ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADVERTISING & EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE
Icelandic Connection, Box 1156, Gimli, Manitoba R0C 1B0 CANADA
CONTACT Lorna Tergesen (204) 642-9650 for inquiries about the magazine

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ON THE COVER

Decoration on the back of an upphlutur, traditional Icelandic costume. Anonymous woman was part of the Lóuþrælar Male Voice Choir tour group at the 2010 Icelandic Festival of Manitoba.

Editorial

Growing and Changing

by Lorna Tergesen

Were you surprised when you received your magazine? The new packaging, set up and all the changes are due to our coming to terms with the higher costs we are having to face. There have been meetings with all those who are now on our new team. In the very near future there will also be the ability to buy the magazine on line. So, to say the least, we are being as pro-active as possible.

There will no doubt be some bumps in the road, but we hope that with your patience we will in the end be able to produce a good magazine. So many volunteers over the years have contributed so much that it is only fitting for us to try to maintain their standards.

Yes, we have had to raise the price, but on reflection we realized that we had held our prices for more than thirteen years. Everyone knows that all costs related to production and sales have risen in that time. Now our Canadian subscribers will pay $40 for 4 issues, USA and International $46.

The folks that now will be in charge of set-up are not new to most of you, for they are part of the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* team. The printer, packager and shipper is Dycom Direct Mail. Upon our initial visit to their plant we were greeted and informed that the maternal side of the owners was of Icelandic background. From that point on we were treated as family. We hope our relationships with these newly met people will be long and lasting.

Please continue to support us by subscribing and also by spreading the word about our little magazine. We appreciate receiving your stories, poems and translations, so please keep them coming. A variety of material for the magazine is so important. To our advertisers, we say thank you for your patience when we have not always been on schedule and for continuing to stick with us. To those who are our donors we are truly grateful for your support and confidence. We wish to also thank Karen Emilson, who has been our desktop publisher for many years, but now finds that her work load cannot accommodate our needs.

So many changes but we hope all are for the BEST!

Tribute to Haraldur Bessason (1931–2009)

The Laurence Johnson Lifetime Achievement Award, Icelandic National League of North America Convention, April 23, 2010, Toronto

by Birna Bjarnadóttir

Distinguished guests,

It is in the thirteenth century *Saga of the Volsungs* that Sigurður the Dragon Slayer has a conversation with the wise Fáfnir, one of the greatest dragons found in World Literature. The dragon knows that the young man's thirst for wisdom is not the sole purpose of his visit. There is a different kind of treasure involved, also, only to be possessed by the slaying of its keeper, the dragon himself. While wondering about the fearless nature of the visitor, the dragon is struck by Sigurður's young age. He's only a boy; "boy with the sharp eyes", as Fáfnir acknowledges.

When Haraldur Bessason arrived in North America to take the position as the Chair of Icelandic at the University of Manitoba, he was a young man, in fact, little more than a boy. His quest for wisdom had ferried him away from his people, his farm and his Norðurland, and from there, to the University of Iceland, straight into the heartland of academia: the Humanities. His quest for wisdom then ferried him further, away from his country, the (at the time) young and fragile republic, into the deep waters and all the way to the shore of New Iceland. Unlike the young Sigurður, who – despite the best of counsel – fell prey for the doomed gold, Haraldur's quest was for one treasure only, namely a cultural heritage. And what is the result?

During his thirty-one years as Head of the Icelandic Department at the University of Manitoba, from 1956 to 1987, Haraldur served well over 15 years as a member of various North American Icelandic organizations (including the Icelandic National League of North America) and was a force in North American culture and identity. This, the same man who helped to foster – in the old country – a renewed understanding and interest among Icelanders in North American Icelandic people and culture.

Of particular accomplishments, I will mention only a few: Haraldur established the Icelandic Study Series of publications at the University of Manitoba Press. As part of that series, Haraldur initiated and oversaw the translation of Grágás (Grey Goose), a book of laws of early Iceland in two volumes and worked on the translation of Íslendingasaga (History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth). The Icelandic Study Series continues to this day. He edited, and co-edited numerous periodicals, including *Scandinavian Studies, The Icelandic Canadian Magazine, Tímarit Hins íslenska þjóðræknisfélags* (newsletter of the Icelandic National League), and *Lögberg–Heimskringla*.

In his lifetime, Haraldur received numerous awards, including the first Honorary Doctorate from the University of Akureyri in the year 2000, an Honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Manitoba, honorary citizen of the City of Winnipeg and the Order of the Falcon from the government of Iceland.

And this brings us back to the old country. In 1987, Haraldur and his wife, and companion, Margrét Björgvinsdóttir, left Canada for Iceland and stayed there until 2003. That is when Haraldur became the founding Dean of the University of Akureyri. During those years, he wrote extensively on North Americans of Icelandic descent and their culture and handed down to us books like *Letters to Brandur* and *Afternoon at the Fort Garry*. The last book to appear, posthumously, has the beautiful title *Guðir og menn, Gods and Humans*. Like the other books mentioned, this one serves no less as an indication of Haraldur´s adventurous mindset, the quality of his perception, his knowledge and his lifelong fascination with, and the exploration of a certain passage into the world, this bridge crossing oceans: the Icelandic cultural heritage.

The Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba acknowledges its good fortune to have had someone like Haraldur Bessason serving the cause in a remarkably generous spirit, handing down to us an example full of love, full of magic and full of joyful wisdom. On behalf of the department, it is a great honor to address this convention, and to be present at the occasion of the recognition of Haraldur Bessason's lifetime achievement.

The Scandinavian Hjemkomst Festival 2010 – Iceland as the Featured Country

A glimpse behind the scenes of being the Featured Chef of the Scandinavian Hjemkomst Festival

by Anders Ericsson and Elin Hansen

Anders Ericssonn and the HoDo Reception

This year's Scandinavian Hjemkomst Festival was held June 25 – 27 in Fargo-Moorhead with Iceland as the featured country. On a cold day in March, I started receiving emails asking me to be the Featured Icelandic Chef for the festival. After much thinking and hundreds of emails from Elín Hansen and Pam Olafson Furstenau, I agreed to do this, but only if Elín would work with me. Then I submitted my bio. I was first told I would conduct two or three cooking demonstrations during the event. Three weeks later I was informed that Elín and I would also need to create some Icelandic-themed appetizers as part of the Hotel Donaldson (HoDo) dinner on Friday June 25th. Shortly after, the HoDo dinner was reinvented as a two hour Icelandic Appetizer Reception for anywhere from 50 – 200 plus people. We pored over recipe books, searched the Internet, sent out emails and reviewed hundreds of recipes. We needed a summer pâté, and yet another meat item. I created a salmon and seafood pâté culled from five recipes in my mother and grandmother's collections. Susan Sigurdson Powers and Andrea Abrahamson from Fargo-Moorhead Icelandic Klub (FMIK) were able to get some of the best tasting rúllupylsa I've eaten outside my family farm in Poplar, Minnesota. Our menu for the Icelandic Appetizer Reception included; Ísafjörður Salmon and Seafood Pâté, Reykjavík Rúllupylsa, Nordic Cheeses and Flatbreads, Biscotti Di Vino, and Lefse Chips. Three spreads were made with skyr as the main ingredient; Tzatziki, Guacamole and a Vanilla Fruit Spread. I was given a recipe for a special Hazelnut Chocolate Cookie by my friend Eyþór who works at the Icelandic Embassy in Norway. The pâté and rúllupylsa were named in honor of Örn and Maddý Arnar's birthplaces.

With our appetizers in place, Andrea designed the menu to be distributed at the HoDo reception. Andrea was truly the third member of our team. She was able to find anything we needed with regard to specialty ingredients and even provided us with fresh homegrown produce. To say I was nervous was an understatement. We were putting together a reception and cooking demonstrations without meeting the people we were working with and not knowing what the venues looked liked. Lots of trust involved! Then Elín received a last-minute opportunity to go on a culinary tour of Iceland with a group

of food writers and culinary professionals. It took her out of communication during the final two weeks before the event. She returned to Minneapolis on Thursday June 24th and drove straight to Fargo to prepare for the 25th. We could do nothing now but look straight ahead.

The day of the event arrived. Executive Chef Tim Fischer of Hotel Donaldson provided us with preparation and service help. The assistants were ready and worked very hard. The spreads were wonderful, and the lefse chips were to die for. I poked my head out into the dining area just as the HoDo reception was about to start and saw Dianne O'Konski and Kristín Björnsson Ode who gave me truly needed HUGS! Then it was back to work. I could not believe how quickly the pâté and rúllupylsa went. We had four trays of each and the first went out on the table just before 6:00. At 6:30 I looked at the clock and noticed we had just one tray of each left. The spreads were going like mad too. I have never had so many people approach me to shake my hand and wanting a picture taken with me – I thought I was in a dream! The months of creating a menu that reflected both Elín and me using the foods we both like to make had resulted in a smash hit! I have received at least 30 requests asking me for the cookie recipe. The hugs and handshakes truly gave Elín and me the support we needed heading into Saturday's demos. "Just one more hill to climb" was all I could tell myself after the HoDo Friday night.

Elín Hansen and the Icelandic Cooking Demonstrations

As Anders writes, it was sometime towards the end of winter that we both heard about Hjemkmost and learned with great pride that Iceland was the featured country. We agreed to come on board as Featured Chef (Anders) and Able Assistant (me) and soon an epic exchange of emails was launched between us, Pam Olafson Furstenau, organizers of the festival, friends, family and chefs in Iceland, embassies and honorary consuls. Why all this communication? Simply because we wanted to do the best job possible representing "our country" at the festival!

The events of the HoDo have been well documented earlier in this article and now on to the cooking demos. Saturday morning arrived and Anders and I reported to the kitchen at the Hjemkmost Center. There we found members of the Fargo-Moorhead Icelandic Klub (FMIK) smartly dressed in kitchen smocks emblazoned with the Icelandic flag. They were slathering thick slices of brown bread with butter and topping them with hangikjöt, rúllupylsa and graflax. I could see trays of kleinur, pönnukökur and vínarterta everywhere and all I wanted to do was hang around and hope for a bite or two.

No go, though, as FMIK member Andrea Abrahamson lead us through to a back room where we found long tables piled high with cooking equipment and bags of ingredients for our demos. She pointed out two refrigerators where our perishables were, then set up a table for us to prep and get everything organized by recipe and onto trays. For students of cuisine this is known as *mise en place.* Lots of good humour and adapting to the circumstances unfolded as Anders and I quickly chopped, sliced and diced ingredients for the first two recipes to

be demoed. Andrea returned with a cart: we loaded it up and off we went to the Hjemkmost "Theatre" for our demo.

