first I simply

didn't believe in her, thinking, as perhaps most young men would have done, that she was putting on an act.

It took us many years of working with Margaret Ann to realize this mistake, and it robbed us of some valuable company. But on this distant day, as I set out with her in a rented Dodge to explore Iceland on the prairies and prepare a shooting script, I found her monologues excruciating and longed for the arrival of the rest of the crew who were due in from the East in a few days.

We visited the grim scraped "inter-lake" region of Manitoba to look at Icelandic settlements at Ashern and Lundar; we swung south into the more fertile valley of the Assiniboine to find at Glenboro Mr. Tryggvi Arnason who, having told us with great relish and many times over coffee and pönnukökur how he had "f---d" the Cockshutt Plow Company", was at once cast for the hero of our film. We went north up Lake Winnipeg, an immense sheet of water 200 miles long but very shallow, in search of Icelandic settlements. We visited Gimli (Heaven) where the immigrants had first settled; Hnausa where we saw an Icelandic fair with the girls in floppy red and white dresses; and finally Riverton where we were entertained to a reading in Icelandic of his own poems by a genuine bard, with the truly wonderful name of Guttormur Guttormsson. We returned to Winnipeg to listen to the Icelandic male voice choir under the baton of Ragnar H. Ragnar. We hobnobbed with the local Icelandic undertaker ("How's business?" "Business is dead, ha! ha!") We listened to folk legends and myths from the lips of Rev. Egill Fafnis.

We visited the offices of Heimskringla and Logberg, the two Icelandic language weeklies; and we endeavoured, without much success to persuade ourselves that Sargent Avenue, focus of the Icelandic community, was more different from the rest of Winnipeg than it actually was. Throughout all this intense research Margaret Ann was constantly suggesting places to be visited, personalities to be interviewed, and astute slants to be watched for: such as the almost uncon-

scious (and entirely unselfconscious) lapse into the old mother tongue by these extremely North American editors and farmers and doctors whenever they rose from the table: Takk fyrir matin (Thanks for the 'feed'); or the discovery near Guttormsson's rather dreadful gamboge-painted modern frame house of a pioneer log cabin used by the early settlers, but now forgotten and despised.

After a week's work in the local hotel the script was ready. A few days later a cameraman and assistant came from Ottawa and we were a team of four until the film was shot. Eventually – over a year later owing to wartime exigencies – it was released in 16mm Kodachrome (with even Tryggvi Arnason's pigs looking glamorous) as *Iceland on the Prairies*.

Throughout the entire shooting Margaret Ann was, in our gross male view, obstructively assiduous. She rarely stopped giving us advice, most of it good and most of it, I'm sorry to say, ignored: partly because she was a girl, but partly because her highly inarticulate non-stop conversation got under our skins and made us, in male self-defense, more bristly and blowsy than we really were.

With golden hair flying she would buttonhole us with lengthy expositions of shots that we ought to take. These harangues were delivered in a slow, heavily emphasized Prairie drawl and with an expression of singular intensity. They would include not only the shot and the reason for it, and the place it would probably have in the film, but its relationship to the sociological background of the Icelandic people, its philosophical origins, and its moral justification. To say that she was a bore would be wide of the mark because, apart from her striking and unusual looks, boredom implies a comprehension of her vocabulary and intellectual gymnastics which we did not have.

A few months after the film was finished, Margaret Ann turned up at NFB and her true worth was at once appreciated by the English. She joined Legg's World in Action unit as research assistant, idea woman and expert in locating stock-shots. Eventually she became someone against

whose sharp intelligence, vivid personality, formidable powers of argumentation and disconcertingly rough, mannish sense of humour we could all sharpen and hone our own wits. In this role she proved invaluable, and it was gradually borne in on us that our own lack of appreciation arose from the essential conformism of Canadian society. Because Canadians are apt to distrust "originals" we distrusted her. She exercised her wits in a way that was unfamiliar to us. It was all right to be "bright" but it should be in the recognized Canadian pattern. To be eccentric, even if brilliant, was frowned upon. Margaret Ann was both an eccentric and an original, and furthermore she remained absolutely consistent. She really loved ideas and loved to play about with them, and though she seemed highly mannered, the manner was entirely natural to her and never varied in all her years at NFB. It was really marvelous entertainment to behold this striking girl, with her great mass of honey blonde hair, seriously arguing in the midst of a pack of young NFB intellectuals on the scent, and often besting them, albeit with graciousness so that she would not have her position weakened by becoming involved in the war between men and women.

And after awhile – perhaps rather too long a while – she won us all over. Our distrust turned to admiration and to affection as well. And though it's really outside the scope of this story it's worth telling the end of the tale which was that after the war she went to England where she met, and later married, a great figure in British documentary, Arthur Elton, and found herself well able to wrestle with and to master the subtle English prods and caste knives-in-the-ribs of those who were "really astonished, my dear, that this Canadian girl, should have nobbled . . ."

And after thirty years her mannered naturalness, her unassuming dignity remained total and inviolate.

Letters from Friðjón Friðriksson

Translated by Sigurbjörg Stefansson



Friðjón Friðriksson

Letter #15

Gimli, pt. Winnipeg, May 16, 1877

Dear Rev. Jon Bjarnason:

Many thanks for your letter written on the 27th of last month.

Not long ago I wrote two letters to you, one after the other. Soon after that meetings were held in every community throughout the colony. These meetings failed to produce an agreement concerning who to accept as a minister or ministers. The people of "Micklaey" (i.e. The great Island) and "Fljotsbyggd" (i.e. The community along the river) all agreed (except 5-6 dissidents) to attempt to get a minister, unpolluted by the "Synod", and promised to pay him \$4.00 each (i.e. each head of a household) for three years. The inhabi-

tants of Arnes joined hands in asking for Rev. Pall Thorlaksson as a minister - provided that he made it absolutely clear to them that no decisive difference could be found between the doctrines of the "Synod" and those of the Icelandic Lutheran Church. Rev. Pall is in the process of convincing them that there is no difference. The Inhabitants of Vidines - I am one of those - were divided into two - almost equally big - groups, one group asking for Rev. Pall (because he is not asking for any payment) the other group supporting the idea of trying to get an Icelandic minister, preferably you, since I expressed your willingness to come here- provided you were offered acceptable salary.

Different individuals promised different contributions, depending on their financial conditions, ranging from 1 to 10 dollars. I prefer that kind of arrangements to the one practiced in the northern part of the colony, (i.e. all making equal contributions). On Ascensioin Day, we, the people of Vidines, had a meeting and discussed this matter. The conclusion was that since we are so few - only 59 families - and our contribution amounts only to \$152.00, we are unable to ask for a private minister. Rather, we have to join the people of Arnes and Miklaey and ask their minister to serve us and deliver sermons to us once in a while.

