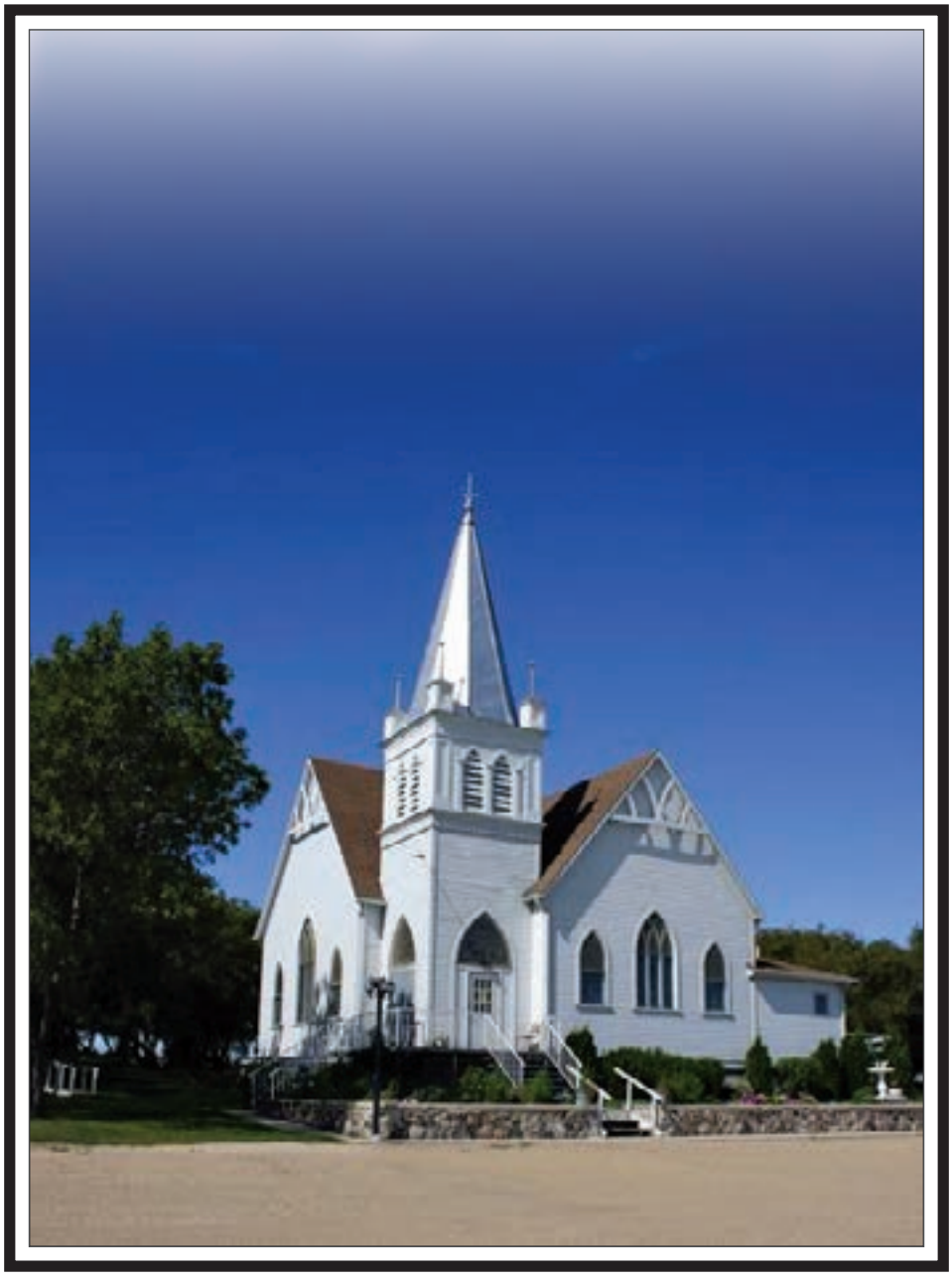
ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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CANADA ICELAND FOUNDATION INC.

SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED

We invite students to apply for the following scholarships which are offered, or administered, by the Canada Iceland Foundation. Priority may be given to first time applicants.

ALL APPLICATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY FRIDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER, 2012

Information and applications are available electronically by request at CanadaIceland@netscape.net (for application requests only), or in hard copy from Lögberg-Heimskringla.
The completed applications are forwarded to:
Canada Iceland Foundation Inc., Box 27012, C-360 Main Street, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4T3

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In the amount of $500, will be given annually to the student obtaining the highest academic standing in Icelandic Studies in his/her final year at the University of Manitoba. The award will be made by the Department Head.

The Margaret Breckman Mack Scholarship Award
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The Canada Iceland Foundation Scholarship
One scholarship of $500, to be awarded annually. Award to be determined by academic standing and leadership qualities. To be offered to a university student studying towards a degree in any Canadian university.

Einar Páll & Ingibjörg Jónsson Memorial Scholarship
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One scholarship of $500 to be awarded to a student who is registered or will be registering to take a course offered by The Department of Icelandic at the University of Manitoba. Preference may be given to students who have not previously taken a course offered by that Department.

The Lorna and Terry Tergesen Scholarship
One scholarship of $500 to be awarded to a student entering the second or a later year of study of architecture, fine arts, design or graphic design, music, dance or voice.

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One scholarship of $500 to be awarded annually to a student of good academic standing entering the University of Alberta or continuing their education there.

The Margrét Bjarnason Scholarships
Scholarships of $500 each for students pursuing a post secondary education, who graduated from a high school in Evergreen School Division in Manitoba and who demonstrate scholastic ability.

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A scholarship of $1000 to be awarded annually, in memory of Judge Walter J. Lindal, to a student registering as an undergraduate at The University of Winnipeg with a view to proceeding from there to the study of Law.

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A scholarship of $500 to be awarded to a student who has demonstrated financial need, academic achievement, strong leadership and community involvement, who will be attending a university in Canada or Iceland to study law or international relations. This scholarship is donated by David Franklin, Ad. E. to mark his ten years as Honorary Icelandic Consul in Montreal.

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A $500 scholarship in memory of Olga Rowlin, Laufey Smith and Kristin Arnason, to be awarded to a student pursuing post-secondary education. Preference may be given to a student with financial need and/or who has a mental or physical disability.

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ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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MANAGING EDITOR Lorna Tergesen
CORPORATE SECRETARY Lorna Tergesen
DESIGN & TYPOGRAPHY Catherine McConnell

SENIOR EDITORS

FAMILIAR ESSAYS Elva Simundsson
FICTION Helga Malis
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SCHOLARLY ESSAYS Norma Guttormsson
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ASSISTANT MANAGERS Moyra Benediktson, Valdine Bjornsson
ADVERTISING & PROMOTION Allison Holm

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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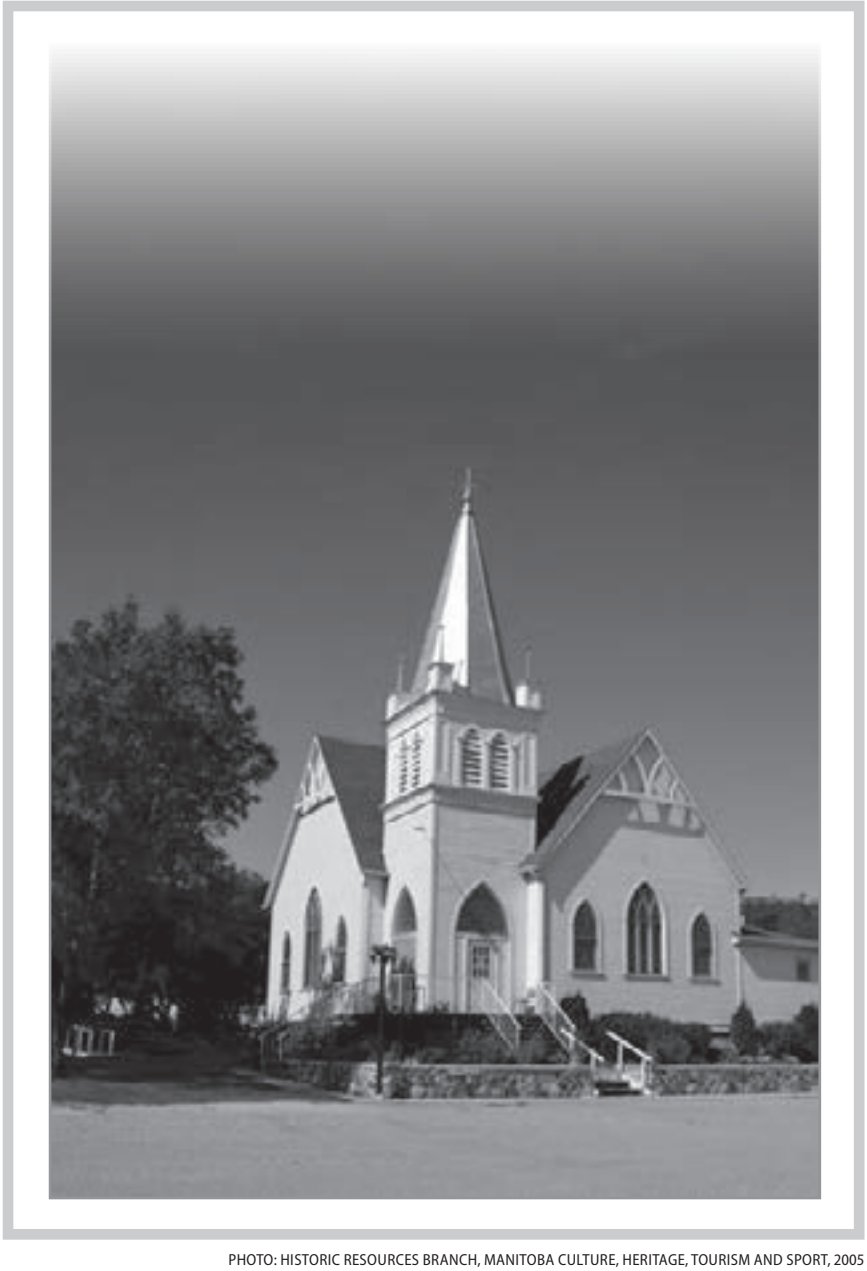


PHOTO: HISTORIC RESOURCES BRANCH, MANITOBA CULTURE, HERITAGE, TOURISM AND SPORT, 2005

Café Brú Bed and Breakfast, the beautifully restored 1910 Icelandic church – Brú Fríkirkju Lutheran Church

Editorial

Food for Thought

by Lorna Tergesen

"Food Glorious Food" from the show "Oliver" in which he is begging for another bowl of gruel brings to mind how much the food we eat has changed since our forefathers first came to Canada. Comparing food in Iceland now to what we serve here is not all that different. The supermarkets in both Iceland and North America carry such a wide variety of food stuffs. Only recently a kiwi, which I purchased (my grandparents would not even have known what that was), had a sticker saying it was from Italy. Globalization has altered our eating habits so much. There is a tale that when the first Icelanders arrived in New Iceland, the Aboriginals tried to teach them which roots were edible but most Icelanders were suspicious and did not dare to try them. This of course is not a confirmed fact, but is one of our folk tales of their first years here.

Global warming or temperature changes will alter what we can produce and what we can't. The thrust is now to eat food that is produced within 100 miles of your residence. This was likely the norm when we think back to old Iceland and also to our pioneer families. They were basically healthy and seldom lacked sufficient food to sustain their bodies. Now, they did not have access to the great amounts of sugar or refined flour or even the fruits and vegetables that we take for granted. Neither did they have all the additives and preservatives we ingest daily. Changes in food production have been dramatic. So we offer some current views about food today.

In our families we still enjoy many of the traditional foods that originated in Iceland. Treats such as vínarterta and pönnukökur are enjoyed by the greater society today. Kristine Olafson Jenkyns produced a cookbook in 2001, in which she incorporates the New Iceland history with the recipes of her mother and friends. This book is now out of print but still extremely valuable to those who own one.

On the lighter side, Signy McInnis details the events that have helped form the new Eldus Restaurant in Arborg, while Bryan Bjerring has delved into the story of the Brú Church Bed and Breakfast near Glenboro, Manitoba. Brynna Stefanson relates her experiences with food while she was living in Iceland and Helga Malis reports on a memorable breakfast in Akureyri.

Because our readers enjoy reading diaries and stories from our elders, we have Tom Goodman offering a story reminiscing about his Amma. And we have a very interesting tale written by Leonard or as he was called, Helgi Olsen. This is shared with us by his family. We thank them for their willingness to allow us to relate the stories that show the conditions of the day. In the last magazine, Kathy Cheater proved to us that she enjoys interviewing and writing about musical people regardless of what their style is. In this issue, you will get an in depth overview of Ron Halldorson and

all his accomplishments.

I do hope you enjoy the diversity of writers and topics. We thank them for their contribution and at the same time invite you, the readers, to offer us any suggestions for further topics.