Upon arriving in the "Theatre" I realized that of all questions I asked about the festival I forgot to ask the most important one, "What sort of kitchen will we be cooking in for the demos?" I watched with amusement as Andrea unpacked two electric burners and plopped them on a table. Here was our "kitchen"! The "Theatre" was really a conference room, with rows of chairs arranged for the audience to watch what was unfolding in the front of the room. *Ekkert mál.* With the experience of coordinating hundreds upon hundreds of cooking demonstrations I knew to push the two burners together to increase the speed of cooking. We had all the pots and pans we needed and our *mise en place* was ready, so we were fine. I don't think anyone in the audience noticed that we weren't sure how we could possibly get everything cooked on those two burners while not setting fire to the tables.

Speaking of the audience, seeing so many beaming faces in attendance was a real comfort to us. The Icelandic American Association of Minnesota and the Icelandic Hekla Club were well represented with members Örn and Maddý Arnar, Claire Eckley, Dianne O'Konski, Kristín Björnsson Ode, and Petrina Cordes looking on. Anders talked and cooked; I interjected a few times and babbled on about sweating vegetables, the Árnessýsla regional dairy cooperative and skyr being available at Whole Foods. Lorna Tergesen shared great tips for making skyr at home with buttermilk. Time flew and before we knew it Anders was presenting the first round of finished dishes: Rhubarb and Strawberry Soup with Skyr and his mother Maddý's Kartöflusúpa. We were delighted by the applause of our audience and both agreed that the cooking demo was a lot of fun to do. We raced back to the prep kitchen with our cart as we had under an hour to prep the recipes for the next class: Salmon with Blueberry Rhubarb Sauce and Amma Inga's Íslensk Salat. The crowds in the hallways of the Hjemkmost Center parted for us and looked on with curiosity as we passed by. We looked back and beamed with absolute pride at representing Iceland for the festival.

Maddý's Kartöflusúpa

Anders cherishes his mother Margrét Lilja's (Maddý) handwritten recipe for potato soup – jotted down on the back of a US airmail envelope in 1949. Try this smooth and creamy soup with a splash of heavy cream, finely chopped fresh chives and your favorite croutons.

Soup:

1 pound / 500g	red potatoes peeled and thinly sliced
1 small	carrot peeled and diced
1 medium	onion finely chopped
4 tablespoons / 60g	butter
2 cups / 500 ml	chicken broth
1 cup / 250 ml	half-and-half
bouquet garni	1 bay leaf, a few sprigs of fresh thyme, and a small handful of roughly chopped parsley tied together securely in a piece of cheesecloth
salt and pepper to taste	

Garnishes:	heavy cream
	finely chopped fresh chives
	croutons

Melt butter in a medium size saucepan; add onions and sauté until just becoming soft and not quite translucent. Add potatoes and carrot and stir consistently not letting onions brown or caramelize.

When potatoes just begin to soften, take the pan off the heat and stir in broth and half-and-half. Add bouquet garni to pan, season to taste with salt and pepper and return to heat. Bring soup to boil, then reduce heat and simmer gently for 1 hour.

Remove pan from heat, remove and discard bouquet garni. Using hand-held immersion blender, blend the soup into a creamy, smooth texture and taste again for salt and pepper, adding more if needed. Or carefully transfer soup to food processor or blender and process until smooth, adjusting seasoning as needed before serving.

To Serve: Divide between 4 or 5 soup bowls; garnish with heavy cream, chives, and a few croutons if desired.

Amount: 4 to 5 servings

Amma Inga's Íslensk Salat

During childhood summers and Christmas holidays in Iceland, Ander's amma would often serve beets, much to his chagrin. As an adult, he came to appreciate this healthful root vegetable and the fond memories they recalled stirred of meals lovingly prepared by his grandmother. This recipe is modernized with a tart and sweet Raspberry Balsamic Vinaigrette.

Salad:

1 small head	iceberg lettuce, cut or torn into bite-size pieces
1 (5 ounce / 140g) bag	Dole® Spring Salad Mix
1 large	carrot
1 medium to large	beet
1 medium	Sweet Vidalia or Spanish onion
1	Red Delicious apple
1	Golden Delicious apple

Vinaigrette:

1/2 cup / 125 ml	olive oil
1/4 cup / 60 ml	balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons	raspberry preserves
1/2 teaspoon	onion powder
1/2 teaspoon	black pepper
1/2 teaspoon	salt

Place all ingredients together in a medium-sized bowl and whisk by hand with a wire whisk until thick and smooth. Set aside while assembling salad.

For the Salad:

Keep all ingredients raw. In a large bowl toss together iceberg lettuce and spring mix. Divide lettuce mixture between six chilled salad bowls. Peel and shred carrot and beet. Peel and finely slice onion. Add carrot, beet, and onion to top of lettuce mix in each bowl. Wash apples well and dry them with paper towel. Do not peel apples. Cut, core, and dice the apples. Add a few drops of lemon or lime juice to apples to stop browning, if needed. Add apples to the top of the salad in each bowl. Dress each salad with Raspberry Balsamic vinaigrette to taste. Serve immediately.

Amount: 6 servings

"Icelandic, a Head Start Heritage – More Than Volcanic Dust"

by Kenneth Davidson, August 2010

My father was Wiglundur (better known as Bill), son of Trausti Davidson and Gudrun Thorlaksdottir. Dad's father, Trausti died in 1934 when Dad was 18, leaving him and his older brother Fridstein (Jim) to support his widowed mother Gudrun, two sisters and two younger brothers. Before moving to Winnipeg to help his Uncle Bill manage his apartment blocks, Dad worked as a fisherman, woodcutter and farmer, depending on the season. Although he later owned and managed his own buildings and became involved in furniture manufacturing and land development, he always remembered his modest roots. To the end, he remained a builder – not just of things but of relationships and his community.

My mother was one of 17 siblings (15 of whom lived to adulthood), the children of Una Gudrun Jonasdottir and Johann Pjetur Solmundson, first minister of the Gimli Unitarian Church on 3rd Avenue. After the dissolution of their marriage the family was left in dire straits. At various times my mother and some of her older siblings were billeted to other families in town in order to make ends meet. Hard times during childhood left a mark on her. In later life she would become active in the charitable work of numerous service organizations dedicated to helping the less fortunate. For her, everyone counted and she believed everyone should be counted in.

Both of my parents were born and raised in Gimli. The Davidson and Solmundson sides of my family originally emigrated from the Borgarfjordur, Akranes and Akureyri areas of Iceland.

So here I am in Gimli today, a third generation Canadian of Icelandic descent, now living in Vancouver. In Gimli my appetite for Icelandic food is satisfied - vinarterta, rullupylsa, lifrapylsa, smoked goldeye and hardfiskur come to mind. But as wonderful as these delicacies may be, Gimli would still be just a place if it were only about the food. And, even though Gimli in Norse mythology is said to be "the most beautiful place on Earth, more beautiful than the Sun", this would not be enough. Truly coming home must be about more – more than food – more than geography.

"Home is where the heart is", as the old saying goes. Because our family's need for belonging is nourished here, Gimli is where our heart is. It is this way for us and likely for many others, so blessed.

For me Gimli is where I return like some migratory bird, magnetized to it by an internal compass. It is where I come to remember and better understand what shaped the character and outlook of my grandparents, parents and now, me. I am reminded that something marvellous has been passed on from one generation to the next from a tiny dispersion of people who

landed on the shores of Lake Winnipeg some 135 years ago.

Memories come to life, helping me keep faith with the past and renew my strength to face the road ahead.

My mother returned to Gimli after my Dad died in 1989. Before passing away at age 97, she spent her remaining 13 years here. My children have wonderful memories of sitting on the lawn at Betel with their Amma, watching the Islendingadagurinn Parade circle past.

Familiar in her hometown and at ease conversing in her mother tongue, she had truly come home to stay. Her final resting place is here with my father, my brother Bill and my son, Paul.

Visiting the old church on Second Avenue where Johann Pjetur's pulpit was, I imagine the powerful oratory in his sermons still ringing out for the ages.

I look over at the dance pavilion in this park. In my mind's eye the hot August night air is filled with the sound of Johnny and His Musical Mates from Riverton. My cousin Kim Thorarinson and I are 12 years old again, dancing up a storm which in retrospect may have looked like an early version of break dancing or two young berserkers in training. How thrilled and proud we were to accept spare change for our efforts from bemused dance-goers.

PHOTO: KEN DAVIDSON

Left to right: Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, Kenneth Davidson, Sara Davidson, Reva Davidson

In 1986, due in large part to the genealogical skills of my sister Connie, the Solmundson clan – some 400 uncles, aunts and cousins gathered in this park for a reunion. We turned the sports field behind the pavilion into a soccer pitch. A spontaneous and raucous soccer tournament broke out. Everybody claims to have won. The passage of time helps me realize that in the larger sense, we all did win.

In memory of our late son Paul, Gimli is where our family lends its support to the development of promising young musicians. Given our family history in the area, Paul's musical talent and pride in all things Viking and Icelandic – it was a natural choice.

So, Gimli represents much more than a place on the map where we came from – it is a "home" – a centre of experiences and shared values that we carry with us on our journey through life. It is a home to which we strive to return – no matter where else we may choose to call home.

So what are these experiences and shared values to which I refer? Why do the stories of our Icelandic heritage enthral us?

Long before the volcanic dust of Eyjafjall spread across Europe, a small number of people from a tiny island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean began their emigration to distant lands, including here to New Iceland.

While they carried precious few material possessions, the early settlers brought ideas and values that gave their descendants a "head start" and enabled them to make contributions to the diverse communities in which they settled. In the sciences, arts, trades, business, education, law, medicine and other professions, politics and public service - the record of achievement by Icelanders and their descendants is superlative and disproportionate to their small population.

A cornerstone of our Icelandic heritage is the Althing, the oldest parliamentary institution in the world, established in 930 C.E. It represents the first truly inclusive working model of the democratic ideal. It embodies a system of governance predicated on the belief in the equality of all people. Guided by mutual respect for each other and the peaceful settlement of disputes between parties, its laws and judicial decisions balanced the interests of individuals and the community to a degree seldom surpassed in history.

While our ancestors cannot claim these ideals and achievements as theirs exclusively either historically or culturally, they did embrace them and practice them diligently. Their ability to get along with others served our ancestors well as they moved to lands with customs unlike their own.

As they disembarked in Canada, trunks laden with books of all sorts, the Icelandic newcomers were sometimes mocked by customs agents for such eccentricity. While this didn't speak well for the customs officials, it spoke volumes about our forebears' love of literacy, learning and passion for knowledge.

In the fall of 1875 and 1876 they were, indeed, strangers in a strange land. Icelanders had known humiliation and the sting of oppression at the hands of foreigners in their homeland. The settlers had no intent to displace, conquer or subjugate anyone. Instead, their reputation for fair-dealing with people grew. During the particularly harsh winter of 1876 they suffered from famine and disease. Their respectful treatment of others was reciprocated by the First Nations, in particular, who provided

food and traditional medicines which helped them to survive that awful period. And so began a relationship of peaceful coexistence and cooperation with the native peoples of this area.