The meeting appointed a committee whose role is to seek co-operation with the committee for church affairs in the northern districts. These two committees are then, together, to request that you become our minister.

I am a member of this committee, but since I left for Winnipeg (for business purposes) on the same day as the committee was appointed, I have no way of knowing what it has accomplished. I trust that these two committees will collaborate on a letter

requesting that you come here. The number of inhabitants of the northern districts is much greater than that of the southern districts - making their (i.e. the northerners) contributions close to \$400.00, at least. I realize that this sum fails to equal your present salary, but I also know that you are willing to make some sacrifices, and besides, your cost of living will be less here than where you are now.

God give that you come, and may he bless your coming.

Could not you come this fall?

Most are on the verge of losing their patience, and if we don't get a minister by the fall the situation could get out of hand. Undoubtedly, you will be able to leave for Iceland by the spring and spend the summer there.

It is very late, and first thing in the morning I leave for Gimli to have clothing, houses, etc disinfected - when that is over the guard will begin and communications will be reopened.

Mr. Taylor is now in this town buying tools, seed and miscellaneous things for the colonists. Upon completing my business in Gimli I shall return here in order to do my shopping for the summer.

Please send to Winnipeg P.O. invoice of the price of the press because unless we have the invoice cannot get the press through toll. This is urgent.

Yours with love and respect
Fr. Fridriksson



Letter # 16

Gimli pt. Winnipeg, May 27, 1877

Dear Rev. Jon:

There are so many things on my mind today that I am hardly able to write to you, but I must, however, do it.

Shortly after Sigtryggur's getting your letter - in which you promise to become our minister in 9 months - a few members of the church board (including myself) had a meeting in order to discuss this matter. The conclusion of this meeting was to ask you to begin your duties as our minister as soon as possible.

Since it looks like you will not be able to come here until after approximately 9 months, we are forced to be without a minister or we can accept a Norwegian "Synod" minister as our minister until you come. Furthermore, Sigtryggur was appointed to write to Halldor Briem and ask him to come here next fall - ordained - in order to begin to serve as a minister. Thus the conclusion of the meeting was that we would definitely need two ministers both of whom we anticipate to be able to pay decent salaries. While Sigtryggur was to write to Halldor Briem, I was asked to write to you and inform you about the conclusion of the meeting.

By the way, we did not have too much time to prepare for this meeting. Therefore, we could not discuss the matter with the other people, and therefore I do not have a written warrant authorizing me to resume my requesting you to become

our minister. Anyway, I am sure that we can handle this matter as if it were officially authorized. I, therefore, recommend that you go ahead and tell your employers that they have to look for another editor for "Budstikken."

We shall write to you, as soon as possible, giving you further informations about this matter.

The Canadian Government has now granted the Icelanders a loan of 25,000 dollars. It (i.e. the Government) wants this loan to be the last one to Icelanders. John Taylor, our agent, is in the process of buying food, seed and tools. I have been his assistant. Most of the seed is now being transported to the colony. Only a small part of this seed, however, will be used this spring because each farmer is only going to have time to grow a small area since the conditions are such that plows cannot be used - the soil must be cut and turned up by shovels.

The guard is being set up and the disinfection of the colony is about to take place. Recently I went from Winnipeg to Gimli to prepare these activities. I just returned from that trip. Soon I will return home bringing with me a few boats loaded with merchandise for my own store as well as for other Icelanders. The ice disappeared from Lake Winnipeg on the 16th of this month. There is an abundant catch of fish in the colony, all serious illnesses are behind us, and on the whole everything is on the upswing.

The day before yesterday we took the press to Gimli. Toll and postage and handling amounted to \$30.00.

Pardon my handwriting.

Remember me to your wife.

Sincerely yours,

Fr. Fridriksson

Letter #17

Gimli, July 6, 1877

Dear Friend: (Lara Petursdottir)

Assuming that your husband is already on his way to this colony, I turn to you for assistance. When we started to put the press together - and were going to begin printing - we realized that a part of it was missing. This part is an iron box containing ink for the printing, but we do not know what it is called in English.

(description of the press and missing

part is omitted)

On behalf of those who are in charge of the press I am asking you - even though it is strange to ask a woman to do this - to write to Mr. Valdsted and suggest that he send all this immediately to Winnipeg, c/o McMicken & Taylor. We shall take care of the postage and handling. Nothing can be printed until we get the missing parts.

All are well in the colony. We have had a lot of rain - both here and in Manitoba. Consequently, vegetation has been damaged in scattered places.

Recently, I wrote to your husband recommending that he take the steamboat which sails every day to Selkirk. There he can see a merchant by the name of Sanderson who can take him to the colony.

Pardon my handwriting.

Sincerely yours

Fr. Fridriksson

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Short Story

The Neighbour

by David Jón Fuller

There was a point in my life when I became convinced that my immediate family was in fact the bane of my existence. My siblings felt the same way, and that was about all we agreed on, from my older brother, Brian, to my sisters Lisa and Tammi, down to me, the so-called "baby" of the family. I strongly resented the infantile epithet; after all, I was nine. My parents, of course, did not appreciate the strife that we kicked up daily; perhaps the isolation imposed on us by our location in the semi-rural area of Bird's Hill, just outside of Winnipeg, exacerbated the situation. My mother, particularly, was mystified by the change which had taken place over a couple of months one winter; unlike my father, she didn't quite accept the theory that our family simply had Too Many Teenagers. I had my own theory as to the source of our problems, but of course nobody would listen to me.

Our family was going through many changes, although for most of us it was simply puberty. Brian was almost done with it. Ever since he had gotten his driver's license and didn't need either of our parents to drive him when he wanted to go into town, the frequency with which he absolutely needed the car increased dramatically. I hypothesized that this had a lot to do with the fact that Brian was seeing someone. Her name was Linda. I did have, even at that age, a theoretical knowledge at least of what occurred when carrying on relations with the opposite sex; however, this was limited to the number of episodes of Happy Days I had seen.

My sister Lisa had started seeing her first boyfriend, a fellow by the name of

Wes, sometime around Christmas, and even a month later she was still constantly flitting about, fixing her makeup, doing her hair, or changing her outfits, something like a cross between a fashion model and a bumblebee. I was still at the sensible age when girls were gross, so I was able to observe her fascinatingly adolescent behaviour from a reasonably objective standpoint. I was also carefully watching Tammi, who was twelve, for any signs of such ridiculous behaviour.

She was beginning to take things in life very seriously; they were just not the same things that everyone else thought were important. For example, it was a pressing concern for her to discover whether our grandfather's old wardrobe was in fact capable of providing access to Narnia, or just how much garlic it took to ward off vampires, or if the nearby ranch was secretly breeding unicorns. I was often both impressed and intrigued by her theories, but I often noticed that while she was always willing to expound her latest beliefs, rarely was my input welcome. For this reason, I continued to keep to myself.