PHOTO: LEIF NORMAN

Skyr at the 2012 Brandon INL convention

Correction

CONTRIBUTOR
Vol. 64 #3 (2012)

BETTY JANE WYLIE is a member of the Order of Canada and a two time Gemini award winner. She has published thirty-five books, including biography, self-help, financial planning, inspiration, cookbooks, belles lettres and two books of poetry.

Café Brú – Sustenance Then and Now

by Bryan Bjerring

One will not find Café Brú on a major Manitoba highway. But, if any place is a destination it is Café Brú. Those who know more about these things than I do say that for a small, independent (and even out-of-the-way) business to succeed it must offer something special. And Café Brú does that in spades, as they say.

Fifty or so delegates and participants attending the 93rd Convention of the Icelandic National League of North America made this discovery as they headed out from the host city, Brandon, Manitoba. We were on the trail of settlement sites of the late 19th century Icelandic immigrants. Descendents of the Icelandic immigrants in both Canada and the United States cannot get enough of this stuff!

I, along with most others, was on a chartered bus. This was a good thing, as Martha Stewart would say, because I had no idea where we were going. Our destination for lunch was Café Brú.

The Café as we soon learned, was not always a Café. Icelandic settlers began to arrive in the Argyle district of Manitoba in the latter part of the 19th century. By

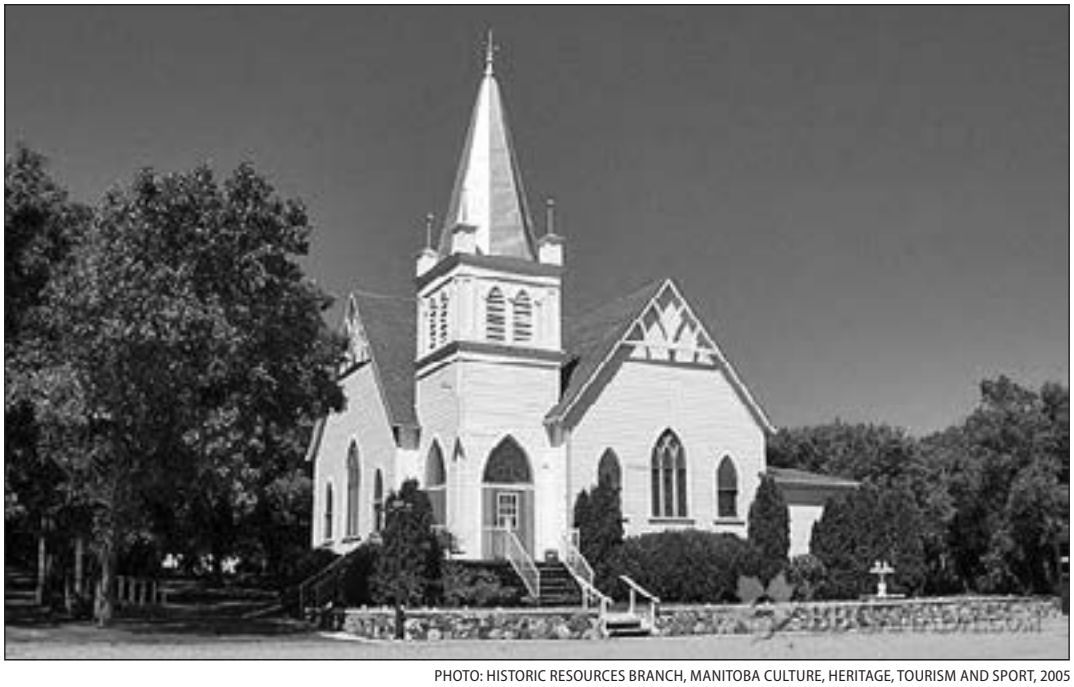


PHOTO: HISTORIC RESOURCES BRANCH, MANITOBA CULTURE, HERITAGE, TOURISM AND SPORT, 2005

1884 there were enough of them that the community began to organize and the Fríkirkju Congregation at Brú was formed. In 1889 a church building was erected at Grund. The building served both the Grund congregation and the Brú congregation. In 1910, partly to overcome travel difficulties, the Fríkirkju Congregation at Brú decided to erect a new church building near the bridge over Oak Creek – Brú meaning 'bridge' in Icelandic. There is some unconfirmed speculation that differing views on 'demon rum' also had a part to play.

In time, larger farms with smaller families led to the demise of the congregation and in its latter years only a half-dozen or so special services in addition to weddings and funerals were held in the church.

In 1998 Albert and Annette Wyntick, who had purchased the church building, moved it to its present location two miles south of Cypress River. It was placed on a new foundation and lovingly restored. Albert informed us that the Icelandic builders of the church had a surprise in store for the new owners. His new foundation was on the square; the church building was not. (see note above on 'demon rum')

The furnishings of Café Brú include the original candelabra and the altar which has been placed at the back of the church. The reredos, the decorative wood carving located at the front of the church behind where the altar would have stood, was carved by Byring Hallgrimson for the Grund church. It was later donated to the Brú church.

The Café Brú kitchen is located to the right of the main body of the church. Diners have a clear view of their meals being prepared – and it is possible to detect mouth-watering aromas which whet one's appetite. The kitchen now occupies the space where the choir pews were located and where the pastor had his office. Thirteen windows containing the original, subtly coloured stained glass bathe the interior with a warm and inviting glow.

Most importantly for those looking to have their appetites sated, the congregational pews have been removed. In their place are tables arranged for groups large and small. Our large group was accommodated at three rows of tables and smaller tables along the edges of the area.

But Café Brú is not all about the food. It is also a Bed and Breakfast. And, as a delightful extra, Albert will pick up his guitar and sing familiar songs and some of his own compositions. Reservations are required at Café Brú and information can be Googled online.

The Development of *The Culinary Saga of New Iceland*

by Kristin Olafson-Jenkyns

In the formative stages of creating *The Culinary Saga of New Iceland,* I was compiling a small collection of favourite recipes for my children and nieces. Over the years my folders outgrew the filing cabinet and I began to realize that I was not compiling a few recipes – I was creating a book! Along the way I was encouraged by two women, Elva Jonasson and Lorna Tergesen, who were my prime motivators in this project. Their belief in the value of this book to our community of Icelandic descendants and their confidence in my ability was very compelling.

The Research

The Culinary Saga took many years to come to fruition. In the beginning I was only interested in learning to make and to preserve recipes from my mother, aunties and Amma for my own family. Then I began experimenting with unfamiliar recipes from my mother's church and ladies aid cookbooks passed on to her from my Amma. My recipe collection grew along with a curiosity as to their origins in Iceland and the evolution of ingredients and cooking techniques developing in New Iceland.

I went to the University of Manitoba Icelandic Collection to search for Icelandic cookbooks. At that time there were only two small books. Only one was translated into English. I photocopied both being thrilled to find any connection in print to some of the recipes I knew.

I started researching the history of the Icelandic emigration to North America and I read the English translation of the *Framfari* (the New Iceland settlement newspaper, 1877-79) looking for references to women in particular. There were not many but I took note also of any food references. I began to think how the recipes passed down from one generation to the next would serve to honour the women who came, preserved their culinary traditions as best they could, began new traditions and always maintained their great sense of warm hospitality and caring.

In 1996 I sent out letters addressed to "Dear fellow Icelandic descendant," explaining the concept of the book and asking them to test a recipe I included. They were to reply with their comments, suggestions and other recipes to consider for inclusion. The responses were very encouraging. The comments ranged from warm and humorous to serious and well-considered advice. Also more recipes! I loved receiving all these letters (yes posted with a stamp letters, not email!) and phone calls. For me the opportunity to be in contact with everyone was a marvelous gift. In my opinion the comments that follow the recipes are greatly responsible for the book's success.

My concept now expanded to include the historical background of the Icelandic settlements in North America. I hoped that an abbreviated account would whet the appetite of the next generation to

learn more and would be an explanation for anyone with an interest in the cuisine of other cultures. Nelson Gerrard's books were a tremendous source of information as was the *Framfari* from which I included excerpts wherever they were applicable as they really bring our history to life.

As I mentioned earlier I had always wanted to know more about cooking in Iceland. Fortunately I had the pleasure of meeting Guðrun Ágústsdóttir (wife of Svar Gestsson, former Consul-General for Iceland in Winnipeg, Manitoba). She graciously allowed me to examine and copy her grandmother's recipe journal. Guðrun Jonsdóttir wrote the journal *Matreiðslubók* circa 1915 while she attended the Women's School in Reykjavík. This sepia coloured journal beautifully inscribed and well organized was a treasure for me. It was invaluable for providing insights regarding the comparison of cooking in Iceland and the settlements in North America not long after the major tide of emigration. We met together with Elva Jonasson who translated the recipes, to ensure my comments were accurate.

Preparing the Manuscript

By January, 2001 I was finally ready to organize the layers of the book into an order that would hopefully make sense to the reader. I now had many elements including the recipes, the history, the *Framfari* and the *Matreiðslubók.* Graphics were required to visually separate these layers to create a cohesive whole. Luckily I have a creative son who came up with different page backgrounds for these layers. (I liken this to vínarterta with photos as the icing on the cake!)

When I was immersing myself in this final phase I was living in Thunder Bay, Ontario. My family was in the midst of planning another long distance move to southern Ontario. My dining room table was piled with books and papers and my house was on the market for sale. Everytime I had to 'show' the house I had to clear the table. This went on for months. In fact we did not sell until just after publishing. During this time the *Culinary Saga* became an all-out family project. I sent Mackenzie who lived in Eden Mills near Guelph, Ontario typed pages, previously all handwritten, to format. As I did not type, I enlisted my daughter Reyna and my son Spencer to help. Spencer insisted I acknowledge his very tedious contribution here. (I did pay him!)

Financing the Culinary Saga…making it real

Then I had to tackle the biggest obstacle – the expense of publishing. I did not receive the Canada Council grant I applied for as it is impossible without being a known writer with a publishing house. I explored a few publishing houses. As a first book it was not viewed favourably as viable. Also it was clear I would have to make many compromises. For example the history was not deemed relevant. As well, I had many variations of the same recipe. I included five vínarterta recipes – and even so I had a hard time choosing those. As with pönnukökur, there are as many variations as there are Icelandic women! It was discouraging but Mackenzie and I plodded on until we had an almost complete mock-up.

What follows is my favourite reminiscence. Towards the end of June I called my sister Laurie in Manitoba and declared my desperation. As a woman of action she wasted no time getting me on a flight to bring my mock-up to Gimli the next day. My father, Dr. Irvin Olafson, with all the unfounded confidence only a father can have for his daughter gave me the go ahead to publish!

I returned home, gathered up all my

papers and travelled to Mackenzie's to finalize the book. For about 3 weeks we worked non stop to get it ready for press. We were also caring for my granddaughter, Lára Kristrun, just a toddler at this time. She was a very cute and well intentioned child who thought bringing Amma papers from our organized piles was very helpful!

Printed!…in time for the Íslendingadagurinn

At last with the final edit complete it went to press. We gave a sigh of relief and I returned home and then on to Gimli to await the first shipment promised for the Íslendingadagurinn. One hundred books were to be sent to Winnipeg to a friend's address the day before the festival. I waited there until late afternoon, making calls to the company and fretting. Finally around four o'clock I found out that for some unknown reason, they had been unable to deliver. The books were waiting at their office. I did not have a vehicle and I needed to get there by five o'clock. Luckily, my brother Steven was at home when I called. We got there just in time – what a relief it was to open up that first box in the parking lot and see an actual book!

The reception of the book that night in Gimli was very gratifying. We had many visitors including Lorna Tergesen. I was so proud to give her a copy of this book that she had been asking about my progress on for so many years.

I was not prepared for all the interviews, reviews and articles that followed. I guess I should have expected attention from the *Lögberg-Heimskringla, The Icelandic Canadian,* the *CBC* and the *Winnipeg Free Press*. When I saw the articles from Iceland including the *Morgunblaðið* I was thrilled. Locally, newspapers such as the *Hamilton Spectator* and many more surprising places all over North America and even England wrote articles.

I was astounded that a book that I thought would be mainly of interest to only Icelandic descendents would be of interest to others. When I purchased a *Homemakers* magazine in my grocery store that featured the *Culinary Saga* with two other books in an article on Scandinavian cooking I was speechless!