My father told me that one way or another, we are all immigrants. He was ordinarily a gentle man but one day when I was 10 he gave me a lesson I will never forget. A family had moved in two doors down the street from us. When he found out I had been teasing the new kids because of their funny clothes he was enraged. I learned that he was intolerant of intolerance. That day I received my first and mercifully, only good old-fashioned spanking. Although my rear-end might disagree, as a parent I can now understand that the spanking probably hurt him more than me. I learned that being proud of our own culture and customs doesn't give us the right to feel smug or superior toward others'.

When the women's movement came to my attention in the 60s and 70s, I was perplexed. The status of women had never been an issue in our family or in the Icelandic community of which we were part. Everyone was equal – plain and simple. While my father ran his own business, he was no stranger to a vacuum cleaner, washing machine, cooking or kitchen chores. Similarly, my mother was very active in political causes, social justice and environmental issues. I would come to realize that this sort of behaviour was not the norm at the time.

I can't say that my experience or my family is entirely representative of the Icelandic community but I'm sure many of you can identify with the stories I have related to you today. We have similar experiences and shared values that can be traced back through our parents and grandparents, through the history of the settlement of New Iceland – right back to the fire and ice of that volcanic rock in the deep Atlantic that spawned us. I consider myself fortunate and blessed to share such a heritage. It lives in my heart and helps to sustain me wherever the journey leads. It is a legacy worth passing on to our children. I am optimistic that the next generation of New Icelanders will use their heritage wisely. And, that it will help them chart their course and confidently do their part to heal and improve the world we all call home. May their ideas and good deeds spread as easily as volcanic dust wherever they go.

Thank you for welcoming me home and "takk fyrir komuna".

Where the Hell is Willow Point?

by David Jón Fuller

I'm driving up and down Highway 9 just south of Gimli during August long weekend, 1997, desperately trying to follow instructions given in Icelandic via cellphone by a director whose shot I am in the process of blowing by failing to show up on time.

I'd like to say it's not my fault. It's not because the directions were given in Icelandic – that's actually the easiest part of the whole mess. And it's not because I didn't give myself enough time to get there – I'm staying at my aunt's cottage just north of the Ukrainian camp past Gimli, so I'm already in the neighbourhood.

No, the main difficulty is I haven't a clue how to find the road that leads out to Willow Point, where David Arnason has his cabin, where the director of a documentary on Canadians of Icelandic descent wants to film me and David talking about the importance of being Icelandic. Or, should I say "wanted" to film, because now it looks as though I will never get there. "The cabin is on a peninsula, you go out from Highway 9 before you reach Gimli, and drive out on the long strip of land…." I even wrote it down as he told me, I'm staring in rage at the piece of paper as I drive.

The real problem, of course, is a total failure to understand what the word "Icelandic" means.

For the literal-minded, it could mean the Icelandic language. It could also mean "pertaining to, or of Iceland." Since, as I drive uselessly somewhere around David Arnason's cabin, I have just finished two years in Reykjavík and Snaefellsnes learning the Icelandic language, I am biased towards thinking I've covered the bases.

I'm not even close. To the cabin, nor to grasping what Icelandic means in this time and place.

It's a very weird weekend, not just because there are hordes of Canadians descending on Gimli to affirm their Icelandic identities at Íslendingadagurinn. It's also not just because, of all the people I know there, the one I know best is from Iceland – the aforementioned director, Jón Einars. Gustafsson, who at this point I've known for about two years – and the person in town I have the next closest connection to is the President of Iceland. (I went to university with his daughter Dalla and got to know her through student politics.) Beyond that, the town is full of strangers to me.

This is perhaps a kind of heresy – and the root of the problem – but my family has no connection to Gimli.

Gimli is the putative centre of things Icelandic in (take your pick): Manitoba; Canada; or North America. (It depends on whether you've been to the Icelandic celebrations in Mountain, ND or Spanish

Fork, UT, I suppose.) It's fair to say that in Manitoba, when you ask someone where the Icelanders are, they're likely to say Gimli. Even though the Ukrainians have just as much claim to it; even though it was never the capital of "the Republic of New Iceland" (because there never was one); even though more Icelanders have always lived in Winnipeg than in Gimli at any given time; and even though the original capital of the New Iceland colony was meant to be Riverton.

I am only in Gimli this weekend because I am required to be here. Otherwise I'd be at my family's cottage in the Whiteshell, decompressing after two years in a foreign country. Reykjavík still feels more like home than Winnipeg. Hey, I worked hard to fit in there – that doesn't fade quickly.

But then, I'm not worthy of being a heretic. That requires breaking from orthodoxy. It's possible I'm just a pagan – clearly, I am not following any of the requirements and don't know the right myths. The history of Lake Winnipeg is vague to me, I haven't heard the story of the smallpox epidemic and I only read the Icelandic newspaper *Lögberg-Heimskringla* because I was given a free subscription by Neil Bardal. (Given my later employment with the publication, there's a fateful irony for you.) So what, you may ask, the hell am I doing in a documentary about being Icelandic? That is, if I even make it to David Arnason's cabin?

The answer is probably a combination of dumb luck and delusion. I first met Jón Einars in 1995 in a student theatre group, when I was studying Icelandic at university in Reykjavík. Given that I'd just finished my B.A. in theatre at the University of Winnipeg, the student group seemed a good way to meet Icelanders and pick up the language.

Among my reasons for going to Iceland were to learn the language and literature of my ancestors and somehow become more Icelandic. Yes: there was the delusion. If you need further proof, in my first week in the country, I bought a copy of *Njal's Saga* – in Icelandic – figuring I'd work my way through it. That's like trying to pick up English by reading King Lear.

Jón seemed intrigued by the idea that anyone would go to such lengths to try to be "Icelandic" – which he was too polite to say was flat-out impossible. It soon became clear to me that Iceland is a very tight-knit society, in which if you're not already related to someone, you probably know someone who went to elementary school with him, or your grandfather had gone into business with one of his relatives, or something like that. Coming from Winnipeg, the biggest small town on the prairies, I didn't find that odd. But I failed to grasp at first that those connections are very much part of being Icelandic in Iceland, and I didn't have them.

True, I did have some family, though distantly related, in the country. Making contact with them and getting together for supper with one family in particular on a regular basis, was fantastic. It was like being able to forget I was a foreigner for a short time every week. Plus they soon got over any hesitancy to tell me how I regularly butchered their language, correcting me when I fumbled through nominative, accusative, dative and genitive case as though each were a bullet in a linguistic revolver and all I knew was I had to fire one of them to get the noun out.

Slowly – verrrry slowly – I picked up the language. All the while being reduced to near incompetence at rehearsals in the theatre group, since I could only

memorize my lines phonetically, and had no idea what anyone else was saying. But with typical stubbornness I kept going. Why admit defeat, no matter how obvious it was? And anyway, didn't I have a goddamned degree in theatre? I should be able to handle it.

So far, we have: delusions of grandeur, check; stubbornness, check; and unshakeable belief in the significance of Icelandic culture. Maybe this is sounding very Icelandic after all.

PHOTO: MHARI MACKINTOSH

David Arnason at Willow Point

It's probably because my Icelandic cultural roots were vague that I felt the need to actually go to the "homeland." (My other side of the family is from England, which I'd had the good fortune to visit five years earlier. Besides the fact there's no language barrier, I'd grown up with a healthy exposure to Monty Python, the Beatles and stories of King Arthur.) That's not to say that my Icelandic side of the family didn't know how to make vínarterta (my amma's was the best, and whenever she shared the recipe she always left out one ingredient so no-one could make it exactly like hers); rullupylsa (my Uncle Eddie, who ran a hardware store in Selkirk, was an expert at it); or Icelandic sweaters (my mom can knit one start to finish in less than a weekend); or that we didn't have semi-regular reuinions, organized and spur-of-the-moment. But we didn't see these things as necessarily Icelandic, and I suppose in my early twenties, when I started reading up on family and Icelandic history; it became pretty clear that my sense of being Icelandic only went as far back as the time my ancestors arrived in Canada. What was beyond that? The answer: Iceland, obviously.

Of course, going there in 1995 told me very little about leaving there in 1896. It wasn't until I'd been there a few months, bludgeoning myself with linguistic and cultural tasks that were almost as bad (but not quite) as learning Finnish, that I caught a glimpse of understanding. Here I was, in a foreign country, trying to a) speak the language, b) establish a social and family circle and c) fit right in. It occurred to me I was doing in reverse what my ancestors had sought to do in Canada, and was still having a way easier time of it. If I wanted to give

up, I could hop a plane and be back home whenever I wanted. I didn't even have anyone besides myself to take care of and my expenses were covered by a scholarship.

So yes: it was a bit ridiculous. But I started to understand what it might have been like for my ancestors to leave everything behind and come to Canada, knowing it was a one-way trip.

By the time I was finished in Iceland, I eventually grasped the language firmly enough that if I didn't screw up my grammar, I was able to fool people into thinking I was Icelandic thanks to my pretty good pronunciation (and, OK, perhaps my tall, blond appearance had something to do with it). That would seem an indication of success, and certainly, after spending twice as long there as I had originally intended, I was ready to take it as a "good enough."

So when Jón mentioned he wanted to film parts of the documentary at the Icelandic Festival in Gimli, it seemed as good a deadline as any for returning to Canada.

I'd heard that culture shock is always worse when you come back from a strange place. It's true: you expect things to be the same, but the old familiar things have gone on changing without you there to see them. Some of my friends had moved away; some relatives had passed on (my Uncle Eddie was one), and I'd lost touch with a lot of people. What made it harder to adjust was going somewhere else I'd hardly been. (Prior to that weekend, my most memorable time spent in Gimli: seeing Spaceballs at the movie theatre in 1987. Not exactly a cultural high point.) So while my head was still buzzing from life in Reykjavík and saying goodbye to a lot of good friends both Icelandic and foreign, I was subconsciously hoping to find something familiar in Gimli during the Icelandic celebration. But I still had a different idea about what "Icelandic" meant, because the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba struck me as very, very Canadian.

Certainly, there were Icelandic flags flying all over the place, something so familiar I almost didn't notice them. There were also the vast, grey waters of Lake Winnipeg, which really does remind you of the ocean. But while the content was Icelandic, the form was like any other summer festival, complete with midway rides, hotdogs, souvenirs and a parade. I had hoped to speak Icelandic with someone, and I did, once or twice: I was introduced to the fjallkona, Lorna Tergesen, and actually had a conversation in Icelandic with another Canadian, which was a real thrill. And since the president of Iceland was in the same room at the time, I figured, what the hell, I'll say hi and tell him I know his daughter. Plus, the Government of Iceland was the entity that funded the scholarship I'd been awarded and I wanted to show him he'd gotten his money's worth.

All of this was separate from not being able to find David Arnason's cabin. I did manage to make other rendezvous points with Jón, and considering I was still mentally in Reykjavík I didn't say too many ridiculous things on camera. (His editing has a lot to do with any coherence in my reactions to Íslendingadagurinn.) About the only things I was sure of by the end of the weekend was that I was never going to be Icelandic the way Icelanders were, and that was OK; and that there were thousands of other people who were never born in or had even been to Iceland who still felt it was important to have some kind of Icelandic identity.