I knew everybody in the neighbourhood by then, partly because we had lived there for a few years, but mostly because I had a paper route and I knew where everyone lived. It meant a fair amount of riding my bicycle in the summer and trudging through the snow in the winter, but I didn't mind, because I got to know a lot more about the world; on a particularly long stretch between driveways, I might finish an entire article before having to re-fold the paper and tuck it into the mailbox by the side of the road.

It was a good time to take an interest in current events; whether it was the upcoming referendum in Quebec, the Oilers' new star, Wayne Gretzky, or Terry Fox's intention to cross the entire country by foot, there seemed to be a great many things happening. I personally hoped that the citizens of Quebec would not leave the country, as I had just started taking French in school and I felt it would be an awful shame if I were to learn the language and then have no-one to talk to. Thus it was with great interest that I devoured the news contained in the Winnipeg Tribune every day by the fading light of the sun as I distributed the papers to the people on my route.

Since nothing particularly out of the ordinary happened in our neighbourhood (well, perhaps once or twice), the fact that somebody was moving into the old Pudruchny house by the turn in the road was naturally the chief topic of conversation. Not much was known about him, beyond the fact that he lived alone; some said that he had had something to do with a circumglobal undersea line, presumably fibroptics; I heard from others that he had recently spent some time in Quebec.

The newcomer, whose name was Louis Karl Larson, but usually went by his first initials, quickly endeared himself to the rest of the people in our sparse community by coming up with creative solutions to seemingly impossible problems. The one which nobody forgot was the way he put a stop to the late-night use of our road as a private drag-racing strip.

From time to time, teenagers from Winnipeg would show up on our road in their souped-up hotrods and roar down it to the point where it turned sharply, right by Mr. Larson's house. It was never any use calling the RCMP, because by the time they arrived on the scene, the teenagers were already long gone. Now, everyone who had lived in the neighbourhood for some time knew exactly where the turn was, and could have found it blindfolded, but of course Manitoba Highways had placed a warning sign there for the benefit of other drivers.

It so happened that one night, when

the increasingly familiar rumble and growl of the exuberant, speed-crazed youths' vehicles was heard at the far end of the road from Mr. Larson's house, and the pairs of headlights wobbled and glared as the cars restlessly awaited the word to hurtle down the road in an attempt to impress somebody or other, that sign mysteriously disappeared. There followed the usual cacophony of roaring engines, and headlights streaked like comets down our normally peaceful road as a flag was dropped somewhere and the race began. However, on this particular night, the end result was that two carloads of unhappy teenagers ended up in the ditch just beyond the sharp turn, their vehicles held captive by the snowdrifts until the police arrived, at which point the sign had mysteriously been replaced. Of course, no-one could tell exactly what had happened or who had done it, but the final outcome was that more than a few driving privileges were revoked and our neighbourhood got its peace and quiet back.

I, however, did not trust Mr. Larson, but I must admit that my first impression of him was based on a rather unfortunate incident with his dog, which I was convinced was part crocodile.

When he subscribed to the Tribune, it gave me an opportunity to find out more about him. I walked up to his mailbox by the side of the road, and once I had done my duty as paperboy, I decided to have a closer look at Mr. Larson's abode and took a few casual steps down the tree-lined driveway. I immediately wished I had not, as the black shape by the side door, which I had taken at first glance for an unusually dark boulder, lifted its head and looked at me. I was terrified for a moment, amazed that something the size of a small, fur-covered Volkswagen was aware of me, but then I relaxed, because I knew that a dog so large would be on a leash. I had staked my peace of mind on this logical assumption, which unfortunately turned out to be sheer fantasy, as I saw when the monstrous creature rose to its feet unaccompanied by the reassuring rattling clink of a well-secured, hopefully titanium chain.

My mother has often remarked that I

was prone to exaggerating events in order to make stories of my life more interesting, but then of course my mother has never been on the wrong end of the slaving jaws of a two-hundred-kilogram wolf. As the behemoth sniffed curiously at the frigid air, pinning me with its pale blue eyes, a thousand plans of action flitted through my mind. However, none of them were possible, as conscious thought had been overridden by instinct; unfortunately the well-known fight-or-flight impulse failed to engage, and I was left with the default instinct, stand-there-staring-and-be-doomed. My entire life flashed before my eyes, all nine years of it, and I reflected sadly in that split-second that I would never reach the realm of double-digits.

We stood there motionless for an unbearable moment, which seemed to endure for an eternity (but was really only long enough for the instant replay of my life and the complete emptying of my bladder), after which I heard a low growl emerge from the cavern that was its chest. I knew then that Bray Road East would soon be bereft of its paper carrier. Clearly the gargantuan man-eater was anticipating an exchange of the void in its stomach for a void in the place where I now stood. The rumble trickling out of its throat deepened as it raised one huge paw from the snow and took a menacing step towards me.

In light of this new development in the situation, my instincts reorganized themselves and fight-or-flight thankfully resurfaced. Fighting was clearly out of the question, as I had no surface-to-surface explo-

sives handy, so I quickly endeavoured to break the sound barrier, gasping desperately and splashing gusts of powdery snow with every stride. I could hear the black guardian of our neighbour's home give chase, and remarkably, my speed doubled. Years later, when I was on track team in High School, I won many a race just by thinking of that dog.

To my horror, the monster closed the distance between us in mere seconds and I received a snap at my heels which tripped me and sent me tumbling into the ditch. Fortunately for me, and for the people who had not yet received their papers, before I could be treated to a guided tour of the creature's throat, a voice called out from Mr. Larson's house, bidding it to stop and return. I lay there motionless as the dog ceased its attack, then loped off back to where it had been lying earlier. Once it was out of sight behind the trees along the driveway, I leapt to my feet and tore home. Even though I knew the dog was no longer chasing me, my feet were not prepared to stop running until they had put me safely behind locked doors.


My family was understandably concerned when I appeared, sobbing with terror, clutching my newspaper bag, and repeating, "That damn dog!" I'm afraid that not even having a good bath, a hot supper, and watching Mork and Mindy was enough to get me to stop imagining ways to bring about the demise of the canine horror down the street. As I look back on the whole incident, I realize I may have been overreacting.

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My father went over to have a word with Mr. Larson about what had happened. I felt somewhat vindicated at his support, as Brian had already begun tormenting me with a typically creative string of dog jokes. When my father returned, he seemed frustrated; he said that there was simply no talking to the man. Somehow, Mr. Larson had managed to change the topic whenever my father had raised the issue. I was afraid that this meant I would have to daily face death in the course of my duties as paper carrier, and I began considering early retirement. This was not to be the end of it, thankfully; my father phoned the police.