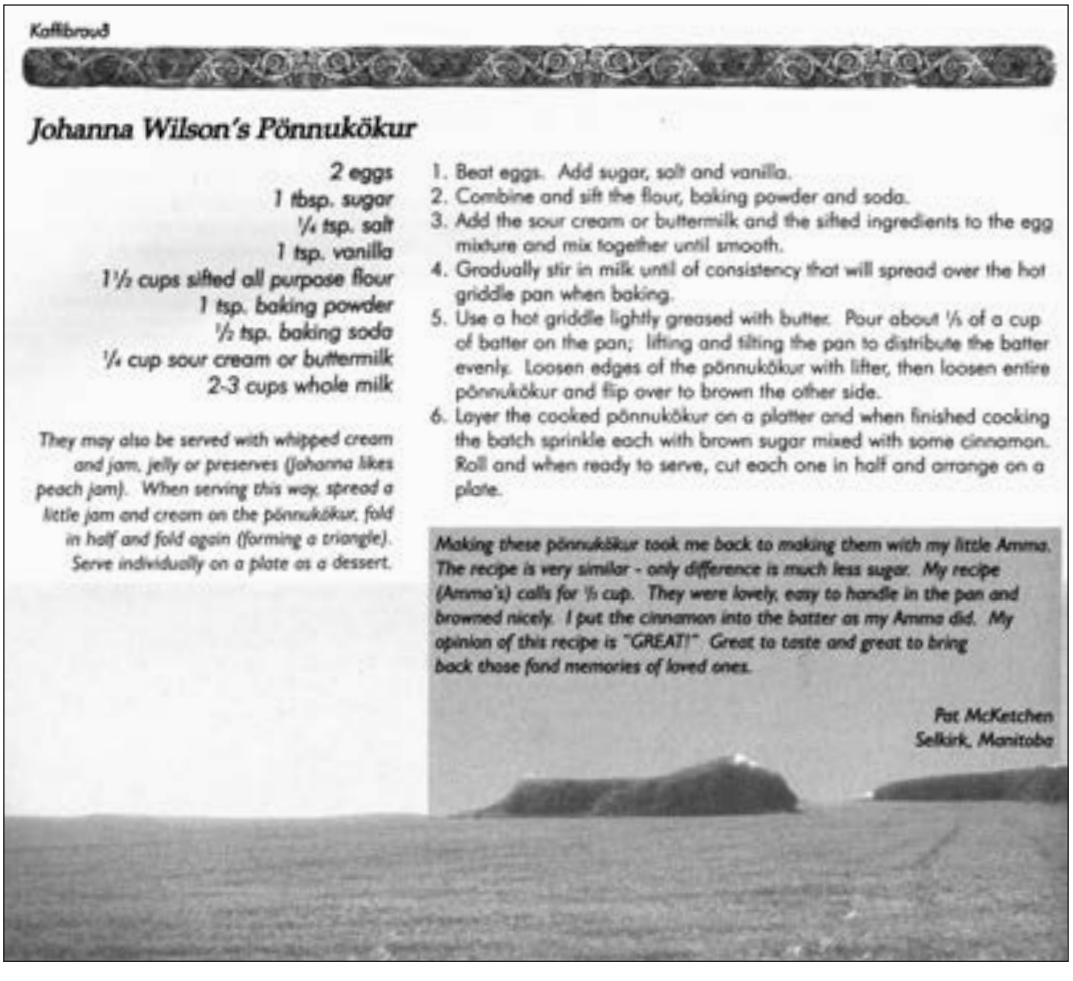
The greatest surprise though was being nominated for a Cuisine Canada award. The awards dinner for publishing in Canada's Food Industry took place at the Cuisine Canada Conference held in Guelph, Ontario, October 2002. I felt honoured just to attend this conference and met so many interesting people working in Canada's food sector. Mackenzie accompanied me to the awards dinner. When I received the Silver Award for Canadian Food Culture, I was stunned. I remember making my way to the podium trembling and desperately trying to focus on what I would say. Public speaking is not my forte! I sat down following a speech I cannot remember, relieved to think I could just sit back and enjoy the rest of the evening. But there was another surprise. I was called to the podium again to receive the Gold Award for Special Interest Food and Beverage Books. I did not even know I had been nominated for this category. And there I was at the podium again. I think I had to be pushed up to it. I was at first speechless looking at all the people in the banquet hall. Mackenzie assures me that I delivered a heartfelt speech about the many Icelandic women who had inspired me. This was the first time any book had received two major awards at Cuisine Canada – a fitting tribute to the tradition of Icelandic women that inspired the book. Coincidentally the guest chef at the awards dinner was Michael Olson,who has Icelandic roots, and his wife Anna Olson was also there.

I have had many other experiences

as a result of the *Culinary Saga.* One of my favourites was giving cooking demonstrations at the Scandinavian Hjemkomst Festival in Moorehead, Minnesota (June 2005). I flew there with brown bread, vínarterta, utensils and a deep fryer in my luggage. Of course there was an inspection tag in my bag – would have looked suspicious on the x-ray machine!

In February 2005 I received notification of the inclusion of the *Culinary Saga* in Library and Archives Canada's website to showcase the history of Canadian Cookbooks. Based on the physical exhibition "Bon Appetit – a Celebration of Canadian Cookbooks", the website presents information and images from Canada's culinary history, from early aboriginal traditions to the present. Good to know we are represented in this history.

I would like to thank everyone who purchased *The Culinary Saga of New Iceland.* For some the recipes are nostalgic and purposeful in the traditions of Icelandic Cuisine. For the uninitiated they are an opportunity to create, carry forward our traditional fare and create new memories.



Kaffibrauð

Johanna Wilson's Pönnukökur

2 eggs
1 tbsp. sugar
¼ tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla
1½ cups sifted all purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. baking soda
¼ cup sour cream or buttermilk
2-3 cups whole milk

1. Beat eggs. Add sugar, salt and vanilla.
2. Combine and sift the flour, baking powder and soda.
3. Add the sour cream or buttermilk and the sifted ingredients to the egg mixture and mix together until smooth.
4. Gradually stir in milk until of consistency that will spread over the hot griddle pan when baking.
5. Use a hot griddle lightly greased with butter. Pour about ⅓ of a cup of batter on the pan; lifting and tilting the pan to distribute the batter evenly. Loosen edges of the pönnukökur with lifter, then loosen entire pönnukökur and flip over to brown the other side.
6. Layer the cooked pönnukökur on a platter and when finished cooking the batch sprinkle each with brown sugar mixed with some cinnamon. Roll and when ready to serve, cut each one in half and arrange on a plate.

They may also be served with whipped cream and jam, jelly or preserves (Johanna likes peach jam). When serving this way, spread a little jam and cream on the pönnukökur, fold in half and fold again (forming a triangle). Serve individually on a plate as a dessert.

Making these pönnukökur took me back to making them with my little Amma. The recipe is very similar - only difference is much less sugar. My recipe (Amma's) calls for ½ cup. They were lovely, easy to handle in the pan and browned nicely. I put the cinnamon into the batter as my Amma did. My opinion of this recipe is "GREAT!" Great to taste and great to bring back those fond memories of loved ones.

Pat McKetchen
Selkirk, Manitoba

Fiskmatur

Mrs. J.G. Johannsson's Fiski Hveitbollur (Fish Dumplings)

2 cups fish (to be made of any kind of fish)
1 egg
2 tbsp. melted butter
½ cup flour, approximately
1 tsp. baking powder

1. Run fish through a food chopper so that there will be enough for 2 cups.
2. Add the egg and the melted butter. Sift the flour and baking powder. Stir into fish mixture to make a stiff dough.
3. Have ready a pot of boiling water and drop fish mixture from a spoon and boil for ½ hour.

Serve with drawn butter or white sauce.

If using raw fish, put through a food processor in the frozen state.

It was absolutely delicious! I did some variations - cooked the pickerel before measuring it, but I guess you could do it raw as well. I fried the pickerel in butter and it gave a nice flavour. Also I used chicken stock in the boiling process. I recommend making it this way as it was very tasty. I served it with a basic seasoned white sauce - I made one batch and everyone was looking for more! It was a terrific success and a great addition to the Icelandic foods section of our New Year's Eve Feast!

Connie Magnusson Schimnowski
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Laurie (Olafson) Jervis's Djúpsteiktur Fiskur (Deep-Fried Fish in Batter)

1 lb. pickerel, catfish or sunfish cut into serving size pieces
1 cup flour
1 tsp. baking powder
salt, pepper to season
½ tsp. paprika
1 cup beer

1. Combine dry ingredients and add beer. Mix well.
2. Dip fish into batter and deep-fry a few at a time until golden brown. Drain on paper towels.

I liked the easiness of the recipe and the idea of doing fish differently. The only problem was that the batter seemed to stick to my deep fryer. We loved it, calorie wise and all!!!

Maria Olafson-Kerr
Winnipeg, Manitoba

My Iceland Experience with Food

by Brynna Stefanson

Pönnukökur, vínarterta and a seemingly endless pot of coffee. These are some of the earliest memories I have of my Amma and Afi. Food is an important part of culture, something to gather around; something to share. I thought I knew Iceland because I knew these foods, because I lived in a community were you could get skyr ice cream in the summer. Was I ever in for a surprise.

In 2011, I lived in Iceland for five months, working as an au pair in a home outside of Reykjavík. The first day I arrived, the family took me out for some true Icelandic food. Standing in the January rain in front of a tiny hotdog stand, it was apparent our ideas of what symbolic Icelandic food was were quite different. Though I quickly developed something close to an addiction to Bæjarins Bestu pylsur, the famous hotdogs made of lamb, braised in beer and served with onions fried and raw, sweet mustard and a mayo-like sauce, I longed to find more traditional foods, things that Amma and Afi would want to eat.

My search for vínarterta ended in an identity crisis. Vínarterta, at least in the way we made it in Gimli, did not exist in Iceland. It was explained to me by relatives that it was a popular Danish dessert in the late 1800s, meaning that Icelanders who

PHOTOS: BRYNNA STEFANSON

Iceland's secret sauce

wanted to seem high-class started eating it. Emigrants brought it to Canada with them and while its popularity faded in Iceland, Western Icelanders hold it dearer to their hearts than almost any other Icelandic custom. My cousins did manage to get me some for my birthday, and I was surprised to find this supposedly Icelandic food lifting some of my homesickness.

Pönnukökur fortunately are indeed alive and well in Iceland, and still served with good hot coffee. I ate pönnukökur in tiny, below-the-street cafes, decorated like my Amma's house. I ate them at visits to family; I ate them on rainy afternoons. One day, I made pönnukökur for the children I was looking after. Mixing up my Afi's special recipe, I have never felt prouder than when they told me they were the best pönnukökur they had ever had.

Still seeking some tradition, I attended my first Þorrablót. The midwinter festival is mainly an excuse to gather together in the dark evenings, but since the 1950s, the food has become important as well. Now referred to as þorramatur, foods that were once Icelandic staples but are not frequently consumed anymore are served. Among these are hákarl (the infamous fermented shark), sheep's heads, liver sausage, blood sausage, whale blubber preserved in whey, and many other hearty foods designed to last through the long Icelandic winter. Though many of these dishes proved challenging to my taste buds, I was happy to share in such a special event. In an Iceland that is increasingly connected to the rest of the world, it is a chance to preserve the memory of a different way of life, and to honour and remember those who came before.

In large part though, food in Iceland was often hard to distinguish from food back home. Though McDonald's has left the country, hamburgers still remain popular, with a TV show dedicated to the opening of a high-class burger restaurant. Sushi is very well liked, and was certainly far better on the island than in my midland home. Greenhouses in Selfoss and elsewhere in Iceland have made fresh

produce more affordable and more readily available, if not quite in the variety I was used to in more temperate climates. Cucumbers and tomatoes wrapped neatly in cellophane can be found year round now, a welcome addition to the diet here.

The dairy aisle was one place in the grocery store that was unmistakably Icelandic though. Skyr, the incredibly tasty yogurt cheese, was found in several different brands, consistencies and flavours. Yogurt to my confusion, came packaged in milk cartons. And then there is súrmjólk, an unusual but delicious product that is indeed, sour milk. Rich and tangy and normally served with sugar, there is really nothing to which it can be compared.

Sheeps head and a type of headcheese are popular Þorramatur

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Certainly most tourists will not head to Iceland specifically for the food. Nor will Western Icelanders find all the foods that have come to mean Iceland to them. What is found in Iceland's culinary world is ingenuity for making something out of very little, a respect for the past with an eagerness to explore, and passion. Only passion can explain a line up in the rain for hot dogs.

Left: A sampling plate of Þorramatur including whey preserved whale blubber and liver sausage. Right: Hákarl, the fermented shark. Best served chased with a shot of Brennivín.