The truth of this came out in the documentary.

At some point in my passing and re-

passing the same buildings and landmarks on Highway 9, I decided to turn off on something that looked like a dead-end road, that could not possibly be where Jón had meant for me to go, but was nevertheless the only place on that side of the highway I had not tried. Lo and behold, the road turned and took me out to somewhere looking very much like the place Jón had described. I pulled up beside a cabin, got out and ran to the door. It did not look good: There were no cameras, no Jón, no cameraman, no person who might be David Arnason. So either I had the wrong place, or I had missed the whole thing, or both.

David Arnason answered the door. I introduced myself and explained what I was doing there. He kindly told me that they'd been there and left. Yes, I had completely blown the scene, in which, perhaps, an elder of the Icelandic cultural community in Manitoba and a young whippersnapper who had drunk the mead of modern Iceland could hold forth on what being "Icelandic" really meant. As it was, I had to hastily take my leave and try to catch up with Jón at the next event or shoot, which I eventually did.

It's a shame, too; because in the documentary, David explains about the history of Icelandic settlement in Gimli, how today there are those he calls "born-again" Icelanders, people who for some reason latch on to their Icelandic identity and must go to Iceland and absorb as much of it as they can. That would have made a lot of sense to me, and I don't know what I would have said then in response. Perhaps I would have understood sooner that "Icelandic" can also mean "the part of my heritage I can't let go of yet" – long after the language has died, the family has no living memory of the mother country and the hardships of immigration are just anecdotes.

It's a funny word, "Icelandic." Its definition is probably a work in progress.

Reawakening the Archive: Kristjana Gunnars' Settlement Poems

by Becky Forsythe

In recent decades a new way of providing access to the past has developed; this new science is one that emphasizes memory rather than history, as if the traditional science of history were insufficient to preserve or study the past. (Motskin 265)

The feeling of leaving home behind, of throwing oneself into the unknown and distantly unfamiliar can be likened to the experience of a new world. Light is shed on the movement and bridging of the gap between what is known and what is mysterious in this instance. At once, one is surrounded by all things strange and this feeling cannot be easily put into words, especially for those who have never left home or crossed borders themselves. In the instance of the event of moving between countries and cultures, the immigrant is faced with giving up a sense of place while simultaneously engaging with the hope of gaining a new one. Displacement may be felt beyond the experience of immigration, but it is within this context that the term signifies both its literal and figurative constructs. For it is the act of crossing the borders of geographic space, as well as the boundaries of specific cultural identities, that marks the moving bodies as the binding thread between distant locations of the world and the lives lived within those locations. As bodies cross boundaries, whether consciously or not, they unite together both old and new, carrying familiar threads from far away. It is in the increasingly connected world that the importance of the binding of these threads extends beyond the immigrant solely, as their stories help to inform the nature of culture both then and now. This situation is one in which many cultures meet, cross into one another and coexist. Along the same lines, the engagement with these stories plays a critical role as they provide insight into what may be understood as the border crossing experience.

Kristjana Gunnars is a crucial border crosser, who continuously draws connections between her own cultural heritage, mixed of both Icelandic and Danish traditions. Her viewpoint as a moving body in North America, and the elements that bind her to the strange mix of people within Canada exceeds the boundaries of her new home to provide a worldly perception. Not only has she taken part in the act of immigration, but she has also engaged with this idea in her literary works. Through her large body of writing, themes such as memory, displacement, fragmentation and story-telling lend themselves to a nostalgic recollection of

the past, although the works are in no way frozen in that past. This return to the fragmentary nature of time is most clearly drawn through the works *Settlement Poems 1* and *Settlement Poems 2,* published in 1980. In both instances, Gunnars examines and reflects upon the merging of Icelandic and Canadian cultures through the heritage of Icelandic immigrants in Canada and her own perception. While demonstrating the ephemeral quality of individual experience in terms of time and archival history, *Settlement Poems 1 and 2* more importantly address the resilience of such experience in the form of writing and its contribution to world literature. Essentially, the *Settlement Poems* become a memorial to the experience of the immigrant, not as a dead thing of the past, but as a reawakened contribution to the cultural makeup of Canada. The poems act as a creative exploration into Gunnars' personal heritage, but in the act of their creation highlight the importance of living literature, breathing creativity.

In the "Preface" to *The Axe's Edge,* 1983, Gunnars writes, "[t]here are various ways into the writing of a story; you can make one up or run into one" (1). Stories most often exist prior to being written and it is those who give these stories a voice in literature who invite readers into the lives of others. Her interest in this case is, "stories that exist prior to being told. Not simply what has happened to people struggling for a living, but also the voices that still reverberate in the wind. Cries of a certain hue that resound even now" (1). Having published the *Settlement Poems* three years prior to *The Axe's Edge,* it is relevant to consider the links running between both, as her "Preface" clearly shows a reflection of the themes addressed within the former. It is perhaps these "cries of a certain hue that resound even now" that Gunnars is attempting to deal with in her research and writing of the poems. As the *Settlement Poems* are a compilation of fact and fiction, pieced together through research done at the University of Iceland, the National Library of Iceland in Reykjavík and at the Elizabeth Dafoe Library at the University of Manitoba, it is evident that Gunnars is dealing with "stories that exist prior to being told." She in fact began "delving into the journals and daybooks of Icelandic pioneers in Canada, Icelandic myths and sagas, and the contemporary world around her" (Tschofen 24). In sifting through historical archives Gunnars has transformed fragmentary selections from settler daybooks and recorded experiences into poems that invite the reader into the complex world of those who cross borders.

If one begins to view the *Settlement Poems 1 and 2* as a living and archival object then it becomes clear that the collection is multi-faceted. Their role is in many ways crucial to working against the increasing age of the 'anti-archive,' where traces of literature, historical documents and stories seem to disappear through advancements in technology. The collection stands up against time and calls out to the roots of transitory tradition, and may also be read as a re-visitation to the lives of Icelandic-Canadians in the form of postmodern memorial. They are a continuation of, or a contribution to what Monique Tschofen, in her "Introduction" to *Kristjana Gunnars: Essays on Her Works,* coins as Gunnars' "hybrid works" (11) in which the past meets the present and cultural ideas merge. The works, in fact, are inevitably multilayered and contribute significantly to the contemporary discussion surrounding

migration. They are not only others' stories as told through Gunnars' perspective, but rather become Gunnars' story as well, and may even have the capacity to become a voice for us all.

She writes,

> we've begun to rehearse how
> to see in darkness, to see
> that which is hidden, to win
> the love of strangers, to
> understand
>
> the speech of birds, the foreign
> tongues" (Settlement 1, 27)

The sense of "we" within the beginning of this fragment extends to the writer herself, and perhaps the reader, depending on the situation. "We" begin to find our place once again, even though this place may be foreign. In relation, we could also find that this fragment could easily have been taken from *The Prowler,* Gunnars' more directly personal work, which addresses similar themes. The boundaries of cultural exchange, individual experience and the generational gap have been blurred as Gunnars presents how personal experience transforms into communal experience. With that in mind, the question of the true role of the *Settlement Poems* arises. Why might it be crucial to the world of literature to reawaken these experiences and present them to a greater audience? Also, how in fact do these experiences relate the immigrant experience from one specific culture, namely Icelandic-Canadians, to the experience as a worldly condition? The above questions are crucial simply for the reason that the answers provide a contextualization for the event of movement from one place to another, and in this case give relevance to the past experiences of such.

In his critical essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," Fredric Jameson examines postmodernism as a social phenomenon in contemporary society. He highlights a major theme of this relationship as, "the disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past" (293). Jameson then continues to point out that as a result of the loss of this sense of history society "has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social information have had, in one way or another, to preserve" (293-94). What Jameson is pointing at here, as Gunnars also does in her article "Translation as Appropriation," is that our cultural memory and communal history, as a result of technological advances, one way or another begin to disappear in tangible forms, as virtual access to this information increases. With that thought in mind, issues such as how we intend to preserve, document and archive such materials becomes quite important in the later dissemination of information. *The Settlement Poems* work against this idea of the obliteration of historical presence, as can be linked to postmodernism and instead use history as a tool to enter the discussion of cultural heritage, as it relates to the individual, and through the individual enters the much greater realm of the world. In *The Prowler* Gunnars writes, "[w]ords are suitcases crammed with culture" (52) and to this effect, the words she has transformed within the *Settlement Poems* are also full of insight into culture. History is reawakened

through the *Settlement Poems* and, as in *The Prowler* "[t]he quest in literature" becomes "a mirror of the quest in life…. It is a story where the boundary between that which is written and that which is lived remains unclear" (146). Through her writing Gunnars has taken on the responsibility to see that these stories continue to live on.

Gunnars completes the task of re-contextualizing history and acknowledges the importance of the way in which stories become the true reflections of the process of border crossing. In the true spirit of the immigrant, *The Settlement Poems 2* conclude with:

> fishflies carry their own
> roof with them
> wings held over
>
> the body at rest
> a beginning: the first
> thundershower, the first
> wheat under the ground
>
> the first milkweed
> cow: a beginning
>
> fish in the stream (i, too
>
> am attracted
> to the light, at night
>
> go big-eyed, alone
> from under the stone)
>
> i can leave now (49)

Gunnars, in a way, points out that the end of the story produces a new beginning, as the immigrant experience becomes a new experience enriched by unfamiliar instances. In *The Prowler* she concludes by stating that "it must be possible after all to find a beginning to any story. Even if it is arbitrary. I have been thinking that there is an actual beginning to this story and that a story should end with its origins" (166). Connected with Jameson's concern with the loss of a sense of history, this point provides helpful insight into how one's story may end, but at the same moment another's story may begin or continue. It is important to maintain a sense of history as the world progresses into the future. *The Settlement Poems* are not only about the experiences of the settlers they document, but in the contemporary context present a beginning to the story for many immigrant experiences and contain an element of universality.

As Gunnars pieces together the past of the Icelandic settlers in Canada, she inevitably relates her own story-telling voice within the work. Reflecting back to the idea of communal memory or memorialization, the place for works such as *The Settlement Poems* becomes clearer in relation to contemporary society. In his essay "Memory and Cultural Translation" in *The Translatability of Cultures,* which Gunnars herself has quoted, Sanford Budick writes: "[t]he contemporary memorialization of historical experiences raises the question of whether commemoration really signifies a memory of events, or rather an active process of participation in transforming a past into a present and a future" (266). This point is at the heart of Kristjana Gunnars' engagement with the complexity of human relationship and identity. Through the memorialization or reawakening of the archive, she constructs a bridge between the gap of past and present, as well as crossing the borders surrounding culture. Her works have been described as "fragile and flexible. Tentative and solid. Like the

tiny Nordic flower that grows from rock through snow," (Tschofen 12) and much like the stories of the Icelandic settlers in Canada succeed the test of time within both *Settlement Poems 1* and *Settlement Poems 2*.