Tammi confided in me that she thought perhaps Mr. Larson's dog was in actual fact a werewolf. She reasoned that since it was really just a friend of his who happened to be afflicted with lycanthropy, of course he didn't keep it tied up, as that was no way to treat one's friends. I was nearly convinced of this theory until I took a step back and thought about it rationally. Obviously it was not a werewolf, because then he would be human most of the time and a wolf only during the full moon. Tammi argued that he might be a reverse werewolf, but at that point I gave up on the conversation, because I knew that there was no such thing.

The point soon became moot, however, as I noticed the next day. I approached Mr. Larson's driveway, newspaper clutched tightly in my mitts and only a tiny wisp of vapour streaming from my nostrils (I was having trouble remembering to breathe). As I placed the newspaper in the mailbox, keeping an eye out for the whelp of Cerebus, I noticed that there was a police van parked in the driveway, and my curiosity overpowered my fear long enough for me to see what was happening.

There were two men arguing with Mr. Larson about his dog; I didn't hear everything they said, but it was clear they were talking about the fact that the dog ought to have been on a leash, and that since it had attacked someone, namely me, they were going to have to take it to the pound. I noticed that Mr. Larson did not seem

overly concerned; he almost seemed to want them to try. Gradually, tempers on both sides of the dispute boiled over, including the dog's (who, I was sure, had been following the whole conversation), until the men said that enough was enough and they were taking the dog away, whatever Mr. Larson said.

This, of course, was easier said than done, and the men realized that the animal was not going to readily submit to having a collar and leash added to its evening ensemble. I heard Mr. Larson say that if they weren't careful, someone would lose a hand, and I wasn't sure if that was a warning, a threat, or a joke. The two men glanced at one another, and I could see that they were wondering the same thing. They returned to the van, and I saw a smug grin appear on Mr. Larson's face. However, one of the men emerged from the vehicle with a gun, shot the dog with a tranquilizer, and when it was quite unconscious, they muzzled it and took it away. I could see that Mr. Larson hadn't expected them to do that. I think he saw me grinning with relief as the van drove past, because he gave me a look reminiscent of the one his dog had given me the day before; I decided that it was a good time to finish my route and return home.

When I came in the door, I saw that things were much the same as they had been for the last few weeks, my sisters were bickering and my parents were tense. Things did not improve when Brian came home. I could tell that he had been to the barber's; even if I had not noticed the fact that for once his hair was not hanging down over his forehead like a neanderthal's, and was feathered at the edges in accordance with the new style, he was strutting around like a peacock, expecting everyone to stop and admire him. Fat chance. I reasoned that the phenomenon of Brian getting a sensible haircut was somehow connected to the other phenomenon, that of his relationship with Linda. He had made it clear that this was going to be one important Valentine's Day; I had overheard him ask my father for the car four days in advance. Now that the day had come, I was surprised that he had managed to fit his ego in through the door.

He didn't hear a thing that was said to him all through dinner; he just looked out the window like a king about to conquer a

foreign country. He didn't register anything that was happening around him until Lisa excused herself from the table early, saying that she was supposed to go driving with Wes. I suppose that since whatever Brian was imagining had something to do with the car, her comment penetrated the stupor of fantasy in which he had immersed himself.

He immediately wanted to know precisely which car in the world she intended to be driving in that night, to which she responded, batting her Maybelline eyelashes at him, that she had already asked our mother for the car. Brian's previously regal eyes began to resemble those of an enraged bull, and my mother and father immediately looked at each other. I could see that there had been a lack of communication.

My two eldest siblings were now squaring off in the kitchen, Lisa already holding the phone, and Brian threatening bloody murder if she were to call Wes and say she would be right over. My parents leaped into the fray between them and attempted to defuse a rapidly escalating situation. Tammi and I watched them, and then looked at each other. At that point, neither of us was looking forward to adolescence.

My parents had made a grave error in separately giving permission to use the car to both Brian and Lisa for the same night, but in the end the car was awarded to Brian because he had asked for it first. Lisa would have to inquire as to whether Wes would be able to borrow a vehicle from his parents. I have always been amazed at the vol-

ume of fluid contained in my sister's tear ducts—the supply seemed limitless—and as she now employed them to deal with this situation, one might have wondered whether Wes's parents were heartless fascists who would torture him for daring to ask to use the car. However, her tears were to no avail, as my parents were becoming rather foul-tempered themselves at having made a mistake and then having to deal with my two older, more mature siblings and their tantrums.

Brian continued getting himself ready for his big night. Lisa left to go driving with Wes, whose parents had not in fact boiled him alive for needing the car, as her earlier display of emotion had hinted at. A while later, Brian departed, fitted out with a shirt with buttons and dress shoes, which hadn't seen use since Christmas. After the door closed, the rest of us breathed a heartfelt sigh of relief. My mother had barely begun an impromptu monologue on the values of patience and keeping one's temper when Brian exploded through the door, once again letting the minus twenty-five-degree air in. My mother stopped in mid-diatribes, and we all turned to look at him. He stared speechlessly at us as if someone had just proven to him that he was an obscure species of frog. My mother was the first to speak to him.


"What's the matter?" she said.

"The car's been unplugged!" he said, "It won't start!"

This was the first of the many incidents in an escalating civil war in our previously quiet household.

The second major incident occurred after the whole family had gone out one evening to visit my mother's parents in Winnipeg, except Tammi, who was at Girl Guides. She would be dropped off by one of her friends' parents, and would be able to let herself in with the key which we kept hidden outside the house. It was my grandfather's birthday, and after a few hours we returned home, only to find Tammi waiting on the doorstep in the freezing cold. Apparently, Lisa had forgotten to tell her that she had found a new hiding-place for the key. Luckily, Tammi had not been there long.

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The next night, only an hour after she had washed, changed, and flown out the door, Lisa returned from her driving practice with Wes. He came in for a moment, scratching his fingers, but he didn't stay long, as Lisa flew straight up to the washroom and wouldn't come out. My mother went up after her, and after waiting for a few minutes, Wes asked us to tell Lisa he'd call her the following day and left.

It was nearing bed-time for me, so I went upstairs to wait for the washroom in order to brush my teeth. I could not hear everything my mother and Lisa were saying, and of course I wasn't eavesdropping, but on a particularly loud wail I did hear Lisa say that someone had rubbed fibreglass insulation all over her underwear. I might have found out more, but I heard the door unlock and I suddenly developed an interest in a picture at the far end of the hall. My mother left the bathroom, looking not-at-all pleased, and closed the door behind her.

It seemed as if our family were cursed to live in interesting times.