Eggs in Akureyri

by Helga Malis

After the long drive from Reykjavík, my daughters, Denise and Marilyn and I checked into our guest house in Akureyri. We then went to the super market to get the basics for supper and breakfast and to pick up a supply of the chocolate covered liquorice sure to be there. After we had found the meat, fruit, skyr, coffee, etc, I noticed a bit of a flurry down one of the aisles. Of course I had to find out what the fuss was about. People were leaning over a large square bin and seemed to be all excited. When most had gone there was one couple left and I had to ask what had happened. They told me excitedly that the sea bird eggs had come in and everyone just had to get some. "Do they taste good?" I asked. Well, they told me those eggs were only available for a short time in the spring, they were a delicacy and that I absolutely should not miss the chance to try them. Ever ready to try a new gourmet food, I leaned down into the bin and brought up three huge eggs – they seemed to be twice the size of the eggs in Canada. The woman then told me that I

must boil them for exactly seven minutes. My daughters, who had caught up with me, looked dubiously at the eggs, but I told them not to worry, I had been told they would be delicious. I was first up in the morning, so I thought I would get the water ready and try to figure out how to work the toaster. Boiled eggs and toast on the menu. The girls came into the kitchen and looked skeptically at these huge eggs in the pot. After seven minutes, I took the eggs out, cooled them under water and proceeded to crack one into a cereal bowl. The egg was cooked, but it was strangely translucent, you could see a bright orangey-red yolk right through the opaque white. Thinking that there was probably something wrong with that egg, I tackled another. The same thing, that bright orangey-red yolk again. The toast was ready, so I cracked the last egg and put it too into a bowl. Then I said, "bon appétit'. The girls didn't think that was funny. As we sat down their eyes went from the egg to me. Being the mother, I felt I had to go first, as it were, and just dig in. I looked at the egg and felt my stomach almost turn. It just didn't seem right to eat big sea bird eggs that had red yolks. But, someone had to go first, so I quelled my gut, put salt and pepper on and took a spoonful. That spoonful of egg just sat in my mouth until I able by force of will to get it down. I survived and then realized that it tasted just like an EGG, if a tad richer. What a surprise! When the girls saw my reaction they mustered up their courage and started to eat the eggs. We all admitted that it was a tasty breakfast and that our pre-conceived notions about how an egg should look almost kept us from trying this exotic gourmet food.

PHOTOS: DENISE MALIS

The Eldhús at the Arborg Hotel

by Signý McInnis

PHOTOS: OWEN EYOLFSON

They may have left mountains, geysirs, ice and fire, waterfalls and fjords when our ancestors came to the new land for a better life, but the Arborg Hotel has a very Nordic atmosphere. If you venture up to the New Iceland area of Manitoba's Interlake, you should make a point of visiting the small town of Arborg and in particular the restaurant called Eldhús at the Arborg Hotel.

My home town of Arborg is home to some rich Icelandic history, and what better than to have a restaurant named to show that connection. Not only is it my home town, but the hotel's owner/manager Owen Eyolfson also grew up in Arborg. He is 4th generation Icelandic, and grew up with Icelandic words used at home, as well as listening to his grandparents speak the language.

Icelanders first arrived in the Gimli area in 1875. From that time up to start of the First World War they continued to migrate in large numbers from their home country and many came to the eastern Interlake area of Manitoba. As homesteads were taken up nearer to the shores of Lake Winnipeg new settlers moved north and west upstream along the Icelandic River into the communities of Geysir, Arborg and Vidir. With such a concentration of Icelanders, it was just natural that they would continue to speak Icelandic among themselves. Use of the Icelandic language in the area has significantly decreased over the years, but a surprising number of words

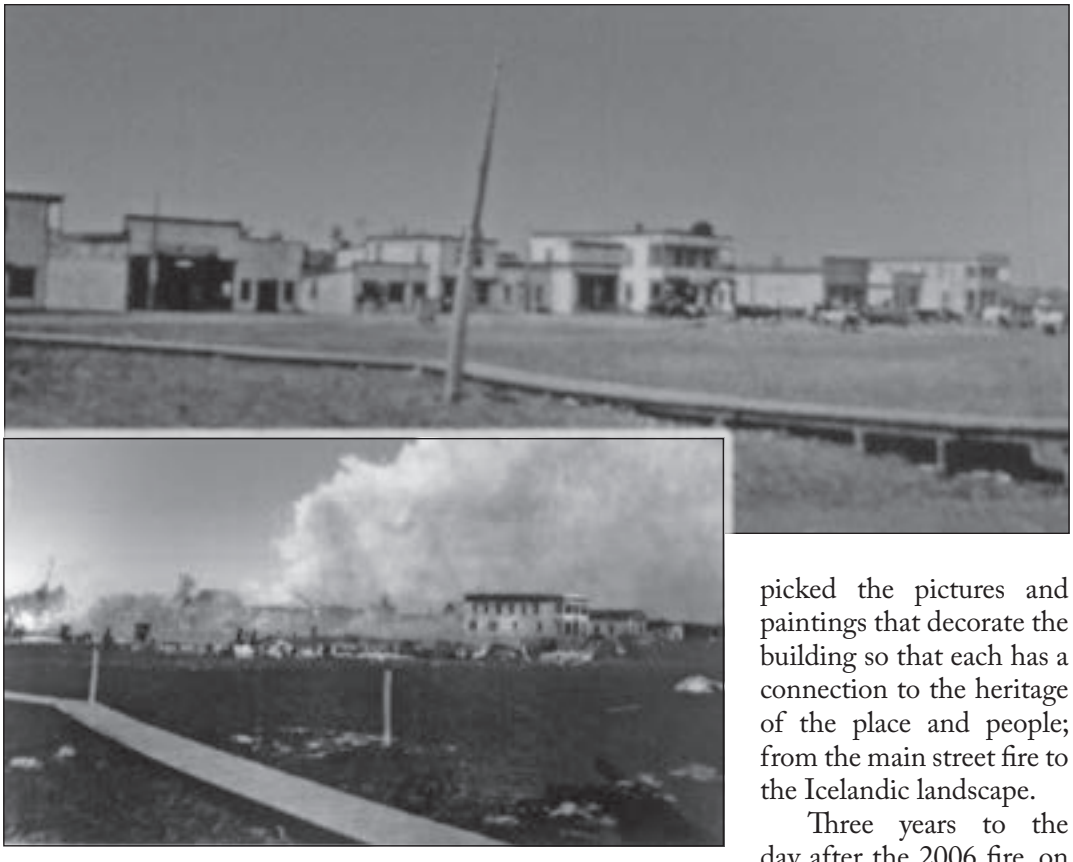
Owen Eyolfson at Þingvellir

remain with the younger generations. The town name, "Arborg", for example means "river town" and if you greet Owen in Icelandic, you will very likely get an Icelandic greeting in return.

The name "Eldhús" is Icelandic for kitchen, or more literally it can be broken down into "Eldur" (fire) and "hús"(house). The previous Arborg Hotels were the inspiration behind the current building and the restaurant's name. The name Eldhús has a bit of irony behind it as the Arborg Hotel has burned down twice and survived one other fire.

In 1912 the original Arborg Hotel went up in flames. Following this, a new hotel was erected. In 1920 a fire broke out in the Co-op store on the same street, and took out all but the hotel. There was an empty lot beside the hotel, and this fire break is believed to be what saved the building. Stories have been told of people throwing buckets of water onto the wall of their beloved hotel (not to mention the only beer parlour in town) in the hopes of keeping it wet enough that it wouldn't burn.

On September 15, 2006, yet another fire broke out in the Arborg Hotel causing irreparable damage to the building. When the owners at the time decided not to rebuild, Owen saw the opportunity to replace a much-needed commercial enterprise to a dynamic and growing community. The hotel had always been a popular gathering place in town and he saw the continued need for the business. Owen told me that his strong family roots in the area are the basis for wanting to stay



Arborg Main Street before and during the fire of 1920

in Arborg. He says he always knew that he would do something in the area one day and being in a family of entrepreneurs, he saw the hotel as a great chance to bring back the gathering place the town needed.

The windows in the current building are designed in the style of the windows of the first hotel and the roof design is from the second one. As much as possible the contractors who did the rebuilding were local. The building structure was done by Kristjanson Construction, heating and air conditioning installed by Ventrix Heating and Ventillation, and even the furniture and brick work by other local artisans. Owen himself kept his fingers in the whole process, from the design of the structure itself to the furnishings and decor. He hand picked the pictures and paintings that decorate the building so that each has a connection to the heritage of the place and people; from the main street fire to the Icelandic landscape.

Three years to the day after the 2006 fire, on September 15, 2009 the third incarnation of the Arborg Hotel opened its doors. Walking in the foyer, the stone wall imitates stone reminiscent of Iceland. Set in this wall is a modern Icelandic painting that Owen himself chose on a trip to Iceland in 2011. Throughout the building there is representation of the country from whence Arborg's first settlers came. The oranges and reds represent the lava of Iceland's many volcanoes. In each of the ten rooms, the hardwood floors and beautiful earth tones in the furniture, along with the crisp white linens, set a feeling of being a very Nordic place.

If you want to spend the night, you better pre-book as they are frequently full. Groups from as far away as France and China, as well as Iceland (of course!) have

The hotel that burnt in 2006

spent time here. People cycling across Canada have stopped here on their way. In April 2010, the Arborg Hotel played host to the regionally famous band Doc Walker when they did two shows in our little town.

The Eldhús restaurant focuses on a generic Canadian menu, including awesome pizzas and a variety of flavourful chicken wings. At Christmas they have a small selection of Icelandic foods. This last Christmas they put a spin on the traditional rullapylsa; breading small chunks and deep frying them. Owen is considering options for adding something Icelandic to regular menu. However, if it is Icelandic alcohol that you are looking for, he currently carries Reyka vodka and is looking into adding an Icelandic beer for the summer.

In an effort to resurrect a bit of Icelandic language, two Icelandic chat groups take place at the hotel. One group meets in the evening on the third Tuesday of every month in the lounge. Here you will find younger folk interested in practicing what they know, learning new phrases, and playing Icelandic card games such as "Veiðimann" (go fish), Manni, or Icelandic whist. We aren't focussed so much on grammar as we are on having fun!

Each Wednesday at three o'clock in Eldhús, you'll catch a coffee crowd practicing their conversation skills. So come in, grab a coffee, beer, Reyka vodka or whatever your choice may be, and join in on the conversation or just listen.

A visit to the Interlake is definitely a place to connect with Canadians of Icelandic descent and Arborg calls itself the 'Heart' of the Interlake. The Arborg Hotel is the place to catch up with old friends and meet some new ones. Our Icelandic-Canadian community welcomes visitors to our Icelandic chat groups and any other time. Justifiably, we are proud of our town and our heritage, not to mention our favourite place, Eldhús at the Arborg Hotel.

Ron Halldorson: Gentle Giant of Jazz

by Katherine (Einarson) Cheater

The giants of our imaginations are usually very tall and very broad, at home in mythic environs the world over. All cast long shadows over the landscapes around them. Ron Halldorson, with skill of his own making, has become a giant of his genre, having earned great respect and admiration amongst his peers. His story is one of deep love for the art of creating music.

When young Ronnie Halldorson was seven years old, a salesman came to his home selling Hawaiian guitar lessons. Since Hawaiian music, dance and film were wildly popular at the time, his mother became sold on the idea. Still unconvinced that he might prefer to give up regular childhood pursuits to a music agenda, Ron was registered for weekly group lessons at the National Institute of Music on Main Street, followed later by private instruction with 'Mr. Hawaiian Guitar,' Jack Riddell. Ron's proficiency in playing by ear would soon lead to mastery of other instruments through an intense process of listening, listening, listening – to radio, recordings, and his father's musical friends.

Between ages six and ten, Ron's recollections run to the ecstatic freedom of summers spent near Geysir with his mother's parents, Jon and Disa (Sigurdson) Thorsteinson, on their Icelandic River homestead, Helgavatn. Here he came to understand the language of his ancestors and to share their foods, including the home-cooked Icelandic meats and sweets from his amma's kitchen. "I loved my family dearly, and would gladly go out with my uncle Adalstein (Al) to the fields, and collect eggs with my afi. I would watch my amma cooking, and accompany her to gather vegetables and fruits from the garden. Those summers were just wonderful. I have the fondest memories of them." Through later summers at his Gimli cottage, Ron has continued to weave those familiar threads of early times into the special fabric of his own family.

Ron was born March 15, 1943 in Winnipeg. His mother was Juliana (Julie) Albertina Thorsteinson, born January 17th, 1916 at Helgavatn. His father was Thorberg (Thor) Halldor Halldorson, born November 23, 1912 in the Vidir area and raised in Riverton, where his father Jon (and mother Anna Sigurdardottir) operated a pool hall and barber shop. Here Jon was renowned as a talented poet in the Icelandic tradition of competitive spontaneous poetry making, much as Ron developed talent for improvisation in jazz.

Thor Halldorson was a gifted 'old time' fiddler (and impressive whistler), who played never in public but always at parties in his home, with friends. These friends included singer Jimmy Oig, heard regularly on CJOB's *The Western Hour,* and Metis fiddling superstar Andy De Jarlis, heard regularly on CJRC (later CKRC) playing any number of the over 200 'Red River' tunes recorded and published by him over his lifetime (1914-1975). Entered into *The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada,* and highlighted in a 2011 biography by

longtime band member Joe Mackintosh (entitled *Andy De Jarlis: The Life and Music of an Old-Time Fiddler*), Mr. De Jarlis remains secure in his national reputation as a shy but committed performer.

Deeply influenced by these musical gatherings, Ron soon found himself at age 10 playing steel guitar with Jimmy Oig on *The Western Hour*. This public exposure lead to his being asked at age 11 to join a country band that played for community shows and dances all over the province. He would be picked up each Friday after school, travel to some rural community, play until the wee hours, then be dropped off at home to catch as much sleep as possible before being picked up again for the Saturday night dance in a different town. With no trace of regret, Ron grins, "I had no childhood, you know, and no adolescence whatsoever." While he loved singing under maestro Glen Pierce in the Daniel McIntyre choir (Grades 10 and 11), life otherwise involved mostly practicing, playing gigs, and homework. Nevertheless, "I was lucky," he concludes. "I had direction and I had a focus, so I had none of the usual teen-age angst about identity; and no self-doubt." Ron graduated from Nelson McIntyre in 1960, by which time he was playing nightly in six different bands at the Normandy Dance Hall on Sherbrook Street.