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Shoal Lake Sketches

by Wihelm Kristjanson

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PHOTO: EVELYN KRISTJANSON

Location And First Settlement

Shoal Lake, in the Manitoba Interlake district was in 1886 about thirty miles long, ten miles wide in the south and two miles wide in the north. The distance from the southern end of the lake to Stonewall is about fifteen miles.

In 1880 the charter for the Winnipeg Hudson Bay Railway and Steamship Company was granted. The proposed route was from Winnipeg, along the west shore of Shoal Lake and north some distance to the east of Lake Manitoba. On October 9, 1886 the first sod of the first stage to Oak Point was turned. Construction proceeded and steel was laid for forty miles to Harperville.

Of settlement in the neighborhood of Shoal Lake there was at this time the Roman Catholic mission at St. Laurent, the Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Oak Point, a few English settlers at Erinview and also half-way up the east shore of Shoal Lake a little knot of about four English families at Seamo, seven miles south-west of the northern end of the lake and a scattering of Metis, chiefly along Lake Manitoba. The Stonewall district was settled.

Following the collapse of the boom in Winnipeg in 1882 many of the approximately 773 Icelandic residents of the city contemplated a move. In the Icelandic settlement in Argyle (commenced 1880-81) all the homesteads had been quickly taken and New Iceland recently inundated by floods did not offer an inviting prospect.

In 1886, Freeman B. Anderson of Winnipeg, and the Icelandic Framfarafélag (Progress Society) were instrumental in securing government aid in prospecting for a suitable territory for settlement. Anderson and Björn Lindal, who on his

own had already explored the possibility of an Icelandic settlement at the west coast, were appointed by the government to do the exploring. The proceeded to the Qu'Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan but found the land there taken. Then they went to the Pipestone country in western Manitoba. Here they found bald prairie, light somewhat stony soil and little hayland. This locality was not ruled out of consideration by Anderson, who had in mind agricultural development but Björn Lindal centered his thoughts on stock raising and he was not satisfied. A third journey was made, the government providing a guide and horses and paying other expenses; this time to the region east of Lake Manitoba. The explorers went as far as Township 22, close to the present village of Mulvihill. Of this locality Lindal says: "All the country was then dry and the grass was most abundant in all low-lying portions. It was wooded, affording material for the construction of temporary log buildings and a supply of firewood. I liked this place."

At a meeting of the Progress Society, Anderson and Lindal gave their reports; Anderson favouring agriculture, Lindal advocating cattle raising. The Hudson Bay Railway was a consideration in favour of the Inter-Lake district.

In the spring and summer of 1887 the Álftavatns (Swan Lake) settlement was founded. The majority of the first settlers located in the Lundar area but a detached group proceeded a few miles to the north-east, to Townships 20 and 21, Range 3 in the district generally known as Suffren but referred to by the earliest settlers on as "Siberia".

Anderson continued his roving career in Winnipeg, Paris and eventually Iceland.

Lindal did not locate immediately in the new settlement but employed himself in transporting thither settlers and their effects.

"I transported many of the prospective settlers before taking up residence myself. These trips were no pleasure jaunts. We took turns staying awake to keep smudges going for the stock, for the swarm of flies was almost unbearable."

Houses were built and the prospect seemed bright. In Siberia in the first year of settlement a community library was started and lumber was set aside for the building of a school. More settlers came.

The summer of 1890 was exceptionally rainy. Low-lying land was flooded and the hay crop spoiled. During the summer two families moved out to the north end of Shoal Lake: Kristjan and Margret Sigurðson with their unmarried son Magnus and Jakob and Helga Crawford.

Kristjan Sigurðson, Magnus Kristjanson and Jakob Crawford commenced haying in the new locality in July. They had a team of oxen belonging to Crawford, a team of steers belonging to Sigurdson and his son-in-law, Daniel Backman and a team of oxen belonging to Þorsteinn Hordal. The mower, a "Warrior" was the joint property of Magnus Kristjanson and Jakob Crawford. Their temporary shelter was under canvas.

During haying, timber was felled for both houses and about September building was completed. Kristjan Sigurðson's was the first house to be erected. The flooring of white poplar had been prepared with a hand saw by the owner himself for his house in Siberia. The chinks were plastered with clay and the roof was thatched with straw.

When the house was ready, Mrs. Sigurðson joined her husband and son

and with her came a married daughter, Mrs. Daniel Backman whose husband was working in Winnipeg. Later in the fall Þorsteinn and Ragnhildur Hordal and Björn and Sigríður Hordal established themselves two miles to the south-east along the lake shore.

The advance party at Shoal Lake gave a good report of the locality with its belt of grass-lands along the lake shore and the following summer, 1891 most of the settlers in Siberia moved to Shoal Lake. Shortly everyone moved from that locality and it became but a name and a memory.

In addition to the settlers already mentioned, the following came from Siberia: Arni Freeman, Björn Lindal, Sveinbjorn Sigurðsson, Þorlakur Eiriksson, Nikulas Snædal, Jakob Jonsson, Isleifur (Guðjónsson) Johnson, Sveinn Sveinsson, Bessi Tómasson, Guðmundur Einarsson, Jon Hannesson, Þorgils Ásmundsson.

Personal Glimpses

To indicate the background of the settlement a brief account of some of the early pioneers is now in order: where they came from, and their previous experiences in the New World.

Kristjan Sigurðson came to Canada in 1887, then aged fifty-two. Immediately on arrival in Winnipeg, he and his son Magnus proceeded to work on the C.P.R. lines near Moose Jaw. Another son, Sigurbjorn, who subsequently settled in the district, spent his first summer on the Fulcher farm twelve miles north of Winnipeg.

Jakob Crawford came to Canada in 1876. He spent the first winter with the ten soldiers who formed the military cordon at Netley Creek during the small-pox quarantine of the New Iceland settlement. Subsequently he was employed on steamboats plying on the Saskatchewan River from Lake Winnipeg to Edmonton. He served as a volunteer in the North-West Rebellion of 1885 and there met with the first Icelander he had seen for seven years. Frontier life seems to have had a strong attraction for him for in 1892 he moved to Westbourne, Mantitoba and then to Athabasca Landing.

Magnus Kristjanson spent his first winter on a farm seventeen miles south of

Winnipeg and then worked on the Morris-Brandon branch (railway) west of Miami.

Þorsteinn Hordal arrived at Gimli 1876 with the "large group". His wife Ragnhildur, was the one member of the family to suffer severely from the small-pox and she also had a tale to tell of walking on the ice from Gimli to Winnipeg for employment and of sleeping in the winter on the floor of an unheated room. Forced out of New Iceland by the disastrous flood of 1880, the family moved to Winnipeg and later to Cavalier, North Dakota. The struggle for bare existence there was so grim and the prospect so bleak that the move to Shoal Lake was made.

Bjorn Lindal came to Canada in 1878, aged twenty-five years. On arrival in Toronto, he had sixty cents in his purse. He began work on a farm near Toronto. At first his pay was twenty-five cents per day but after a week this was raised unsolicited to fifty cents. In the fall Lindal moved to the Icelandic settlement in Minnesota. There he worked on a farm on a railroad and clerked in a store. To Winnipeg he moved in 1882.

Bjorn Thorsteinson came to Canada in 1887 and in that year worked on the railroad at Manitou, Manitoba.

Arni Freeman came to Winnipeg in 1883. He was one of the first group of

settlers in the Swan Lake-Siberia district and he and Isleifur Johnson were the first to build. At that time his possessions consisted of two oxen, five cows and three younger stock and an old wagon.

Isleifur Johnson came to Canada in 1883; worked on the Canadian Pacific Railroad for some time, farmed for about a year at Boundary Creek (Winnipeg Beach) and moved to Siberia in 1887. On his arrival in Siberia, Johnson possessed one ox, two cows and a Red River cart.

Nikulas Snædal came to Canada in 1883, spent some time in New Iceland and a year in Winnipeg.

The first settlers cushioned the arrival of those who followed. In 1894, Daniel Sigurðson, brother of Kristjan Sigurðson arrived with a large family. Kristjan had built an addition to his house where Daniel received accommodation the first winter. Then Daniel, in turn provided temporary quarters for several successive families; four of whom stayed a whole year. Daniel came direct from Iceland where his home for twenty-three years had been at Hólmlátur, a farmstead where many centuries before a man known as Eric the Red, accompanied by his ten year old son Leifur, stayed one winter while endeavoring to secure settlers for his Greenland colony.

Log houses built in sheltering bluffs began to fringe both shores of the lake and the settlement was taking roots. There was abundance of hay and game in the woods. At first the lake was low and fish did not pass the Narrows so that some settlers went to Swan Creek to fish but soon the lake rose and there was a good supply of fish. The hunters brought home partridges, grouse and ducks as well as rabbits and larger game.

But conditions were difficult and progress slow. The cattle were often driven miles away by the blistering swarm of flies in summer and search for them might take hours. The sheep had to be guarded from the wily coyotes. Supplies had to be brought from Stonewall and Winnipeg, the latter point over eighty miles away by the trail that wound its way around bluffs and sloughs. If there was serious illness it meant a journey to Winnipeg. About 1892 a great fire swept though the bush on both sides of the lake and came very near to destroying some of the homes although the little settlement was miraculously saved. Smoke hung in the air as far south as North Dakota and the glow of the fire was visible there at night.

But little by little the nucleus of the herds of cattle and flocks of sheep grew and addition was made to the woefully inadequate stock of farm implements. Those who had been compelled to do their haying in Siberia with scythes acquired mowers. Þorlakur Eirikson had brought a team of horses with him to the north settlement and now others acquired horses.

Immediately on settlement, there was the beginning of social life and organized community effort. A reading society was organized in Siberia in 1887 and continued its activities in Shoal Lake. In 1894 and 1895 respectively, the first two schools were opened.

The first children born in Siberia were Hermann Johnson and Guðný (Sigurðsson) Halldorsson. The first child born in the Shoal Lake district was Guðni Backman, son of Daniel and Hólmfriður Backman. This was in November 1891.

Very soon there was need of a cemetery. An infant's grave appeared and then another in the little plot located on Kristjan Sigurðson's homestead. Jörundur Guðbrandsson was buried in the fall of

1894. He came to Shoal Lake with his son-in-law, Daniel Sigurðson. In Iceland he had been a prosperous farmer and a noted horseman and rider but now he was seventy four years of age and his days of activity numbered. He derived pleasure from puttering around gathering sticks for firewood. Such a supply he had not been used to on the bare Icelandic countryside He passed to his rest a few months after his arrival in the new world.