The next noteworthy event occurred shortly after Tammi had somehow forgotten that snow melts inside the house, unless of course one keeps it inside a freezer; however, she had not put her snow-covered boots in the freezer, she had left them on my shoulder bag full of newspapers by the back door. When the time came to deliver them, I found her boots still sitting there—shiny, wet, and entirely free of snow. I must admit that I was none too pleased at this; wet papers are less fun than a barrel of

monkeys to deliver, but frozen ones are somewhat worse, particularly when they begin to freeze to each other.

When I had finished distributing Winnipeg's most-read block of ice and had returned home for supper, I told Tammi what she had done and asked her please not to do that again for the rest of her life. However, I had yanked her attention away from *The Hobbit* (which she was not supposed to be reading at the table), so when she muttered a quick, "sorry," I was not sure whom she had been addressing; me, or Gandalf.

Later that evening, after I had gone to visit my friend Scott who lived down the road, Tammi received a phone call, the consequences of which I heard about when I returned later that night. Apparently Matt, one of the other boys in our neighbourhood, had invited her over to work on a book report which they both had to do for school. Being as it was Tammi's first phone call from a male, she had been so excited that she had nearly hung up on him. Once she had gone through the formality of receiving permission from our parents, she had thrown the necessary books and scribblers into her Adidas bag and rushed out the door.

However, after barely half an hour she had returned, cheeks red and hair wet, having received a ride from Matt's parents. As I found out when I came home myself and heard the story from my mother in clipped sentences, when Tammi had been approaching Matt's house, she had been pelted by snowballs made with ice. When she had fled to the house for help, Matt's parents had let her in, but informed her that Matt was at Cub Scouts that evening.

Nobody knew what to make of this.

I pondered our current situation, which was beginning to make the national tension between Ottawa and Quebec seem like a picnic, as I walked down the road to pick up my newspapers (I no longer brought them home before delivering them). It was getting dark later and later every day now, but the sunlight was nevertheless still fading as I began to deliver my papers. I skimmed over the front page headlines as my feet carefully found their

way on the icy road. I found nothing particularly interesting, and my attention wandered until I was looking up at the sky. The familiar constellations of the North began to appear in the wide Prairie sky, and I found myself thinking of the last time I had seen a shooting star.

Unfortunately, since I was not paying attention to my immediate surroundings, I did not see the patch of black ice that my unsuspecting foot was about to step on. Within seconds, my feet were no longer directly beneath me and I was discovering the hard way that gravity is in fact operational twenty-four hours a day. The paper I had been reading went flying and its pages scattered. I hit the ground and rolled into the snow-filled ditch along the side of the road. After a moment I poked my head up from where I lay, resembling, I am sure, a nine-year-old yeti, and saw that the rest of my newspapers were still intact and safely in my bag. The one I had been reading, however, would require some careful reassembling before I could conscientiously deliver it to the Robertsons, who were next on my route.

As I collected the pages and began to put them back in order, I noticed a piece of paper that had fallen amongst them. I picked it up and stared at it. It was a typed, mimeographed sheet, which personally insulted everyone who lived on my route. Some of the remarks were funny, but as my eyes scanned down the page, I saw that they became increasingly personal and deliberately cruel. They were things I already knew, or had heard about—I knew

everybody on my route reasonably well—but I would never have said any of the things which I saw on the sheet before me. This made it all the more horrifying when I saw my own name at the bottom of the page.

I stared in disbelief at the page in my hands. Then, without bothering to re-fold the Robertsons' paper, I checked some of the others in my bag. They all contained the same note. Right then and there, I decided that the war in my family had gone far enough, and that I was going to go home and bring the matter before my parents. Then I realized that I had already delivered five papers.

There is not much to be said about what happened next, except that I ran faster than seventy-three percent of bats out of you-know-where to reclaim all the papers I had so far distributed. I took back the first four without incident, but as I came to the last house left to be saved from the slanderous insert, I saw our next door neighbour quickly shuffling down the driveway in her housecoat, parka, and untied boots to get the paper. I knew I had to reach that mailbox before she did, so I forced myself to think of Mr. Larson's dog; let me tell you, it did the trick. I snatched the neatly folded paper from its place just as she came to the mailbox, and as she stood there, puffing clouds of vapour and staring at me as if I had suddenly started doing my job in reverse, I could hardly let her long trek to the mailbox be in vain, so with a quick, "Here you go," I handed her the mostly-reassembled newspaper in which I had discovered the first note in.

Once home, I took the matter straight to my father, who, like everybody else on my route, was waiting to read the paper. Upon seeing the note, he agreed that things had indeed gone too far and that it was time to clear the air, as it were. After supper, he brought the matter to everyone's attention, citing the newspaper incident as the final straw. What followed was a long, heated debate in which accusations, denials, and rebuttals flew back and forth until everyone was exhausted. My parents said that if no-one was prepared to admit to what they had done, the only thing left to do was to

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forgive each other, forget about the pranks, and stop trying to get revenge on one another. I think the main reason that she succeeded in getting us to agree to this was that by that point everyone was tired of arguing.

Late that night, after my father had driven me around the neighbourhood to deliver my papers, I lay awake in the room I shared with Tammi. My sister was a sound sleeper, and unfortunately in her case it meant that when she slept she sounded like a chainsaw. I sat up in my bed, looking out the window as the stars twinkled in the deep, dark sky. I was startled out of my reverie when something flew up against the glass. I jumped back against my pillow, then hid under my quilt and tried to disguise myself as an empty bed. When I at last dared to peep out from underneath the covers, I saw that it was only a raven, which flew away as soon as I poked my head out. I went to the window to see whether it had built a nest under our eavestrough, but once at the sill, my attention was diverted by a black shape approaching our house over the snow. Someone was coming to pay us a visit.

I knew that we were not expecting anyone; we had only ever had one visitor in the middle of the night (and anyway, that is another story). Whoever it was walked over to the telephone pole which our icicle-covered phone line was connected to. I immediately went to wake my parents up. They were somewhat less than overjoyed to be disturbed after such a stressful evening, but when I told them that we were possibly in danger of being burgled (a verb I had never had the opportunity to use before), they quickly woke up. My father had barely slipped into his housecoat when we heard the back door quietly unlock and then creak open. My mother quickly grabbed the phone to call the police, gripping my arm so that I would be unable to follow my father, who was already creeping downstairs with a baseball bat. The phone was dead.

A few tense moments later, we heard the sounds of a scuffle, a yell, and an odd clang as if something had been dropped on our kitchen floor. This woke the rest of the

family up (even Tammi) and we rushed downstairs to help my father, Brian rushing past us, eager to prove something to someone.