Recollections around early influences provide unique insight into the history of the pedal steel guitar that would become part of Ron's professional development:

"Before the pedal steel arrived, what you had was the basic 6-string lap steel, followed

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RON HALLDORSON

Amma and Afi, Ron Lamont, three months, Momma og Pabbi, Julie and Thor. Seated Jon and Maria Sigurdson.

by an electrified version of the same with one or two more strings added. This was followed by double, triple and even quadruple neck guitars with 10 or 12 strings per neck. I experimented with some rather unwieldy steel guitars that were custom-made for me and had 14 to 17 strings on one neck. Some players had 4-neck guitars and each neck had a different chordal characteristic – major, minor, more modern 6th or 7th, and dominant 7th. Players would jump around the necks according to the requirements of the music. All this ended when the pedal steel guitar was invented because the pedals were able to produce chromatic qualities, changing the available sound completely.

One fateful day when I was about 11, my parents and I were returning from Minneapolis, having just purchased my first double-neck Fender. That evening, in a motel room in Grand Forks, I heard Webb Pierce's recording of Slowly, featuring a glorious-sounding steel guitar in the background – Bud Isaacs was the steel player – and I thought, "Oh, my God, how is he doing that? I'd never heard that sound before. It was brand new and I loved it instantly. I was wildly elated, but at the same time my heart was sinking, because I knew that the brand-new instrument under my motel room bed was suddenly obsolete.

When I figured out how these sounds were being produced, I enlisted the help of my uncle Kris Halldorson, who was extremely talented with all things mechanical. He listened to my account of what this new pedal steel guitar was doing, then rigged me up a kind of primitive mechanism that enabled me to get that sound. I had one pedal, not the usual three, but I had it.

Dear Uncle Kris! He could make or fix anything he set his mind to. The mechanism used to break strings every three days and that would drive me out of my mind, but it got me started in the fascinating world of the pedal steel guitar."

Over the next few years, while Ron was listening to increasingly sophisticated pedal steel players, his musical interests were running toward a fascination with jazz arrangements on guitar and

piano. What he now wanted to do on steel guitar was presenting him with new challenges: "I was not satisfied with what I could do on the steel. Whereas on the piano you really have ultimate freedom as to what notes to put together, on the steel guitar everything is very parallel because of that tone bar that goes across all the strings. Ironically, while from that bar comes the beauty of the instrument, the beautiful expressiveness of the bar is also its limiting factor. I got interested in guitar then because I wanted, needed, to have an instrument that was being used in jazz." Applying his knowledge of jazz guitar to steel guitar resulted in the development of a style recognized as unique in the world of steel guitar players. That began creating opportunities for him, the most significant one arriving on the day that Lenny Breau called.

In 1958, Ron's performances on *The Western Hour* caught the attention of the eldest son of Hal "Lone Pine" Breau and Betty Cody. Described as "guitar wizard Lenny Breau" on the family's regular CKY radio show, *Caravan,* Lenny was magnetic. As Ron recalls, "I was totally in awe of him. I would run home from school every day to listen to him on the radio. By then, I was very familiar with Chet Atkins' playing style and I could hear that Lenny was already doing everything that Chet did, and he was only 15. He was already expanding on Chet's knowledge and creating all sorts of exciting new things. I knew how extraordinary he was. I knew where he sat in the pantheon of guitarists, even at that age." So imagine picking up the phone one day and hearing the voice of your idol telling you he loves your steel guitar playing and wants to know if you would like to get together to 'jam' with him. Apparently, under the influence of the electric impulse that causes hair to be raised on the back of your neck, destiny knocks.

Within ten years of first jamming with Lenny Breau, Ron would be playing bass guitar as part of The Lenny Breau Trio on two separate RCA albums. *Guitar Sounds* from Lenny Breau was recorded in Nashville under the supervision of iconic guitarist and innovator Chet Atkins. *The Velvet Touch of Lenny Breau, Live!* was recorded in Los Angeles at Shelly's Manne Hole. This famous jazz club was home to a great many important live jazz recordings of that era. Shelly Manne, premier jazz drummer and owner of the club, had first seen the trio playing at The Stage Door in 1960, following a concert given by his own trio at the Winnipeg Auditorium. It was now the spring of 1969, one year since the release of Lenny's first album. Wherever he played, Lenny Breau's club and stage performances were a virtual magnet for guitarists from around the world. According to Ron, "during the Manne Hole recording sessions, the club was filled nightly with the most famous guitar players in L.A." Both albums continue to garner accolades from successive generations of musicians.

In the 2006 biography *One Long Tune: The Life and Music of Lenny Breau* (by journalist Ron Forbes-Roberts), Ron Halldorson was extensively interviewed and frequently quoted. The book offers a fascinating study in the incubation of [home-grown] genius, as it appears that the atmospheric pressure of a decade beginning in 1958 was sufficient to blow up a powerful storm of creative energy. The center of this storm was The Stage Door, a coffee-house where local musicians could hone their musical skills seven nights a week. Jazz aficionado Jack Shapira, in providing this downtown Winnipeg venue, is widely credited with development of a pivotal music scene in the life of the city. From here, Bernie Senensky (piano), Dave Young (bass), Icelander Bob Erlendson

(piano), Lenny Breau (here, bass guitar), Reg Kelln (drums), Gary Gross (piano and accordian), Ron Halldorson (bass guitar) and many other talented people, graduated to professional careers in various parts of the country.

Over a career spanning more than thirty years of free-lance work, private recordings, CBC shows, National Film Board productions, and symphony and theatre engagements, Ron has earned a solid reputation on guitar, bass guitar, dobro, banjo and mandolin, while remaining a unique, titanic talent on the steel guitar.

Highlights of recognition include multiple awards from the Manitoba Association of Country Arts, and in 2001, a CanWest Global Jazz Award for lifetime achievement in Jazz. Ron has appeared in combo with many great Jazz artists including Benny Goodman, Bob Brookmeyer, Bill Watrous, Rob McConnell, Marvin Stamm, Ed Bickert, Dave Young, Bernie Senensky, Jack Sheldon, and Tommy Banks, to name but a few.

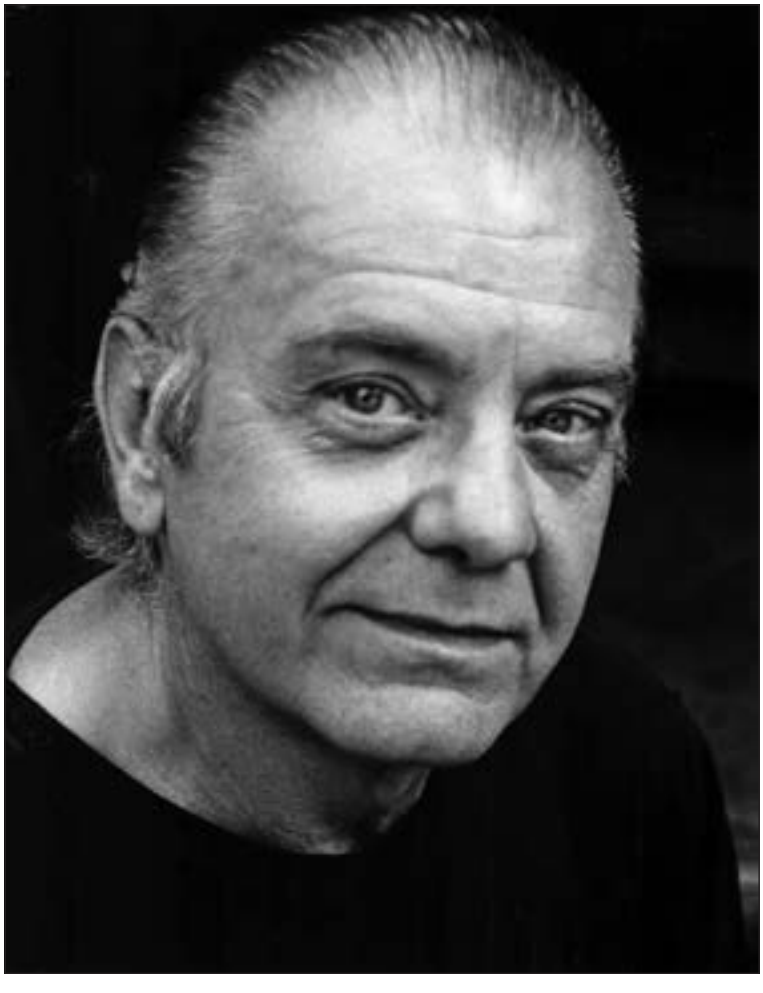
Opportunities with CBC included session work of great variety. Ron's younger daughter Emily recounts experiences in the early '90s as a pre-schooler on the sets of Winnipeg-recorded segments of *Sesame Street* and *The Fred Penner Show,* her father providing the musical backdrop. Similarly, in 1978, Ron assumed the role of music director on CKND TV's *Ray St. Germain Country,* after receiving a surprise call from Ray saying that this show would feature their teen-aged daughters on vocals. With no idea that his older daughter Wendy had any interest whatsoever in singing professionally, Ron, with some skepticism, found himself signing on. The show ran from 1978 to 1980 in its initial form, by which time it was clear that while the girls (Wendy, Cathy and Chrystal St.

Germaine) had begun as "little diamonds in the rough,' they had developed into fully professional performers. With touching affection, Ron recalls never having been so proud of anything his career had served him, awards included, as seeing his daughter shining so brightly on camera in front of him. He was equally devastated when Wendy died suddenly on September 7, 2009. As "grief therapy,' Ron compiled a DVD of Wendy's solo selections from the show. The disc is dedicated to 'an angel' coming of age in the public eye, beautiful in every way. One particularly poignant track features father and daughter singing a duet on the song *I Love.* As sister Emily describes it, "Wendy was my idol and I loved that duet. As a child, I watched Wendy singing over and over and over."

In a 2011 article in *dig! magazine,* emerging U of M bassist Luke Sellick writes: "I first met Ron about five years ago. He agreed to play a gig with me, and although I was wildly inexperienced at the time, he was nothing but encouraging. I owe a lot of my musical development to him." It has often been remarked to Ron by colleagues that his professional style is characterized by generosity and patience. In commenting on this legacy, Ron concludes that it has always been in him to give his best to every performance, even when others would judge an opportunity unworthy.

If experience bestows wisdom, it follows that great experience bestows great wisdom. On the subject of maintaining crucial focus as a performer, and in a voice full of lilting cadence, Ron provides eloquent insight on the nature of creativity born of love:

"Maybe the question of 'focus' is really two different things. One is a kind of performance anxiety issue, and I suffered from that a lot. It's amazing how many talented people are not suited temperamentally to be performers. To perform successfully, you need to avoid being distracted by so many things that can go wrong; especially by negative thoughts



sitting in judgment on every musical thing you do.

In jazz, it's really a 'stream of consciousness' thing. You just have to let everything go by. Even the best players are not perfect, and jazz by nature, is not Bach. There is limited preplanning. It's really like living in the moment, having faith in your creativity, and being motivated by the love of doing that. I think the reason the best players are so extraordinary is that they love doing it so much; it brings them so much pleasure to be part of this process of creating music.

Being motivated by love is very effective. You can't actually force yourself into inspired improvisation; just like you can't force yourself to fall asleep. You have to seduce yourself, you have to keep your thoughts on the joy of doing this. Sometimes that just means slowing down; slowing down and playing less, but just trying to make it interesting. And the better you treat yourself in this process, the better it goes.

The other part of the focus issue is the chemistry that develops between people in performance. In The Lenny Breau Trio we became so receptive to each other that a quality of deep empathy naturally evolved between us."

Unfortunately, empathy, like love, can bring excruciating pain; as in the last time Ron would see Lenny Breau. After a hiatus of many years, the old trio had gathered for a sold-out concert at Winnipeg's Pantages Theatre in April, 1981. Strung out by emotional turmoil related to unfinished business in Winnipeg, and by the drugs he was using to tune out distraction, Lenny was in no condition to perform that night. While Ron has fond memories of the trio's reunion at his home following the stress of that publicly-maligned performance, the bite of that last dark night of empathy lives on. Lenny died three years later.

Because Lenny Breau's death at age 43 was ruled a murder and the murder remains unsolved, Canadian playwright Pierre Brault toured North America in 2009 with his production *Five O'Clock Bells* (a title of one of Lenny's compositions) in an effort to draw attention and appropriate closure to this dramatic life and death. According to Manitoba Theatre Centre's website, Brault's one-man play "navigates Lenny's dance with genius and the childlike innocence that left him vulnerable to dark forces." Ron Halldorson saw the play as "very clever, and well done as theatre" but concluded that many characterizations were "hopelessly clichéd and totally inaccurate." He cites, in particular, the characterization of fellow Icelander Bob Erlendson, early mentor of many young Winnipeg jazz players.