Settlers continued to move in. About 1894, Thorarinn Breckman, another veteran of the North-West Rebellion, located in the district temporarily. In 1895 Jonas Halldorson, father-in-law of Bjorn Hordal, herded his flock of sheep from North Dakota by way of Gretna and Winnipeg. Sigurður Eyjolfson drove a team of horses from west of Yorkton Saskatchewan, leaving on the fourth of May and arriving on the fourth of June. Sigurbjorn Guðmundson came from the Thingvalla settlement in Saskatchewan. Some came direct from Iceland.

The first permanent settlers, Kristjan Sigurðson and Magnus and the Hordals originated from Dalasýsla (the Dales County) on the west coast of Iceland. Some of the other settlers hailed from the same county and countless immediately to the south but many other parts of the island were represented; Bjorn Lindal coming from Strandasýsla (the Strand County) and Arni Freeman from Þingeyjarsýsla (Assembly Island County).

The Settlement Takes Shape

In 1897 after steel having been laid for forty miles the bright prospects entertained by the pioneers in the district were considerably dimmed when the Hudson Bay Railway project was abandoned. Also the level of the lake began to rise. A brook became a deep and fast flowing stream. Drainage into Lake Manitoba was attempted with no effect, however Nature presently took a hand and the floods subsided.

Beginning 1902 a notable influx of settlers took place. Fresh floods had inundated the north portion of New Iceland, especially Isafold and Big Island and in approximately a two year period more than 120 persons, young and old, migrated to Shoal Lake. In many cases the government provided new homesteads for the old but this was meager compensation for the losses suffered. Johann Straumfjorð abandoned a prosperous farm at Engey (Goose Island), valued before the inundation at 4-5000 dollars. These new arrivals settled to the west, north and east of Shoal Lake, with a cluster of about ten families in the western part near the tiny Lake Peculiar.

Prominent among the new arrivals were the homeopathic doctors, Johann Straumfjorð and Petur Bjarnason. Rev. Magnus Skaptason, in Fróði, calls the former "one of the most distinguished of the Icelandic pioneers in America". Straumfjorð arrived from Iceland in 1874. After six weeks at Kinmount, he went to Nova Scotia, wintered there and then returned to Iceland for his family. He returned with the large group in 1876 and settled on Big Island. He was an inventor, skilled at making things and built a windmill to grind his wheat. He acquired a steam engine to saw lumber and cut fire wood and he supplied his barn with running water, automatically controlled by a device which he called the "cow telegraph". He was repeatedly member of the local council in the days of New Iceland Republic. Petur Bjarnason arrived in Canada in

1876, settled in Big Island and in Isafold. He was a member of the local council, district reeve, secretary-treasurer for school districts and postmaster and was one of the prime movers in the organization of the two school districts on Big Island. Prominent also were the father and son Jon Jonsson and Jon H. Johnson. The family came to Big Island in 1878. In 1893 Jon H. Johnson in company with Stefan and Kjartan Johnson, built the second Icelandic owned steamer on Lake Winnipeg.

This was virtually the close of the period of settlement although a few were yet to come from Iceland, North Dakota, Winnipeg and elsewhere.

The settlement had now assumed its permanent form, about ten miles wide and six miles deep at the top with narrow fringes bordering on the lake to the south, about fifteen miles long on the west side and ten miles on the east side.

Livelihood

Cattle raising was the settlers' mainstay. Sigurður Eyólfson had about one hundred but very few approximated to that number. Many kept sheep. Magnus Kristjanson had at one time a flock of about a hundred including several pure bred Oxford Downs.

The country although fertile in part was in many places stony and surface soil thin. It was not suited to grain growing. Fifteen years after the first settlement few had more the 10 – 15 acres broken. Jon Rafnkelson had about fifty acres under cultivation. Oates and barley were the chief crops, for home consumption.

For many years there was no threshing machine in the district and the sheaves were fed into the manger. About 1909 a small group of farmers combined to purchase a separator. James Cobb from Seamo was the engineer and Valdimar Eirikson, one of the North Dakota settlers (1903) operated the separator. About 1913 Magnus Kristjanson bought a small gasoline engine and a grain crusher which for a time served many in the Otto and Lillesve districts. Shortly thereafter others acquired similar machines.

As soon as they were able many of the young people of the district obtained summer employment away from home. Snæbjörn Halldorson then a lad of sixteen, walked to the Portage plains where he worked during the summer for thirteen dollars per month. Hjalmur Danielson also at the age of sixteen worked on a farm for a year, receiving forty dollars in wages. For this he bought a cow and a gun thus demonstrating that one may save on forty dollars a year. In the decade before the First World War many went out harvesting in the Portage and Argyle districts in Manitoba and in North Dakota. Many found carpenter work in Winnipeg and a goodly number of these became highly skilled in their trade.

An account by Kari Byron, Reeve of the Municipality of Coldwell, relates the struggle of the pioneers to earn their livelihood. His father Stefan (Bjornson) Byron came to Shoal Lake in 1894. ---Byron says in part: "There were ten children in our family and we never had much money. We had ten to fifteen cows in a herd of over one hundred cattle and flock of fifty to seventy-five sheep. Mother washed wool, carded, spun and knitted it into mitts, socks and underwear for the whole family. I remember she knitted also five heavy sweaters. For some years she made all our shoes from sheep-skin. She made butter from the milk of ten to fifteen cows. Milk was set in pans and churned by hand. The butter was salted

and packed in barrels and kept till fall. It was then taken out, worked over into pound prints and taken to Winnipeg for exchange for flour, sugar, etc. My mother might make fifteen hundred pounds of butter in a summer."

This account has the particular merit of giving an impression of the part played by the womenfolk of Shoal Lake in the earlier days. But no mere farm drudges they; outdoor work was thrust on them only in case of urgent need and they shared with the men in the development of the social and intellectual life of the community.

With the establishment of the creamery at Lundar in 1902 the settlers were able to dispose of their cream locally.

Mail Service

Mail service to Siberia was from Oak Point; the settlers arranging among themselves for transportation. When the first group moved south in 1890 Seamo post office, founded July 1, 1887 was only seven miles distant and the mail problem was considerably simplified. March 1, 1894 the first post office in the Icelandic settlement was founded. It was named Otto, in honour of a highly respected and well-liked merchant in Iceland, Otto Wathne. Nikulas Snædal was postmaster for one year; then Magnus Kristjanson became postmaster and continued to hold that position till he moved to Lundar in 1930. Veteran mail carrier of the early years at Otto was Jon Vestal of Otto.

The heavy canvas mail bag with its massive disc padlock contained real treasurers for the intellectually alert and news-hungry settlers; The Winnipeg Icelandic weeklies, *Heimskringla* (1886) and *Lögberg* (1888); the Icelandic Lutheran Synod periodical, Sameiningin (1886) and the liberal and Unitarian periodicals, Dagsbrún (1893) and Heimir; the Free Press; the Family Herald and Weekly Star, old country Icelandic papers, such as Ísafold; the Nor'West Farmer and Farmer's Advocate, letters from the other Icelandic settlements and from Iceland and, not to be omitted, the bulky, highly informative T. Eaton Company catalogue. There were also books for private libraries and for the community library. On mail days, first once then twice a week the post office was thronged; a lively community centre.

Trade

The early settlers took their produce to Stonewall and to Winnipeg. Trips were usually made twice a year, in the spring and in the fall. The distance would average about eighty miles depending on the condition of the ground, with ten miles added for Siberia. These journeys were made in groups and the night-bivouacs on the road were usually pleasurable occasions marked by jollity and merriment. Often the journey was broken at Frank Ward's and then the floor would be overlaid by the closely packed figures of the sleepers. Perhaps the Wards understood the important social service they rendered the Shoal Lake community.

The English settlers along Shoal Lake were generally very hospitable to the Icelandic travelers. One person farther south on one occasion showed himself in a different light. Magnus Kristjanson and Bjorn Hordal were traveling to Winnipeg, the former accompanied by his sister Mrs. Daniel Backman and her very young son. Near Stonewall a raging storm swept down on the travelers. They had a tent, not large enough to accommodate all so Hordal sought shelter in a nearby house.

He was at first refused admission but walked in regardless and succeeded in staying overnight. Once during the night the tent blew down but the journey was renewed without further mishap. The ground between Stonewall and Winnipeg had been badly flooded and during the night surface ice had formed. Kristjanson walked ahead of his team of horses over twenty miles to Winnipeg, breaking the ice for them.

Three Stonewall merchants with whom the Shoal Lake pioneers dealt in the early days were Musgrove, Montgomery and Bruce. One of the three remarked at one time that of all those Icelandic settlers who had received credit from him only one failed to honour his obligation.

In 1903 Fred Olsen, who had previously taught at Markland, opened a store in the Vestfold district. Three or four years later Magnus Kristjanson followed suit at Otto and Bjorn Lindal at Markland. When the last segment in the northern part of the district filled in and Stony Hill post office was established the postmaster, Guðmundur Johnson opened a store. Jón H. Johnson of Hove who had commenced dealing in fish at Big Island in 1892 continued in the business after his move to Shoal Lake in 1902. In 1910-11 he bought forty carloads of fish on Lake Manitoba in the face of steep competition.

Magnus Kristjanson's store served for some time the western and northern part of the settlement and also the Swedish settlement at Lilesve. Also groups of Métis from St. Laurent on their annual trapping and hunting expedition to the Fisher Branch district chose to deal there finding prices more to their liking than in St. Laurent.

The Canadian Northern reached Oak Point in 1904 and the Stonewall-Winnipeg expeditions became a thing of the past, a memory of pioneering days. When the railway was extended to Lundar trade moved to that place.

A story within the story of trade in the Shoal Lake district is the account of a vision that was not destined to fulfillment. Magnus Kristjanson was greatly possessed by the co-operative ideal and was well versed in the story of the Rochdale pioneers. He took the initiative in forming the Coldwell Farmers' Company. The members of this small group appreciated the benefit of the undertaking but in the nature of such things it could not survive unless located at a railroad point and when Lundar grew, its fate was sealed.

Education

The first school district to be organized in Shoal Lake was that of Vestfold, formed March 19, 1894. In that year there was an attendance of eleven. The first teacher was Lena Johnson.

Markland school district was organized January 1, 1895. In that year the school remained open forty-five days and the first teacher was John J. Beildfell. He joined the gold rush to Yukon and the next teacher was Bjorg Thorkelson, the first Icelandic person to attend Normal school in Canada and a classmate of Nellie Mooney (Mrs. Nellie McClung).

In 1903 three school districts were organized, namely: Norður Stjarna, Háland and Maple. For many years all these schools were open only during the summer months and the pupils were often required to miss school for a period to help with haying.