What we found shocked us all. It was Mr. Larson. My father had put his years on the wrestling team in university to good use and had our neighbour pinned on our kitchen floor. There was an odd smell in the room, and we saw an open gasoline can lying prone in the corner. Next to it was a lighter. Brian helped my father keep Mr. Larson where he was as my father questioned him as to what exactly he had been intending to do, and our neighbour-cum- arsonist began a particularly eloquent story which he assured us would explain everything. He was cut short however, by the sound of hoofbeats on our driveway. I noticed that Mr. Larson's face turned pale at that.

There was a polite knock at the door and Lisa ushered in a Mounted Police officer, who explained as he doffed his wide-brimmed hat that he had been out for a late night ride from the ranch when he noticed someone tampering with our phone line, so he had ridden cross-country to see if we needed any assistance. I was bit disappointed that the officer was wearing a dull-coloured uniform rather than the bright red ones I had seen in pictures, but nevertheless there he was a real Mountie in our kitchen. (My mother told me later that they only wear red for special occasions.) He handcuffed Mr. Larson, asked us a few questions, and thanked us for helping him do his job. He said that he had actually been looking for this man for some time, who, it turned out, had been living in our neighbourhood under a false name. I supposed that there were a number of warrants out for his arrest. The officer apologized for having disturbed us and escorted Mr. Larson, who now looked very unhappy indeed, out the door. When we heard the hoofbeats again as the officer left, I went to the door to wave goodbye; however, he was already gone. I noticed then that the officer couldn't have been alone, as there seemed to be two sets of hoofprints on our driveway in single file.

That had certainly been enough excite-

ment for one night, but no-one wanted to go back to bed until each had had the opportunity to tell the story from his or her point of view. My father made hot chocolate for everyone as my mother cleaned the gasoline off the floor and opened a window to help get rid of the odour. Everyone was glad that the officer had shown up when he did, except Brian, who said that he and Dad could have handled Mr. Larson, at which I noticed my father rolling his eyes behind Brian's back. All Lisa had to say about the Mountie was that he looked as if he had had a glass eye, which she hoped would never happen to Wes, because she felt it was (as she expressed it) "totally gross." After drinking our hot chocolate, we all turned in and got some rest.

Things quieted down considerably after that. My siblings and I had no more major misunderstandings, and although we did of course get on one another's nerves from time to time, it never developed into anything more than a few arguments. Mr. Larson did not come back, and his house eventually went up for sale. I looked for stories of his case in the paper, but had no luck, so eventually I gave up. My parents were happy to be finished with the entire affair and things returned to normal.

I often thought about that winter in later years; I had my own theories about the discord that had insidiously grown in our home, although I had to admit that whatever the cause, it was made worse by the decided lack of communication between my siblings and I. Although I have never raised the issue with my family, I believe that Mr. Larson had something to do with it, that he was more than a malicious arsonist. However, I have to admit that whatever he may have done, he had done it without attracting much attention; far from being a loud, obnoxious neighbour, he was definitely low-key.



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Poetry

Vinland Quest

Eirik The Red, a Viking warrior so bold,
was exiled from Iceland for crimes of old,
set sail for a new land with wife, son and crew,
then called on his gods to guide his *sea steeds.
Westward he turned, sailing into all fjords
of his new country, Greenland, settled at Eiriksfjord,
where he *hallowed the land, raised a dynasty of
three sons and a daughter, all explorers at heart.

Leifur the eldest son, heard many compelling tales
of western lands sighted by *Bjarni Herjolfsson.
In one thousand A.D. Leifur and crew westward sailed,
discovered *Helluland, *Markland and a land of plenty
with riches unbound, which he named Vinland The Good.
He returned to Greenland with wealth and honour
where he ruled at Althing with justice and caring,
forever known as Leif The Lucky, for ventures so daring.

Thorvald, Eirik's second son, also fearless and bold,
longed to seek lands and fjords far beyond Vinland.
He sailed with a crew to a cape he named *Kjalarnes,
then on to a tree-lined fiord where he proclaimed,
"Here in this lovely spot I shall build my home."
But Fate intervened when the *skraelings appeared,
a battle ensued and Thorvald by an arrow was felled,
his Viking heart buried in Vinland The Good.

Thorsteinn, the youngest, a Viking god in mien,
married a gracious lady, Gudridur Thorbjarnardottir.
Seeking fame and fortune they set sail for Vinland,
but their ship, buffeted by storms and shrouded in fog,
was cast ashore at Greenland, not Vinland The Good.
Thorsteinn's fate was sealed by this ill-timed voyage
honour-bound, he ensured his crew's survival,
then died, his dream unattained, but beloved by all.

Thorfinnur Karlsetni, a young trader from Iceland,
sailed to Greenland where he wed the widow Gudridur.
With three ships and crews they set sail for Vinland,
firmly determined to colonize this bountiful land,
settled at *Straumfiord, where Gudridur gave birth
to *Snorri, first white child in North America born.
Thorfinnur traded with skraelings, then battles began,
they returned to Greenland and Iceland, their hopes denied.

Freydis, Eirik's daughter, who was both brave and cruel,
sailed to Vinland The Good with two ships and crews of
Greenlanders and Icelanders, each numbering thirty.
But Freydis, ever crafty, smuggled five extra aboard.
When trouble erupted in Vinland between the ships' crews
a bloody ambush followed, with the Icelanders all slain.
Freydis and crew, richly laden, to Greenland returned,
their voyage forever tarnished with dastardly deeds.

One thousand years ago these Vikings sailed west,
to discover uncharted lands became their main quest,
for Leifur Eiriksson and crew it brought honour and wealth,
for Thorvald and Thorsteinn a cruel rendezvous with death,
for Thorfinnur and Gudridur it brought the miracle of birth,
for Freydis and crew it brought nought but infamy and dirth,
These Vikings set out with hopes and dreams in their hearts
of attaining honour, fame and fortune in their Vinland quest.

- Kristiana Magnusson Clark

GLOSSARY

*sea steeds - Norse ships
*hallowed the land - to burn fire end to end of property line
*Bjarni Herjolfsson - first white man to see America
*Helluland - Flatstoneland
*Markland - Woodland
*Vinland - Wineland
*Althing - Parliament
*Kjalarnes - Keel Point
*Skraelings - Natives, aboriginals
*Straumford - Fjord of Streams
*Snorri - first white child born in America

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DATES IN VINLAND QUEST

966 A.D. Eirik the Red leaves Iceland to settle in Greenland
986 A.D. Bjarni Herjolfsson sights America
1000 A.D. Leifur Eiriksson lands in America
1002 A.D. Thorvald Eiriksson goes to Vinland
1007 A.D. Thorfinnur Karlsefni & Gudridur go to America to found a settlement in
Vinland
1008 A.D. Snorri Thorfinnsson born in America
1011 A.D. Thorfinnur Karlsefni, family and crew leave America
1012 A.D. Approximate year of Freydis' voyage to America

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White Flashes on Charcoal is Fred D. Anderson's first book of poetry but, hopefully, not his last. First books are acts of bravery for it is in them that the secret inner world of the poet is revealed for all to see. Fred takes on that challenge head first for he not only writes about his love of the Netley Marsh near Libau where he grew up but also the tragic death of his father by suicide.