With life and death as classic subjects of great literature, twin experiences of joy and grief can often find sublime expression in works of fiction. It is possible, then, that the body of classical literature published over the last hundred years and included in Ron's significant collection of books, has served to inspire him in myriad and wide-ranging expressions of life and death. Certainly, it has inspired passion for reading in Emily, now pursuing a Political Science degree at the University of Winnipeg. With keen appreciation, Emily recalls strong impressions of a family tradition of literary interest; especially, from earliest memory, her father's love of reading to her from his favourite works of fiction.

Besides integrating a wealth of literary expression into his life, Ron draws on a mass of musical expression through intimate knowledge of *'The Great American Songbook,'* a phrase widely used to describe the large body of popular songs written during the halcyon days of Broadway and Tin Pan Alley. Likewise, he has "learned a helluva lot of great tunes" from a wide range of other sources. He continues to

weave and spin well-worn classics into magical sounds – solo, duo, and in company - at venues wide and varied, mostly in Winnipeg. His last performance with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra was the sold-out concert with The Canadian Tenors in December, 2010. As a regular feature, Ron can be heard most Thursdays in the corridors of CancerCare, Health Sciences Centre, as part of the prized *Artists in Healthcare* program.

Ron's son Owen has been a professional guitarist since his early teens. His children Kyle and Kelsey are also musicians: Kyle a gifted guitarist; Kelsey, an enthusiastic vocalist. Owen's mother, Ron's first wife Melody, was a much-loved country singer in the 60s, performing on TV, radio and in clubs.

Emily's mother, and Ron's wife, Tusia Kozub, also comes from a very musical family. A fine musician in her own right, Tusia enjoys a busy career as a pianist, teacher, vocalist and music director. For most of their lives, Ron and Tusia have made their home in Winnipeg.

The Darling Boy

by Tom Goodman

Elísabet Polson sits uneasily on the Portage Avenue streetcar, her bulky purse on her lap. The old woman's thoughts are focused on her failed séance just conducted that afternoon in the back room of a downtown tea house, and her unsuccessful efforts over the years to make contact with her first-born son.

It's the first day of September. If this had been last week, mothers would have been scurrying with their children between Eaton's and The Hudson's Bay Store, shopping for school clothes. Today Portage Avenue is almost deserted, so there is no diversion from her troubling thoughts.

Another disappointment, she thinks to herself. If only I knew that I might see him again someday, that he's somewhere, not just a memory.

The trolley enters the West End, Winnipeg's Icelandic neighbourhood, and Elísabet happens to look out the window as they pass Vimy Ridge Park, and she turns away in disgust. How dare they! she silently declares, not for the first time. A few minutes later, Elísabet gingerly steps off the streetcar at the Goulding Street stop, taking care to avoid catching her heel in the tracks imbedded into the pavement.

Elísabet is prim in her navy blue coat and traditional black lady oxfords. On her head, she wears a small black felt hat held in place by a hatpin and crowned with a bit of black lace. Her face is pale and creased and her grey hair is pulled back in a bun.

"Amma!" Elísabet's grandson, ten-year-old Tommy, calls out from the seat of a horse-drawn vegetable wagon that was stopped nearby. "Look at me!"

Elísabet smiles at the boy as she walks over to the wagon. Tommy's a classic Icelander, tow-headed and pug-nosed, with an irrepressible good humour that she cannot resist.

"Shouldn't you be in school, Tómas?"

"School's over for the day, Amma. Joe lets me ride with him on the vegetable wagon on his stops between our house and the corner if I get home in time."

Elísabet realizes that she has not said hello to the unkempt man who sits beside her grandson, the horse's reins in his hands.

"Hello, Mr. Dovelman. You're very kind to let Tómas ride with you. He can be quite a chatterbox."

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Polson," Joe says in a thick Yiddish accent, tipping his ancient peaked wool cap. "Tommy, he's good boychick. I like that he talks a lot, and he's very bright."

"Guess what, Amma!" Tommy says. "Joe even lets me fill the horse's feedbag with oats sometimes. His name is Trigger, just like Roy Rogers' horse on television."

Elísabet doesn't watch television so she doesn't appreciates the irony of naming the old draught horse after the television cowboy's beautiful palomino.

Joe leans over to Elísabet. "I am telling you that I was just at your house and I think you're in trouble. Mrs. Goodman is

very worried for you. She's asking if I'm seeing you."

"Auntie Lina said you're sick," Tommy says. "Is that right?"

"I'm not sick, elskan. Just a little cough." Elísabet turns to Joe. "My daughter shouldn't fret. But thank you for warning me. By the way, how is your voice coming along? Are you over your cold?"

Joe is the cantor at his North End synagogue. "Yes, and I thank you for asking. I want you should come hear me sing some time at my synagogue. I'm singing good and I look real good too. I dress up. I shave."

"That would be an honour, Mr. Dovelman," Elísabet says but then she hesitates and lowers her gaze. "Unfortunately, it's impossible."

"Some other time will be okay too," Joe says in a quiet voice.

Tommy senses that his friend's feelings are hurt. "Is your synagogue like a church?" he asks, and Joe nods.

"I thought so. Amma never, ever goes to church." Tommy turns to his grandmother and asks as an afterthought, "Why don't you go to church, Amma? Nobody will tell me."

Elísabet appears not to hear the question as she speaks again to Joe. "I had better get Tómas home. If I don't, I'll be in trouble with two of my daughters, his mother as well as Lina."

Tommy climbs down from the wagon, his unanswered question already forgotten. He and his grandmother walk up Goulding Street toward Lina's white clapboard house where Elísabet has lived since her husband's death. Tommy's mother is Lina's younger sister. They are married to brothers, and Tommy's family rents the second floor of the duplex next door. Tommy and his younger brother, Paul, were not born until their parents were in their forties and, typical of children born to older parents, they are both rather precocious.

As Tommy and his grandmother near his house, he notices that she appears winded. "Are you okay, Amma?" he asks.

"I'm just fine," Elísabet says. "Now off you go, Tómas."

"My mom took Paul to the dentist," Tommy says with a broad smile as he takes his grandmother's hand. "I'm staying at your house until they get home."

A few minutes later, Lina is rushing from the kitchen as Elísabet walks through the front doorway. "Mamma, where were you? We were very worried about you."

"Don't worry about me. I just went to see Madame Red." Elísabet coughs as she removes her hatpin and takes off her hat and coat. "I'm very tired. I'd just like to have a cup of kaffi and lie down for a while."

Tommy looks at his grandmother. Madam Red, he thinks. What kind of name is that?

"Who's Madam Red?" asks Lina.

"Oh, she's just a lady, a lady with a gift." Elísabet knows that her daughter disapproves of her seeing such people, and does not hide her disdain.

"People like that are just out to take your money," Lina says. She pauses for a moment. "I could have gone with you, Mamma. You seem to forget that you're ninety years old – and that you're not well."

Elísabet looks down at her grandson and smiles. "Elskan, will you get your amma her molasopi?"

"Mamma, you know that Lárus says you're a borderline diabetic." Lárus Sigurdson is Elisabet's long-time doctor, and her good friend. Lina wags her finger at Tommy. "No moli, young man."

Elísabet picks up her purse and climbs four steps to the landing where she stops to catch her breath, and peers over her shoulder. Her daughter is still watching

her. "Dr. Fairley is coming to see you."

"Where's Lárus?

I don't like that other doctor."

"Of course you don't, but Dr. Fairley will be here in twenty minutes. Lárus has the flu."

Elísabet's bedroom, originally a small sun room, is jammed with old furniture. She sits down in an office chair set on casters opposite her husband's roll top desk and pulls a bundle of yellowed letters from her purse. She's about to place them in a side drawer of the desk when she hears her grandson's voice.

"Here's your kaffi," he announces proudly.

Elísabet looks up to see the boy unsteadily carrying her large china coffee cup and saucer.

"Tómas, be careful not to burn yourself."

"It's okay. I'm good at this," he says.

Tommy slowly passes the cup and saucer to his grandmother.

"I've got a surprise for you, Amma," he says, an impish expression on his face. Without waiting for a reply, he pulls a half dozen sugar lumps from his pocket and hands them to his grandmother.

"Molasopi," she says with a smile as she allows the coffee to cool a little. Elísabet holds the sugar lumps in her fist, and Tommy watches as she places one between her front teeth and strains a sip of coffee through it.

He had tried to drink his súkkulaði that way once, but his mother yelled at him. "Hot chocolate is already sweet enough," she said. "You do that and you'll end up with dentures, just like all the old Icelanders.

Tommy hops on the rocking chair at the end of the room, the only seating in the room other than Elísabet's narrow bed, and slowly rocks back and forth. He closes his eyes and inhales a deep breath of warm air, tinged with the familiar aroma of mothballs and snuff.

Tommy loves the time he spends here because his grandmother is always interested in what he has to say. She teaches him Icelandic too, and she plays little games with him.

Despite his age, Tommy even loves it when she recites an old Icelandic children's rhyme naming the fingers. She would hold each of his fingers in order as she says: "Þumaltott, sleikipott, langimann, gullibrann." Finally she says, "og litli putti spilamann" and they would both laugh as Elisabet wags his little finger.

"What are you reading, Amma?" Tommy asks.

"They're just some old letters that I'm putting into the drawer."

"What kind of letters? Who are they from?"

"Letters from your Uncle Archie, and my letters to him when he was in the war. The army returned my letters after he died."

"You still read his letters?"

"I think of him every day just before I go to bed."

"Every day?" Tommy asks. "Uncle Archie died in the First World War. That was a long time ago."

"Today is the forty-second anniversary of his death, although it seems like yesterday to me. I went to see a lady today who tried to speak to Archie on the other side. I thought that the letters might help her – but they didn't."

"Madam Red?" Tommy asks. "She can talk to Uncle Archie?"

"She told me she could. Your mother and your auntie think I'm crazy." Elísabet pauses for a moment, and slowly shakes her head. "They're probably right. Either I'm crazy or I'm a fool."

"You're not crazy. You're the smartest person I know. Will you read the letters

to me? My mom says that Uncle Archie was a hero who fought in a great battle."

It bothers Elísabet that her grandson could think that there could be anything glorious or heroic about war – but reading his letters seems to bring Archie close to her once again.

"Amma, did you hear me? Will you read the letters to me?"

Elísabet shuffles through the letters. "Here's one," she says. "It's a letter dated May 3rd, 1917, written just a few weeks after your uncle was wounded."

Tommy notices that his grandmother doesn't bother to put on her reading glasses before she starts to read. "Dear Mother, This looks like child's handwriting as I am writing with my left hand and am lying in bed."

Elísabet looks up. "You know that they amputated Archie's right arm when he was wounded, don't you?"

Tommy imagines what it would be like not to have a right arm. He had tried to write with his left hand once and it was an awful mess. How did he tie his shoes? Or cut his meat? Tommy pauses. Or go pee?

Elísabet places two more sugar lumps between her teeth and takes another long sip of her coffee before she continues as she wipes away a tear. "It is slow work as this is the first letter I've written since I was wounded. I was three weeks in a hospital in France before I came to England. I am getting along nicely. It is just a matter of time before my wounds heal. In the meantime, I am well looked after."

Elísabet looks up and sees that Tommy is totally absorbed by his long-lost uncle's letter. It occurs to her that this might be too much for a ten-year-old. "I think we have had enough of this," she says.

"No, we haven't," Tommy blurts out, but realizes from the look on his grandmother's face that he has crossed the line. He blushes and looks away.

"So who did you play with today?" Elísabet asks. "Any Icelandic children?"

Elísabet loves to impress her grandchildren by tracing the lineage of their Icelandic playmates, who she inevitably concludes are relatives. Like most Icelanders, she has a very liberal concept of what constitutes a relative, often including distant cousins and those related by marriage.

At that moment, Lina calls again from below. "The doctor is here, Mamma. He's coming right up. Send Tommy down if he's bothering you."

"Tómas, you can stay here, but keep out of the way," Elísabet says. She hastily finishes her coffee, places the cup and saucer out of sight, and moves to the edge of the bed as the doctor enters the room. He glances at Tommy, and then wheels the office chair over to the bed.

Tommy heard his grandmother say that she doesn't like this doctor so he decides that he doesn't like him either. Dr. Fairley is tall and slim with ramrod posture and a clipped British accent.

"Mrs. Polson, your daughter tells me that you've been out meeting with mystics, and that it's not the first time. Some fantasy about talking to your dead son. Dr. Sigurdson asks me to see you here because you're too old and too sick to come to the office – and now I find that you can take the street car to see some charlatan."

Elísabet glares at the doctor. Who does he think he is, Tommy thinks, talking to my amma like that?

"I understand from Dr. Sigurdson that your son was a hero of the Dominion," the doctor says as he pulls his stethoscope from his medical bag. "The last man to fall in our great victory at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, was he not?"