The establishment of the school marked the opening of a new world to the young generation. First there was the

language. Although most of the parents had acquired some command of the English language, Icelandic had been spoken in the homes. Now, English in the classroom and English on the playground lent wings to the acquisition of the language. Then there was social behavior, learning not to talk in the crowded classroom, learning to get on in a crowd, learning team-play. There were the Victorian readers, very good literature with "The Great Stone Face" and "Gray's Elegy". There was the ever growing library augmented after each school concert with the Henty books and Abbott historical series, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and others. There were the spelling matches marked by keen rivalry and lasting sometimes from last recess to four-thirty before the victors were decided. There was the mock municipal council with candidates for election making the usual pre-election promises to do their best if returned. There were the recess periods when the children rushed pell-mell to play a variety of games, baseball, football, knobbies, high-over and pomp-pomp-pullaway. There were the practices for field day, marching and track and field events. Boys of twelve who had walked a mile or two to school and had to walk home and then go for the cows did not hesitate to practice the two mile run at noon. There were the field-days when perhaps eight or ten schools took part and competition was keen in sports and in school work. There were the fall concerts when the pupils would sing and recite and take part in plays and skits.

The children were generally eager to learn. Miss Stefanson, now Mrs. Dr. Sommerville of Winnipeg in speaking of her experiences at the Norður Stjarna school, once remarked that despite the unfinished condition of the building and the lack of equipment (there was a time when boxes and blocks of wood had to be used for seats for the overflow) "it was the loveliest school I ever taught in. The children wanted to go to school."

The teacher's personality and teaching ability are more important than academic brilliance. When Miss Stefanson came to the Norður Stjarna school she was seventeen years of age and had only grade ten standing but she maintained salutary discipline and won the respect and warm regard of her pupils. Later during the first world war Johann Magnus Bjarnason, the well known author, taught at the same school and Rev. Guðmundur Arnason, noted intellectual and religious leader, taught for a period at Markland school and greatly influenced the lives of their pupils.

A large number of the immediate descendants of the Shoal Lake pioneers proceeded to higher education. Some of these to a considerable extent had to earn their own way through college. Hjalmur Danielson, son of the Daniel Sigurdson, graduated from the University of Manitoba in 1915. Jon V. Straumfjord, grandson of Johann Straumfjörð was outstanding at the university in his day and was awarded the Governor General's medal. His cousin and friendly rival for academic honours, Agnar Magnusson won the gold medal in Mathematics and Latin in his final year and was awarded a five hundred dollar post-graduate scholarship at the University of Manitoba in 1924. He was at one time Manitoba chess champion. Wilhelm Kristjanson, son of Magnus Kristjanson was I.O. D.E. scholar at Oxford University in 1925. Kirstjan Sigurdson, son of Sigfus Sigurdson, graduated from Wesley College. Successful practicing physicians are: Jon V. Straumfjord, Kjartan Johnson son of Einar

Johnson, Guðmundur Paulson son of Páll Pálsson and Arnold Holm, grandson of Daniel Sigurdson. Drs. Petur and Vilhjalmur Guttormson and Dr. Kristjan J. Backman are sons respectively of Vigfus J. Guttormson and Daniel Backman who resided in the district temporarily.

Religion

In the first years of the settlement, religious services conducted by laymen were held in the various homes in turn. The brothers, Kristjan and Daniel Sigurðson and also Guðmundur Einarsson, performed baptism and conducted funeral services. A wedding however necessitated a trip to Winnipeg.

Occasionally theology candidates visited the district. Ingvar Búason who made a visit in 1895 customarily walked the distance from Winnipeg.

The majority of the settlers were Lutheran but in 1893 when the liberal church periodical "Dagsbrún" commenced publication there were subscribers in Shoal Lake.

In 1913 through the work of Rev. Carl Olson, a Lutheran congregation was formed at Otto. A church was built almost altogether with voluntary donations and voluntary labour. Trustees were: Kristjan Sigurðson, Philip Johnson, Brynjolfur Johnson, Guðmundur Johnson. Jón Jónasson was secretary. Hergeir Danielson was an exceptionally active worker in the congregation. Rev. Hjörtur Leo who was stationed at Lundar served the congregation for many years. He had the love of his people and is remembered for his kindness and warm human sympathy, idealism and sensitive feels for nature as well as for his brilliant scholarship and keen intellect.

Rev. Rögnvaldur Pétursson was active in promoting the organization of Unitarian congregations in the Inter-Lake district and 1909 a Unitarian congregation was formed at Otto.

Members of the New Iceland contingent who had been influenced by Rev. Magnus Skaptason were prominent in the development including Pétur Bjarnason, Johann Straumfjörð, and Einar and Oddfríður Johnson. A church was built in 1915 mainly with voluntary labour. Charter members numbered about thirty but by 1913 the membership had increased to sixty-three.

Rev. Albert E. Kristjansson from Gimli was the first Unitarian minister to be appointed to a charge in the district and he took up residence there. In Unitarian circles in Chicago he was known as the Bishop of the North. He possessed a strong personality and was earnest in his work and an impressive speaker. He had strong humanitarian convictions and was a zealous advocate of social reform.

With the passing of the years the slight lines of division there were between Lutherans and Unitarians in community life have faded in the light of mutual tolerance.

The Community Library

A community library or reading society "Mentahvöt" (lit. incentive to culture), was formed in Siberia and continued its activities on the migration to Shoal Lake. The chief promoter and first librarian was Jón Jónatansson.

One of the articles of the constitution states: "The purpose of the organization shall be to promote culture, increase desire to read and to maintain the Icelandic language as far as possible."

The annual subscription fee was at first one dollar but later this was reduced to seventy-five cents. In 1896 there were eighteen members. The first concert in aid of the library was held in February 1896. This was tombola and proceeds amounted to $17.65. This was also the first concert in the settlement at which admission was charged. Concerts in aid of the library continued to be held apparently every year until the outbreak of the Great War.

In 1905 the society "Mentahvöt" combined forces with the Young People's Society "Verðandi" to build a community hall.

The library was soon established in four subdivisions, the books being exchanged periodically. In 1911 there were over three hundred volumes in the library and ultimately this number increased to nearly a thousand. Some books were bought direct from Iceland but in the main they came from Halldor Bardal's bookstore in Winnipeg.

An idea of the contents and value of the community library may be derived from information given by Guttormur Guttormsson to Watson Kirkconnell and quoted by him in his brochure, "A Skald in Canada".

"At Shoal Lake I had access to a large and well-chosen collection of books, and made the fullest use of it the whole time I was there. There I read Homer in translation of Sveinbjörn Egilson and Benedikt Gröndal, Milton's Paradise Lost in the translation of Sera Jón Thorlákson, the Thousand and One Nights in the translation of Steingrímur Thorsteinson as well as all the Icelandic sagas, Eddas, Sturlunga, etc. There I first read Nýar's nótt (New Year's Night) a fairy play by Indriði Einarsson and it seemed to me to surpass anything I had ever encountered in Icelandic drama. Altogether I had there a choice of the best Icelandic literature."

The library contained the ancient sagas, modern Icelandic writers in prose and poetry and numerous translations of both classical and popular works from English, Norwegian and other languages. There were the fascinating folk tales compiled by Jon Arnason, Thirty Adventures and Seventeen Adventures, a world history, the philosophical works of Agúst Bjarnason, popular literature such as the Allan Quatermain stories, by Rider Haggard, Sherlock Holmes, and Around the World in Eighty Days, the poetry of Jónas Hallgrímsson, Matthías Jochumsson and Einar Benediktsson, some of the plays of Shakespeare and high-class periodicals such as "Oðinn", " Kvöldvökur" (Evening Watches), and "Únga Ísland" (Young Iceland). The arrival of new books and change-over day were a source of keen pleasure and many members of the Shoal Lake community library "Mentahvöt" could indeed say with Keats, "Much have I traveled in the realm of gold".

Two men, perhaps more than all others deserve to have their names mentions for service to the community in building such a splendid library. Björn Thorsteinson, a lover of poetry was librarian and a member of the selections committee for a great many years. He was charter member and is still a member. The other is Hjalmur Danielson, who for many years was secretary-treasurer and member of the selection committee. The influence of such men is incalculable.

To be continued

Next issue:

The Young People's Society

POETRY

Blueberry Blush

By Renee Morin

I imagine her:
bouncing on her daddy's knee,
suckling at my breast
first words
mama, dada,
baby steps,
soothing lullabies,
cooing.

Dressing her, I dream:
she's streaking up the beach,
trick-or-treating,
blowing out candles,
off to school, holding hands,
grad gap, wedding gown,
motherhood.

Then –
I tremble
on the last pearl button.
Fingers stiff, cold,
I warm them with my breath,
brush her bangs aside, and
kiss and kiss and kiss
the blueberry blush of her tiny lips.

The suited man beckons, nodding;
It is time.

continued ....

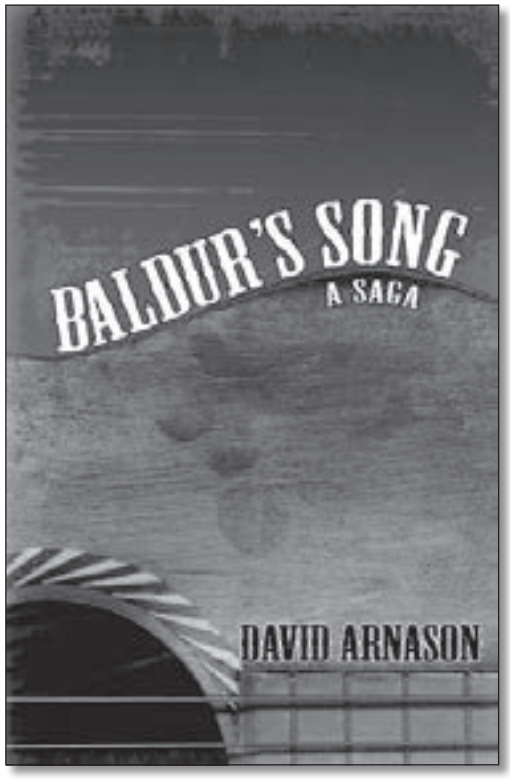
Bleeding out cold sweat,
cursing God, I bend
gently laying her down.
Time stops, cold in the sunshine.
Tears – mine – glisten
on her dark lashes, catching rainbows.

I memorize my baby
cradled in her coffin,
and I imagine
I dream.

Inspired by the image of a mother, Jensina Guttormson, having to dress her recently departed infant, Baby Hulda (1914-1915), after she succumbed to pneumonia during a harsh cold winter, as witnessed and told by the poet's Amma, Palina Guttormson-Dahlman, Baby Hulda's older sister.

Book Reviews

Baldur's Song: A Saga



by David Arnason

Reviewed by Heida Simundsson
Turnstone Press. 2010
ISBN: 978088813736
Soft Cover, $19.00

Set in the early twentieth century, this book brings out the romanticism and charm usually associated with stories from this time. The majority of this saga follows the main character Baldur through his young adolescent life. He is born in the Manitoba settlement of New Iceland and we follow him as he travels first to Winnipeg and into the wide world beyond. Through many twists and turns of fate he finds himself situated in many different walks of life; he is employed from positions such as a musical entertainer at a brothel, to a shoe shiner at the railway station, to a business man investing in the young and growing Winnipeg economy. He however never seems to lose ties to his New Iceland roots and returns often to visit with family, both those residing at his old house and those residing in the local graveyard.