The white flashes of charcoal of the title are revealed in the first poem "renewal" to be pelicans which "arrive/just before dusk deepens to night/over the thirsting prairie". The strength of those lines with

the surprising "thirsting prairie" prepare the reader for poems like "Morning View from Bale House" that include images such as the following:

buckbrush and wolf willows bend low
wiry branches lie back
like the ears of horses
annoyed by the buffeting wind

There is something about a poet's eye and mind that see not only what most of us see but observe what is beyond that. In "Indigo Bunting Day" the speaker says

It's an indigo bunting day
Now, late in the lingering fall
A few fragments of summer cling
To clematis on latticed wall

Having read those lines I will now see days differently. When I return from Manitoba to Victoria, I will watch for the appearance of various flocks of birds and think not only of the poet and his poem but will rename the days.

One of the requirements of a poem is that it earn its last lines. Those lines have to be prepared for, through an accumulation of detail that creates a second level of understanding. In "two pennies" Fred does just that. Taking the most mundane of details—a hair band, a worn cushion, two pennies, a toothpick, pretzel bits, a button—he moves toward a moment of sadness that all readers can empathize with when he says that "for two cents/I'd call/and say hi/speak breezily/to blow the/dust from the tracks you/left behind/.

In the section "Reflections in my mirror" the poet reveals his empathy for those who are marginalized in our society. In "Bonnie" it is a woman wasted by radiation therapy. In "Alley Cat" it is "Back Alley Simon/blinded by Lysol".

In section five, "Marshland

Memories", the poet deals with the most difficult of subjects, the death of his father by suicide. Fred comes from a large, close-knit family with roots in both Icelandic and Manitoba culture; the family history is inseparable from Icelandic history and literature, Icelandic Canadian immigration and, specifically, settlement in the Libau/Netley area.

In "The Last Loon of Long Lake" the poet prepares us for what is coming by describing the death of a loon. He sets the scene with "The Landing at Anderson Lake". When the reader finally begins the "Last Shot", he is prepared for the inevitability of the coming event. In Part 1 the poet describes the experiences that bind father and son.

marshland memories
with gill nets
fishing for mink feed
and out-of-season pickerel
Easter holidays trapping muskrats

hunting, banding ducks

but at the end of the section he describes himself as deliberately missing a mallard that comes their way after a fruitless day of hunting. Something then of the past is missing and fear of the present is clear. In Part II he describes being told of his father's death. He concludes with a quote from when his father complimented him on having shot well, "Good shot, Grizzly" but it is a compliment deep with sorrow.

The final poem, "Morning After the Thunderstorm", ends on a hopeful note, not just in the title, but also in the final image.

As leaves transform to butterflies
butterflies are leaving
from dark chrysalis bursting free
tumbling from
inside of me

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The Ice Shirt

By William T. Vollmann
Penguin Books, 415 pages

Reviewed by Helen Sigurdson

The Ice Shirt is the first volume of William Vollmann's seven part series of his version of how the Europeans settled North America. This book is a rather imaginative historical novel of the landing of the Norsemen in what is now Canada. With faultless knowledge of the Icelandic and Norse sagas, Inuit and Native American mythology, as well as his own well documented travel research, Vollmann has created a riveting account of our early history.

Ice-Shirt is basically the history of Freydis, bastard daughter of Erik the Red and her journey to Vinland, but he begins with stories of the Vikings and the lives of the Norse people (mostly the kings) in the early tenth century.

The power of dreams and the ability to change shape are strong themes in the book. The early Norse kings "shape shift" changing themselves into bears or other creatures. King Ingjald eats the heart of a wolf and becomes cruel and vicious like a wolf, kills other kings and even takes his own daughter to wife. He wears a Wolf-Shirt. In Norse folklore, shirts relate to temperament and attitude. "Although, truth to tell, he could easily have eaten a dove's heart and become mild; or he could have gone - a - Viking to Africa to get a heart of a crocodile, so that at least he'd be able to shed tears over his victims -----." To change shirt is to become something different.

Vollmann's version of Viking raids and his stories of their plunder are gory and philosophical. They did slaughter, rape and burn the inhabitants of the lands they plundered, but many stayed to work the land and create kingdoms. Vollmann asserts, "no doubt the dissatisfaction has been exaggerated in the historical accounts since spoilsports cry out loudly while on the other side good losers are silent, being dead."

Vollmann retells the story of Erik the Red, his banishment from Norway for killing a man and his settlement and marriage in Iceland. Adages such as, "craft is better than strength" and "riches are the curse of those who have none" are interspersed in the very descriptive telling of Erik the Red's life in Iceland. In a dispute over possession of his family's sacred rune board, Erik again kills a man and this time is banished to Greenland.

The story of the encounter of the Icelanders with the Greenlanders begins with the Inuit myth of creation. It is the legend of Elder Brother and Younger Brother in which Younger Brother changes shape and becomes female. (Woman-Shirt) Spirit Woman gives birth to a pack of wolves and dogs who are forbidden to mate with siblings. The children of these animals become the Inuit people. Here Vollmann shows how mythology provides answers to so many of the mysteries of the human condition. For insight into the transvestite world, Vollmann visits with a group of San

Francisco transvestites.

The native Greenlanders, whom the Icelanders called skraelings, were believed to be trolls. Vollmann uses his knowledge from his visit to Greenland to describe Greenland of the present and to retell the myth of the relative sizes of the Greenlanders and the Icelanders. (both exaggerated) He follows the sagas to relate the story of Erik the Red's stay in Greenland, the birth of his three sons, and bastard daughter, Freydis. We learn about one of the sons, Leif the Lucky's exploration in Vinland, about Gudrid, the widow of one of Erik's sons, who marries Thorfinn Karlsefni and their journey to Vinland and about Freydis and her wealthy husband, Thorvard of Gardar, and their settlement in Vinland.

Freydis dreams a dream of the great blue glacier and then begins her treacherous journey to find the Blue-Shirt, Amortortak. (a demon) The descriptive passages of this journey are some of the best in the book. e.g. "The wind sounded like women laughing together riding down a waterfall" and "In the moss was a perfect lemming skull. A flower grew through its eye."