"It might have been a great victory

for people like you," Elísabet says in reference to the people of British descent who dominate Manitoba society. "It wasn't a victory for my people. I can't believe they've dedicated a park to Vimy Ridge. They should have dedicated an abattoir. And Archie wasn't the last boy to fall, he was the last boy to die. Just when he was finally supposed to come home, he contracted tetanus from shrapnel still lodged in his body, and then he was gone."

Way to go, Amma! Tommy thinks as Elísabet pauses for a moment, taking deep breaths.

"When Archie died, most of me died. The only reason I carried on was because of my other children."

Tommy watches to see how Dr. Fairley will react, but the doctor remains stony-faced as he goes about checking Elísabet's heart rate, blood pressure and temperature.

"Have you been taking the heart medicine Dr. Sigurdson prescribed for you?" Tommy thinks that the doctor sounds very bossy.

"Yes, of course I have."

"Let me see it then," he says. Elísabet retrieves the bottle from a desk drawer and holds it up for inspection. It's half-empty, and the doctor nods without comment. Tommy saw his grandmother pour part of the contents of the bottle down the sink the other day, but knows better than to say anything.

"And are you still drinking all that coffee with all those sugar lumps? The caffeine and the sugar are very bad for you."

"You know about that?" Elísabet asks.

The doctor smiles, a smug look on his face. "Dr. Sigurdson, told me."

"Not so much coffee, and not so many sugar lumps," Elísabet says.

"Well, Madam, Dr. Sigurdson is very worried about your health. You have congestive heart failure, and it's worsened considerably. That's why you don't have much energy, and that's why you cough."

"Sir, my heart's been beating for a very long time. If it stops tonight, I will not have been short-changed."

His tests complete, Dr. Fairley apparently concludes that there's no need to provoke his patient further. "Good evening, Mrs. Polson," he says abruptly as he stands to leave.

"Góða nótt," says Elísabet. She looks at her grandson after the doctor walks out of the room. "That man took a lot out of me."

Tommy knows that she's right as her face is grey, and her voice very weak. "You should get some sleep, Amma, and I'll go home. My mom must be there by now."

"Tómas, I want you to stay awhile," Elísabet says.

"Amma, you're not well. I'll come back tomorrow."

"There are a great many people like that foolish doctor who believe that war is noble. You're not going to be one of them."

Tommy is confused. "Dr. Fairley did say that Uncle Archie was a hero."

Tommy sits down beside his grandmother, and she takes his hands in hers. "Elskan, Archie was very brave, but he was no fool. If he'd known what awful things would happen to him, I doubt that he'd have enlisted to fight in the Englishman's war."

Elísabet pauses for a moment. "You must also understand that it's not just soldiers who suffer in war."

She points at the shelf of the desk where she had left the stack of correspondence. "Find my letter dated April 17th, 1917."

Tommy retrieves the letters as

Elísabet lies back on the bed. He soon comes across a letter in his grandmother's handwriting.

"Here it is, Amma."

"You read it to me, elskan," she says, her voice barely audible as she closes her eyes.

"My Darling Boy. How will I commence this letter dearest Archie as we are all thinking of you and praying for your recovery and that you will be able to come back to us again dearest boy of mine. Your father got a lettergram saying you were seriously ill and wounded. Oh how we all felt sad but we hope for the best and as I said before we pray to God you will be spared for us. Your father is so anxious about you as we all are. Oh, if we could only be near you and help to nurse you, my own darling boy."

Tommy reaches the end of the page and stops, his mind occupied by his own thoughts. How would my mom feel if I was badly hurt and she couldn't see me or talk to me or hold my hand? And then I died, alone and far away.

"Amma, poor Amma," he says and pauses again. A moment later, Elísabet gives a long, eerie sigh, and he turns to look at her.

"Did I upset you, Amma?" Tommy asks just before he notices that she is now completely still.

Helgi Olsen's Memoirs

This is a part of a series of Helgi Olsen's memoirs

The Memoirs of Helgi Olsen, who was born in 1893 in Winnipeg, was the son of Ólafur Ólafsson and his wife, Helga Guðmunsdóttir, of the Reykholts Valley who first immigrated to Markland in Nova Scotia and then moved to Winnipeg in 1883. Helgi's intention was to leave a record for his grandchildren of their Icelandic heritage, which, he suspected, was in danger of being completely forgotten. Therefore some of his manuscript is general history, some is family history and much of it is personal anecdotal information about his experiences. He titled his efforts, "The Vanishing Viking." This is in brief the story of the Olsen family, and how their thread of life became woven into the Canadian Identity.

It was in the Reykholt Valley that my parents were born, Father at a place called Vestur Súlunes (West Puffin Point). This was in the western portion of the Valley and the nearest trading point was Akranes, thirty miles further west along the fjord, on a long narrow point called Ships Point, (Skipa Skagi).

Akranes was not only a trading centre, but also an important fishing outlet. Most fishing was done from small sailboats, or from skiffs. This was considered rather hazardous, as so many fishermen lost their lives, either through accidents or from the effects of the storms and other natural elements. Fishing, at any time, or in any place or country, was never considered a financial rewarding occupation. It was hard work, with little income, yet men all over the globe spent their lives on the sea, making their scant living by this means, and seemed unable to switch over to any other occupation.

Father came from a long line of Ólafurs, nine that we are aware of. Father's father was called Ólafur the Strong; because of his many feats of strength performed when he was at his best. One story describes the occasion when a horse of his became mired in a bog and was unable to free itself. Ólafur waded in, got his shoulder under the horse's belly and lifted it clear from the mire and waded ashore with it. Icelandic ponies could weight up to 800 lbs., so this was no mean feat. There were four boys in the family: Ólafur, Björn, Friðrik and Sumarliði. The last named died while still in his teens. Ólafur and Björn immigrated to Canada, but Friðrik remained in Iceland.

The home was the usual sod type, common on farms at that period. The fronts were made of spare lumber and, in some cases covered by corrugated iron. The only source of heat was in the kitchen where an open fireplace served for cooking purposes. The fuel was mostly peat, which had been dried during the summer months. Care had to be taken not to let the fire die out, as they had no matches with which to start a fire and, no doubt, no kindling either. If the fire did go out, then they would have to go to their neighbours and borrow embers from them.

Father and his brother Björn left their farm home, while still in their teens, to seek work. They went to Akranes, where they were soon hired as fishermen by one

of the many fishing outfits, then operating out from Akranes. This outfitter's name was Erlandur Erlandsson. He had five sons. One of them, Erlandur, and Father became staunch friends that lasted through all their years, both in Iceland and after they had immigrated to Canada.

Father and his friend Erlandur courted two girls. Their home was at Ferjukot. Olina was the daughter of Guðmundur Stefansson and his wife Thordis. Mother's mother died while she was a very small girl and was taken to foster by her Aunt Thordis and was brought up at Ferjukot.

Ferjukot was about forty miles inland from Akranes, so the boys had many an interesting adventure when they had the leisure to make the trip to Ferjukot on horseback, as that was the only means of travel at that time.

At one point along the road, the way lay between a high rocky point and the fjord and was only passable at low tide. On their way from one of their many visits to their girlfriends, they had stayed later than usual, so when they reached this hazardous point, the tide was coming in and there was a strong wind blowing. The waves were dashing up against the cliff and the way seemed to be impassable- but not to these hardy sons of Vikings. They waited until between waves crests, then rode through at full speed. Father's horse got caught in the back swell and was almost swept off his feet, but these ponies were of a tough breed and it managed to regain its footing and so got around the point onto clear sand and safety.

Father became foreman on a fishing crew, as he was of the more intellectual type, and not a strong man like his brother Björn, who was chunky and well built. Father was slim and wiry and lighter on his feet, so made a good seaman.

At about the age of twenty-two, Father became first mate aboard a sailing vessel owned by a German trader named Herr Richter or Ritchie. On this ship, Father travelled to many foreign lands including America. He married Helga, my mother, in the fall of 1875, during a short stay, when his ship was being loaded at the port of Akranes. It was while in Halifax that he heard so much praise of a land of plenty and wide-open spaces where one could lead a new life and carve out one's destiny. The urge to move ever westward was too much for Father to combat, so he, and thousands of others from all over Europe, took advantage of the generous offer of free lands and generous traveling assistance to come and live in Canada, with hope for a glorious future for themselves and for their children.

Leonard Helgi Olsen's Memoirs Part 2

"It was with some trepidation and the feeling of going out into the unknown world, with no inkling of what lay before them that my parents made up their mind to immigrate."

Father was first mate aboard a sailing vessel, owned and captained by the German trader Von Ritchie. This ship made numerous voyages to America, with calls to the port of Halifax.

While in Halifax and while waiting for the loading of their cargo, Father received much information about North America, more especially about Canada, that he made up his mind to move there.

The Province of Nova Scotia offered to the people of Iceland, that wished to settle in that province, a tract of land large enough to maintain fifty or sixty families.

The agents responsible for the selection of land for the prospective settlers thought the tract of land in the Mosquidobit Valley of Nova Scotia would be suitable. It was rolling and with a small river running through the center. The

landscape was very beautiful. The whole area was covered with a heavy growth of timber: oak, elm, and maple. There was a fairly heavy annual rainfall with a good growth of trees and shrubs, but the soil was very light, as it was mostly shale, which later proved unfit for crops of vegetables or grain.

Father was one that chose to take up land in Nova Scotia along with about forty other families. He resigned from the ship's crew in the spring of 1876 and sent passage and money back to Iceland to pay Mother's fare and that of her son Oliver, who was then a few months old.

A group of about 200 people were on the list to sail. They came from different parts of the Country, from the north and from the south central sections, and all gathered at the dock in the capital city, Reykjavik. A small freighter was to take them on the first leg of their journey, as far as to the seaport town Leith, in Scotland, and then another ship was to take them across the ocean to Halifax.

Accommodation aboard the ship to Scotland was very cramped, and, to make matters worse, a strong gale force wind forced the ship to take a longer course than was anticipated, with the result that many were sick. Seasickness and dysentery was rife, especially among the children. At last, the harbour of Leith came in sight.

Then they heard the sad news that the other ship that was to take them to America would be delayed for two weeks.

Accommodation was found for the wayfarers in an abandoned warehouse on the pier. They were a tired lot when they landed and found shelter in this freight shed. They had to use their own blankets and food. But they did not mind that too much, as they were used to all sorts of inconveniences, but what did bother them was the horde of wharf rats that infested the warehouse. They were so big and ferocious that they even attacked the children. Many a child bore scars where the rats had been chewing them during their sleep.

The weather was bad while they were in the harbour of Leith. Some did manage to get out and bought, with their meagre supply of cash, refreshments in the form of fruit and a few vegetables.

At last the ship did arrive and all was a hustle and bustle as they got on board the ship, each with their load of what household goods they were taking with them. Then, much to their dismay, they found that their accommodation was down in the steerage. There were no bunks and very little toilet facilities. Each family found a place to park their beds and their goods and were prepared to make the best of a bad deal.

The weather was nice for the first few days out, then a storm came up that blew itself out after four days. The passengers were confined below deck. The air was stifling with foul air. The children became sick and two babies died from dysentery and were buried at sea. But in spite of all the setbacks the passengers were as cheerful as could be expected, when they arrived in the land of promise.

The voyage from the port of Leith to Halifax took nearly three weeks. The ship was slow with a combined sail and steam power.

One early morning, the passengers were roused by the cry that land was in sight. All hurried up on deck to get a glimpse of their land of the future.

Leonard Helgi Olsen's Memoirs Part 3

The long tedious journey was soon to be ended as one bright morning land could be seen in the west. As the day wore on the harbour and buildings of

Halifax came more prominently into view. It was too late that night to unload, so the ship lay at dock until the next morning. Then all was hustle and bustle getting their belongings together and dressing the children. All were up bright and early to get the first glimpse of the new land. The passengers were separated into two groups, those who were to stay over in Nova Scotia and the others who were destined for the western prairies. There were about sixty who planned to stay in Nova Scotia. Among them were my mother and her son Oliver. Father was at the Pier to meet them. Björn, Father's brother, was also in the group with his wife Guðrún and daughter Guðny.

When all were ready they were loaded into a small coastal steamer, together with their belongings and taken to the town of Tangiers, about sixty miles north along the coast. There they had to transfer to ox carts that took them the remaining distance to Markland, the name that was given to the new area that had been selected as their place of settlement.

The Government of Nova Scotia had allocated this piece of land for settlement to this group from Iceland. This was the valley of Mosquidobit. It was a wide rolling countryside, with a very heavy growth of hardwood trees: maple, ash, elm and some scrub bush in between. It was about forty miles inland from Tangiers. The soil was hard with a lot of shale, but with ample rainfall. The soil was not suited for agriculture, as the settlers soon found to their great dismay.