Having grown up in the Interlake, Baldur's character is reminiscent of some of the individuals I have heard about from pioneer stories in my home community. He is easy-going, hard-working, and kind. He has faced hardships and sad times but doesn't let them hold him back in life. One of the most note-worthy characteristics present in Baldur is his how he never stresses about what the future holds. He seems to casually stroll down the paths that life lays before him, never in a hurry or craning his neck to see what's around the next corner. He takes every day as it comes and makes the best of situations, trusting in fate and in his friends. This Icelandic trait of fatalism ulti-

mately leads him down roads that leave him financially well off.

Like many stories, there is an aspect of romance. In a time when people traveled by foot or carriage and distances were a very different obstacle, romance often took people up and away from their homes. In this story, Baldur is captivated and his heart overtaken by a girl named Lara – "a fey spirit destined to be both his muse and torment". Baldur constantly finds himself separated from his enchantress and spends many hours tracking her, hoping that chance will bring him in contact with this girl who haunts the shadows of his mind. And by good fortune his pursuit is sporadically rewarded and he gets to spend some time with her; although she is always soon up and off to a new place, far away from him. True to his defining character, Baldur is never crushed or never mopes around when yet again he finds that Lara has slipped through his fingers. The storyline does not centre around this chancy romance, but it is a constant throughout the book and a prominent aspect of the ending. Their destinies which cross paths, separate, or intertwine at various times, is almost a shadow beneath what first appears to be the main storyline and I can't help but think that that underlying story of their crossing fates has a message I haven't quite grasped. I can feel a dim shadow in my own mind of understanding and comprehension somewhere in my subconscious but it hasn't yet quite reached a tangible thought.

Arnason's writing style is very interesting and unique in this piece of writing. It would best be described as cut and dry, or staccato for those readers musically inclined. It follows the style of the Icelandic saga writings of the thirteenth century. Arnason doesn't dance around or bother with detailed descriptions or elaborate explanations and his characters are outlined with very distinctive personalities rather than complicated emotions. This comes across in all aspects of the book – even the dialogue of the characters. Perhaps "black and white" may be an adequate descriptor, in cue with the old photographs featured at the start of each chapter. Although this doesn't sound complementary to the writer or intriguing for a reader, I assure you, it is an enjoyable and must-read book. Arnason's personal connection to the story also lends to its captivating and interesting nature. Once through the first chapter, I found its literary style refreshing and therefore extremely enjoyable. This was the first literary piece I have read by David Arnason and I am anxious to pick up another.

Letter to the Editor

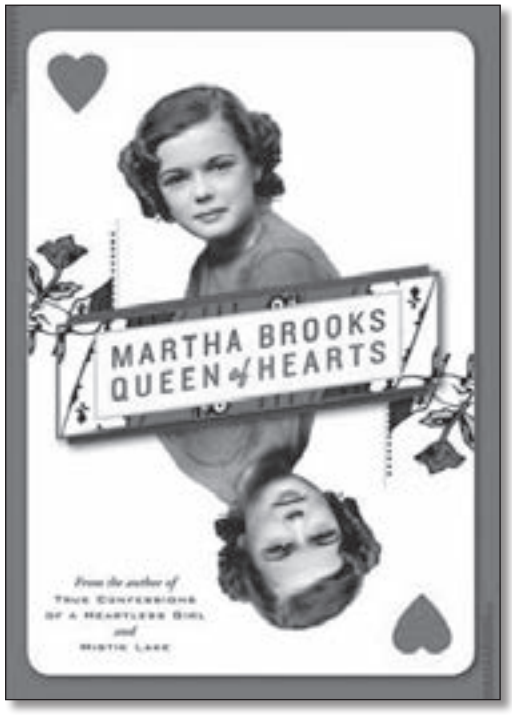
Dear Editor,

I would be quite willing to pay more for our lovely magazine to cover postage.

I was so sorry to the change of name.

From Johanna McKay

Queen of Hearts



by Martha Brooks

Reviewed by Carole Mackintosh
Groundwood Books
ISBN 978-0-88899-828-6
Soft Cover, $14.95

Marie-Claire Cote is the narrator of this captivating portrayal of a spunky, proud and thoughtful teenager wrestling with "the Wolf at the Door" of tuberculosis – a stealthy yet often fatal disease. In the era of this novel, tuberculosis or TB as it is commonly known, is scary and misunderstood due mostly to the absence of an antibiotic cure. The novel is set in a rural Franco-Manitoban farm community in the Pembina Hills. The time frame of the novel is summer 1940 to December 1942. These dark days of World War II are also dark days for the Cote family. Oncle Gerard (age 25), brother Luc (age 10), sister Josée (age 6) and Marie-Claire (age 14) must all go to the Sanatorium for treatment of their TB. Oncle Gerard has always referred to Marie-Claire as his "Queen of Hearts". Tragic events loom large in this story.

Marie-Claire corresponds with a young soldier she had met at a dance in St. Felix and who now is overseas waiting for action. Her Papa later in the novel tells her of the casualties from the Dieppe raid in France in 1942 and the impact on the local community. There are so many dead.

Signy Jonasson (age 17), Marie-Claire's roommate, had endured three operations for her tuberculosis. She is weakened and depressed after five years in hospital. Blunt speaking Marie-Claire tells the reader what it is like to be in the San: Everybody walking by, poking at me, saying good morning while I sit on the commode with my bum in the breeze.

Part of the treatment for all infectious patients is to be bundled up in blankets, scarves, mitts, hats and wheeled outside in their beds to the balcony where they will spend the night. Marie-Claire is outraged by this invasion of her rights as she sees them and seethes. She can barely be civil to Signy, the other patients and the staff. Marie-Claire is also resentful and angry

that her beloved Papa does not visit at all and her mother rarely.

Jack Hawkings , a fellow patient and a resident of the men's wing, is in the same room as Marie-Claire's brother Luc. Hawkings health improves and he moves to a cottage for rehabilitation. Jack and Marie-Claire are attracted to each other and Marie-Claire's heart flutters. Romance follows.

The medical staff are firm but caring. Marie-Claire is not an easy patient. She knows that she must rest but persists in her attempt to control the situation around her. Doctor Yuen is patient and a good listener. Martha Brook's own background as a daughter of the medical superintendent at the Manitoba Sanitorium at Ninette adds authenticity to this story.

Signy's sorrowful but sweet manner is sharply in contrast to the edgy Marie-Claire. How sad for Signy that her various roommates improve and leave her to face yet another new face. Her wealthy parents are distant and seem uncaring. Readers will identify with both girls and their struggles. Signy's comments when Marie-Claire's health has improved but knows that Signy has had a relapse are telling:

I don't want your pity, Marie-Claire. I don't want your charity. If you can't be a real friend to me then just go away. The reader can feel Signy's pain and the uncertainties that surround her.

This is a novel of friendship and hardship written for ages 10 to 13. Marie-Claire has lost her faith in God and in her family. She later sees that she can help Signy by just being herself. She can come to terms with her grieving family even with her now pregnant mother. With her caring nature, compassion and involvement with Jack, Marie-Claire is indeed "The Queen of Hearts."

Martha Brooks is a very successful author. Her first novel *A Hill for Looking* also concerns a tuberculosis sanatorium. Her return to this topic is timely. Tuberculosis has not been eradicated. Other works by Martha Brooks are: *Mistik Lake, True Confessions of a Heartless Girl, Bone Dance, Being with Henry, Traveling On Into the Light, Two Moons in August* and *Paradise Cafe and Other Stories.*

Contributors

BIRNA BJARNADÓTTIR studied literature and aesthetics at the University of Iceland, the Freie University in Berlin and the University of Warwick, England. She holds the position of the Chair of Icelandic at the University of Manitoba. The author of *Holdið hemur andann. Um fagurfræði í skáldskap Guðbergs Bergssonar* [On Aesthetics in Guðbergur Bergsson's Work], her recent publications are prefaces to *The Young Icelander* by Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason, translated by Borga Jakobson (2009), and *The Fifth Dimension,* a collection of poetry and translations by David Gislason (2010). Her *book of fragments,* with a foreword by George Toles, and illustrations by Guy Maddin, Cliff Eyland and Haraldur Jónsson, was published in the fall, 2010.

KEN DAVIDSON is the son of Wiglundur (Bill) and Thorbjorg (Tobba, nee Solmundson) Davidson. He was born, raised and educated in Manitoba, receiving a degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Winnipeg in 1973 and post graduate degree in Natural Resource Management from the University of Manitoba in 1976. He resides in Vancouver with his wife, Reva and children, Andrew and Sara. He and his family return to the family cottage in Manitoba every summer.

ANDERS ERICSSONN is the proprietor of his specialty cheesecake company "My Cheesecakes" and Elín Hansen is a freelance cookbook translator and culinary specialist for the Lunds & Byerly's grocery store chain in Minneapolis/St. Paul.

BECKY FORSYTHE is currently an M.A. student in the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba. She received her BFA from York University in 2007 and has also studied at the University of Copenhagen and the Ontario College of Art and Design. Her interest is in Icelandic literature, language and visual arts.

DAVID JÓN FULLER is a freelance writer and editor. He was born and raised in Winnipeg, MB and lived for two years in Iceland studying Icelandic language and literature. He was managing editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla* for two years and currently works as a copy editor at the *Winnipeg Free Press.*

ELÍN HANSEN, a Minnesota native, trained as an editorial apprentice at Ecole de Cuisine La Varenne in France, specializing in recipe writing and translation. After time spent in Paris, Elín returned to Minneapolis where she now works as a FoodE Expert for the Lunds & Byerly's grocery store chain. She considers her retail career path as following in the foot steps of her great-great grandfather, Guðmundur Thorgrímsen, Merchant of Eyrarbakki.

WILHELM KRISTJANSON was born in Otto, MB. He attended Wesley College (now University of Winnipeg) and then Oxford University and University of Chicago with an education degree. He was the editor of *The Icelandic Canadian* magazine and authored *The Icelandic People in Manitoba: A Manitoba Saga.*

CAROLE MACKINTOSH is an alumnus of the University of Manitoba and a retired Teacher-Librarian. She is an avid reader and former executive member of the Winnipeg Children's Literature Roundtable. She and her husband Joe now reside in Gimli where she is involved in many aspects of the community.

(SIMONE) RENEE MORIN is poet, writer, blogger, and dog-lover living in Winnipeg. Her work has been published extensively online and locally in *Lögberg-Heimskringla, The Icelandic Canadian,* and *The Collective Consciousness.*

HEIDA SIMUNDSSON grew up on a farm near Arborg in Manitoba where she has frequent opportunities to connect to her Icelandic-Canadian heritage. She is a recent BSc BEd grad and is a supply teacher in Evergreen School Division. She relishes in the fact that she is a farm kid at heart.

LORNA TERGESEN is the editor of the *Icelandic Connection.*

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Vikings from the encampment on Íslendingdagurinn 2010

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