Freydis, with her husband and a household of thralls, sails to Vinland and inhabits the place where Leif the Lucky had settled. As she had pledged her duty to

Blue-Shirt, she becomes more and more cold and unfriendly as to the feelings of others. She wears an Ice-Shirt. The Skraelings, (perhaps Micmac Indians) come to trade. They brought packs of furs which they traded for bits of red cloth and cows milk which they had never tasted.

Gudrid and Karlsefni were in Vinland at the same time as Freydis. Gudrid gave birth to the first white child in America. Freydis was now even colder to Gudrid than before and her jealousy made her want to "chop her guts out". Although Freydis was a Christian woman she prayed to Amortorak, a pagan god, and when she heard of Glooskap, the shape changing Person with power of the Micmac people, she believed he was also cruel. She prayed to him to make her richer promising in return to bring frost seed to Vinland. When Freydis became richer, she brought the frost seed from Greenland to Vinland and the climate became colder.

A redeeming feature for readers is the several pages of glossaries, source material and historical date lines of such a wide scope that the reader has a quick reference. The many sketches and maps dispersed throughout the book are very helpful as the writing sometimes feels convoluted and moves quickly from time and place.

Contributors

KRISTIANA MAGNUSSON CLARK has written four family history books relating to the Magnusson/Sigvaldson families one that was in co-operations with her brother in law, Richard Rothe and another with her second husband, Alder Clark. She has also published an anthology *Winds of Spring* and many articles and poems for various publications. She lives in the White Rock, BC area.

DAVID JÓN FULLER is a Winnipeg-based freelance writer. He works for Lögberg-Heimskringla. His work has appeared in *The Icelandic Canadian*, and *Prairie Books Now*, and he is a regular contributor to *Uptown* magazine.

GLEN JAKOBSON is the son of Dr. Bodvar and Borga Jakobson. He was raised in Neepawa, Manitoba and studied English at the University of Winnipeg, education at Brandon University and Icelandic at Haskoli Islands. Following his two years in Iceland he spent a year in Denmark. He has spent the last 13 years teaching in Uwajima (2 years) and Matsuyama (11 years) in Japan. During the hot, humid Japanese summers he divides his time between Nanaimo, B.C. and Siglavik, near Gimli.

KEVIN JON JOHNSON, B.A. Honours, B.Ed., has taught English in Canada and Japan. He has won two creative writing scholarships from the University of Winnipeg and served as President of Lögberg-Heimskringla newspaper from 1996 to 2000. In 1997 Kevin wrote, with Melinda McCracken, the Canadian social history Magnus Eliason: A Life on the Left. Soon, the American firm Publish America will publish his autobiographical novel, *Deep Structure Comedy*. This unique metaphysical saga tells of Kevin's overcoming a bipolar mood disorder, winning the love of a young Grey Nun named Barb, and defeating Satan like the medieval Icelandic intellectual Saemund the Wise.

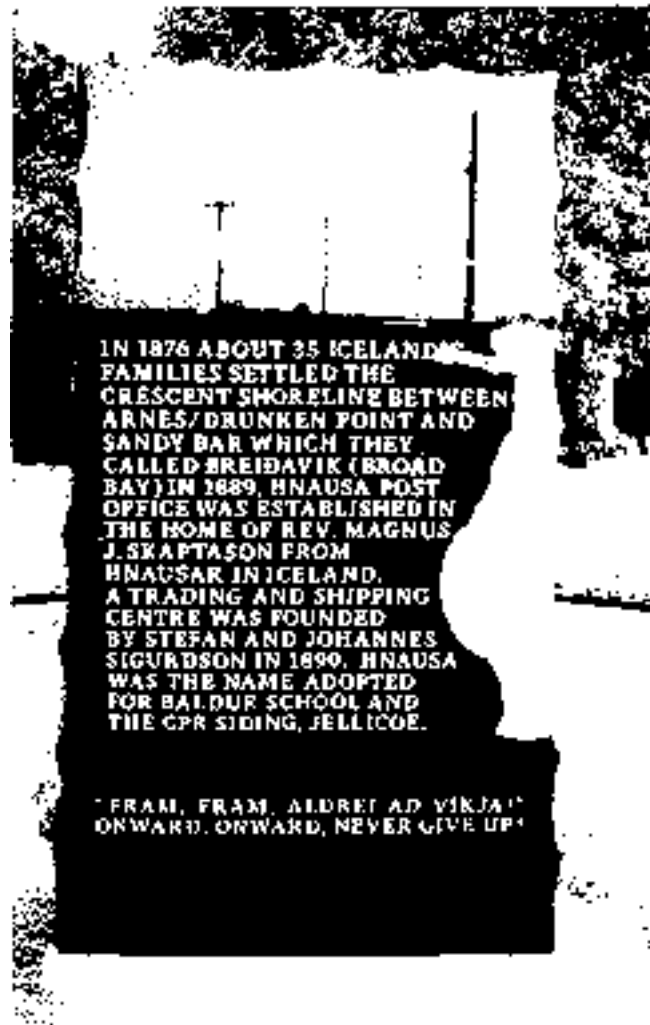
J. TIMOTHY SAMSON, Q.C. practices law as a partner in the firm of Aikins, MacAulay & Thorvaldson, LLP. and teaches law related courses at the University of Manitoba. He is the President of Canada Iceland Foundation and, among other activities, serves on the VIP Fund Committee for the Department of Icelandic and the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba. He was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Icelandic Order of the Falcon in 2000.

HELEN SIGURDSON is a retired teacher. She wrote a book, *I Wanted You to Know*, which is her life story. She has written book reviews for the Free Press and presently facilitates a life story writing program at the Stradbroke Senior Centre. She lives in St. Vital with her husband, Frank.

SIGURBJORG STEFANSSON was a highly respected teacher. A school in Gimli bears her name. She was instrumental in establishing the libraries at Gimli, Riverton and Arborg. She had a great pride in her Icelandic heritage. Delving into the history led her to translating the letters so that they could be shared.

W. D. VALGARDSON has recently retired after forty-two years of teaching English and Creative Writing. He is currently restoring his Heritage Home in Victoria. When he's not sawing, hammering, painting, cementing, he is working on a collection of short stories.

GENE WALZ is professor of Film Studies at the University of Manitoba and the author of *Cartoon Charlie: The Life and Art of Animation Pioneer Charles Thorson*. In addition to the forthcoming *One Man's Documentary*, he has edited two anthologies: *Canada's Best Features* and *Flashback: People and Institutions in Canadian Film History*. In 1987 he wrote and directed *The Washing Machine*, a half-hour comedy drama based on a story by David Arnason.



The back page

The Braidavik-Hnausa Cairn was dedicated on August 5, 2000 to the pioneers of the district. In 1876 about thirty-five Icelandic families arrived, followed later by groups of Ukrainian, Polish, and Hungarian immigrants.

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