Each family had been allotted about a hundred acres with one acre cleared for a home site. On arrival each sought their respective piece of property. The Mosquidobit River, at this point was shallow as it ran over a bed of gravel. It was clear and cool so was used by the settlers for all home use. The logs that had been cut for their clearings were soon put to use for erecting their cabins. There were no forests in Iceland. The use of the axe was very unfamiliar to all so they were a bit slow at first to in getting the logs hewn to shape, but, with perseverance and determination, cabins were slowly put up on each man's property. They all gave each other a helping hand so that the work did not take too long with each home. Before the winter set in the cabins were all chinked with moss. Sod roofs were put on and the soil brushed to a hard surface for the floors. Hay was cut for the few cows that were brought out with them.

Leonard Helgi Olsen's Memoirs Part 4

The name Mooseland derives its origin from the Moose River that comes from the southwest and joins the Mosquidobit River about thirty miles inland from the east coast of Nova Scotia.

A gold mine had been located in a rise of land near the forks of the two rivers, early in the 1870s, and was considered a good producer. It was in full operation when the Icelandic pioneers came to the Valley. Nearby was a sawmill producing a good supply of lumber, as there was plenty of timber in the neighbourhood. A town of about three hundred residents had sprung up around the mine site. This town, called Moose River, was three miles to the east of the new settlement and became the main trading center for the community. The mine and the sawmill gave employment to many of the new settlers and supplies could be traded for with the small quantities of vegetables and other farm produce raised by grubbing between the tree stumps. The soil proved to be very shallow, with shaly sand lying underneath, but because of heavy rain tall trees grew in abundance.

The Province of Nova Scotia was very generous with its help and did all

within its power to ease the newcomers' circumstances. They furnished each family with a cook stove, something that some of them had never seen in the old country.

On arrival, tents were erected and a community system set up for cooking while the men bent themselves to the task of hewing logs into shape and to erect them into cabins. These logs were huge and heavy and men were not use to handling of the axe or the crosscut saw, so they became tired, but never did give up.

Father's house was the first to be completed, as it was the first in line. His brother Björn's was next and so on until each (family) had his own cabin. The floors were of dirt. There was one door and one window on each cabin, while the roofs were of rough wooden shingles, through which the heavy rains soon managed to find a way through.

They soon realized that farming, in a proper way, was impractical. The work of getting rid of the huge stumps, with their wide spreading roots, without any proper farm tools, was a hopeless task. I believe the largest area cleared, in the seven years that the settlement was in existence, was five acres, and that was by my uncle Björn (Ólafsson).

In order to exist, the men had to take turns working outside the community. There were some good farms in the neighbourhood that were in a better soil belt. Here the men could get work at very low pay of course, or they could work at the mine or the lumberyard. The small crop of vegetables and the few dozen eggs that were surplus could be exchanged for coffee and other necessary foods. Sugar was unknown but molasses, called treacle, was used for sweetening porridge while rock candy was available in small quantities for sweetening the coffee. Meat was always a scarce article. The odd deer was shot and the meat divided among those with little children. In the woods there were numerous porcupine. These were killed when possible and the flesh was found most delicious. Milk was always in short supply and because of this shortage children suffered rickets and other nutritional weaknesses. The local graveyard contains many bodies of children who died there from one cause or another as well as those of adults who died in that seven-year period.

They built a log schoolhouse in the second year of the settlement. About ten children attended the first year. The teacher was a young man of Scottish descent. He was really a member of the old school, whose formula was, "If you spare the rod you spoil the child." He apparently spent more time chastising the children than in instructing them in the Three Rs. The children were, naturally, at a disadvantage, not having full knowledge of the English language, and so were often rebuked for common errors of omission. In spite of these acts of temper shown by the schoolmaster, the children did get a good basic understanding of the country's language which helped them immensely when they moved west to Manitoba.

Leonard Helgi Olsen's Memoirs Part 5

After four years of the hard struggle to make things go, Father's health gave way on him. He had been bothered with internal discomforts for a long time. He went to the doctor at Moose River. After examining him thoroughly the doctor advised him to go to Halifax and have a real check-up, which he did, leaving Mother on the farm to carry on as best she could.

At the Halifax General Hospital the doctors were unable to diagnose his ailment, so they advised an operation. Father's ailment had aroused such interest that the doctors decided to hold a clinical

study of the operation. It was discovered during the operation, that a certain type of tapeworm entirely unknown in America caused the trouble. This caused blisters to appear on the stomach and on the intestines. In Iceland this was called "sudluveiki" but is now known as" hydatid", caused by contact with pet dogs which had come in contact with rabbits or other carriers. There were over twenty-five doctors present at the Clinic and it was written up and appeared in the newspaper of the day.

After the operation which proved successful, Father was advised not to go back to the farm or to do any work with heavy lifting. He took a job as an orderly at the hospital. He liked it so well there that he sent for Mother to come to Halifax and they got a suite in a tenement not far from the hospital. Mother also got work in spite of the handicap of having two children to take care of. Between them they were able to pay off the doctors. They also had some money saved up for the journey to Winnipeg when the time came to go west.

My parents liked living in Halifax. They were near to the Citadel Hill that had been tunnelled to become a strong fortress which housed the headquarters of the Army and Navy for all of Canada at that time.

They liked to watch the Army manoeuvres when on parade and the Navy in their blue and white uniforms so neat and tidy. Across the Bay was the bustling town of Dartmouth. There were shipbuilding yards there and sawmills which were all kept busy the year around.

Continued in Volume 65 #1

POETRY

Morning Bus

By Byron Gislason

Sleep is welcome
In a Dreamer's place
While the wind outside
Waits for my face

In this moment a forgiven memory
Is hard to replace
When everything else
Has been taken away

I hear the first morning bus running
I have to walk away
But if this was a dream
I know I would stay

The Visit

By Byron Gislason

I could smell the horses
Before I saw their backs above the stalls
He gave them all names
They would run to him when he called

He didn't sell his steers
Until they were 3 years old
The Auctioneer would joke
You want some help carrying your cheque home

He would invite us in for coffee
Use his pocket knife to punch holes in the carnation milk can
Scoop the instant coffee with a bent spoon
Serve us bakery bread and jam

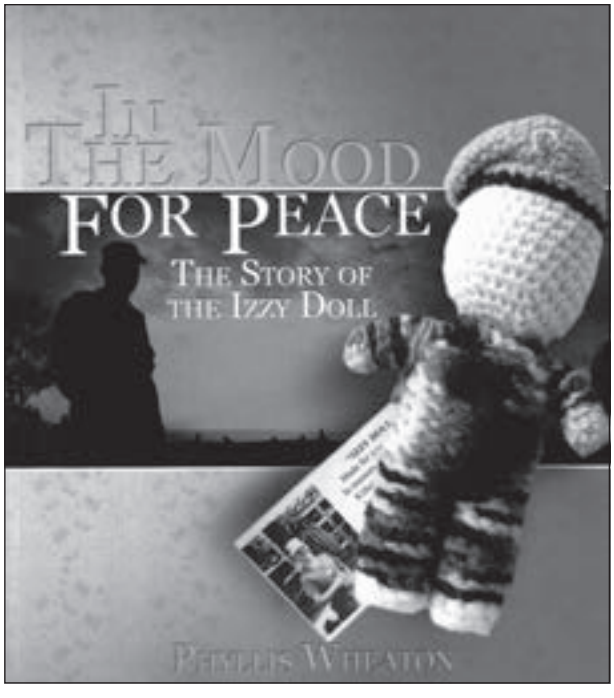
If there was anyone in his life
He never said
My dad would promise that after combining was over
We would visit him again

From the chap book Splinters published in 2012
For copies email byrongislason@hotmail.com

Book Review

In the Mood for Peace – the Story of the Izzy Doll

by Phyllis Wheaton



Reviewed by Elva Simundsson
Published by Author 2011

The Introduction of the book repeats a question posed by a young girl at a military museum in Calgary, Alberta: "How does war end?" Military history is full of details about how wars start but the young girl felt the question on how to stop fighting was absent from the museum displays. The story of the Izzy dolls is part of the answer for that little girl. It tells of how a Canadian soldier and his mother started a wave of peace offerings that became a token for the end of hatred and mistrust between UN Peacekeeping Forces and the children in war-torn areas where troops were serving.

Captain Mark Isfeld was a soldier in the Canadian Armed Forces, the great-grandson of Icelandic pioneers who settled in the New Iceland area of Manitoba. He served in Kuwait during the first Gulf War and then in the Croatia during the Balkan conflict. The role of the Canadian soldiers in the UN Mission was to do what they could to keep the warring factions from escalating the fighting and to restore some peace to the region. Captain Isfeld, or Izzy as he was nicknamed by his comrades was a field engineer, clearing landmines. He was killed by a landmine explosion during his second tour in Croatia in 1994. The book is about Mark Isfeld, his story and his letters home but also it is about his parents, Brian and Carol and the work they have done to keep his memory alive. They wanted to bring meaning to his life by continuing to reach out to children in conflict zones around the world as well

as to remind Canadians back home of the sacrifices the Canadian soldiers were making.

With his letters home, Mark sent pictures. His mother was especially touched by one picture that showed a bombed-out dwelling in the background and an abandoned child's doll laying in the rubble in the foreground. She worked out a pattern for a little crocheted doll, complete with a little blue peacekeeper's beret. The first package sent to her son contained twenty of these pocket-sized dolls. Mark filled the pockets of his uniform before each patrol and passed little dolls out to the children he met. It was a way to connect to war-weary, timid children who were afraid of soldiers and their guns. Mark's fellow soldiers on patrols saw the smiles and the small level of trust the dolls fostered and they too wanted pockets full of dolls. Thus the project was born.

The demand for dolls grew and the story became known in Canada among women's groups where knitters and crochetters helped fill the requests for more dolls. After Mark's death it became a focus for his parents, especially his mother, to continue the legacy of building trust and bringing a bit of pleasure to the children in conflict zones. The doll concept was picked up by ICROSS (International Community of Relief of Starvation and Suffering) who were working in refugee camps throughout war-torn areas of Africa. They discovered that the soft little dolls made ideal packing for shipments of medical supplies and delicate instruments. When the shipment arrived at the refugee camp, the packing was then 'recycled' to bring smiles to the children.

In all, over a million Izzy "comfort dolls" have been crafted and distributed. In addition, the Isfeld family lobbied for more recognition for the role Canadian Peacekeeping Troops have played throughout the world. Peacekeepers killed in overseas missions are now being recognized in the Book of Remembrance on display in Ottawa's Peace Tower along with soldiers killed in battle. There is now a Peacekeepers Memorial Park in Calgary. Mark's parents became very involved in the international efforts to ban landmines and in programs that help survivors of landmine injuries. The author ends the book with Carol Isfeld's pattern for a little doll with a golf ball-sized head, stubby little arms and legs. The pattern holds a mother's love and a message of comfort for frightened children.

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Contributors

BRYAN BJERRING is an Anglican priest now retired from active ordained ministry. He is a graduate of Lakehead University (B.A.), Thunder Bay, Ontario and St. John's College (M. Div.), Winnipeg. He recently enjoyed visiting Icelandic immigrant sites in south-central Manitoba and in North Dakota. He lives in Arnes, Manitoba where he is happy to be involved, at long last, in the work and activities of the Gimli Icelandic Canadian Society and the Icelandic National League of North America.

KATHERINE (EINARSON) CHEATER'S experience with writing came through years of graduate studies, first in English Literature, later in Marriage and Family Therapy. While continuing studies in piano and organ, she has taught piano and theory for over 40 years. In retirement, she is practicing various forms of therapy in relation to spiritual development.

BYRON GISLASON was born and raised in the Interlake at Blómsturvellir the family farm. He has gone on to become an award winning film-maker, an impulsive song-writer and a reluctant singer. Through it all he remains Icelandic.

TOM GOODMAN is a retired lawyer who resides in Stonewall, Manitoba with his wife, Debbie. They have four grown children.

KRISTIN OLAFSON-JENKYNS was born in Gimli Manitoba and in addition to being the author of *The Culinary Saga of New Iceland* has worked as a caterer and interior decorator. She is currently designing kitchens and living with her family in Dundas Ontario.

HELGA (PETERSON) MALIS grew up in Gimli and moved back on her retirement, to the very property she was born on. She finds life in Gimli equally as busy as being in the work force, but a lot more fun.

SIGNÝ MCINNIS is a health care worker, a mom, a resident of Arborg Manitoba and an enthusiastic participant of the Icelandic language chat groups at the Eldhús.

ELVA SIMUNDSSON is a professional librarian, retired from a position with the Government of Canada. She lives in Gimli.

BRYNNA STEFANSON is an artist and photographer who grew up in Gimli. After years of waiting, she finally made it to Iceland in 2011, where she worked as an au pair. Now back in Winnipeg, she is able to get her fill of vínarterta.

PHYLLIS WHEATON author of *In the Mood for Peace: the Story of the Izzy Doll* is a singer and songwriter. She has organized "Izzy's Troop", a group of musicians who bring the messages of the book to the stage with stories, picture shows, harmonies and instruments. Do what you can with what you have, and wearing the mask of 'anti-war' are just two of the issues brought into the light by this talented group. It is a moving show and everyone leaves inspired by our Peacekeepers and compelled to contribute something for peace.

PHOTO: DIANNE O´KONSKI

The Back Page

Each October the Nordic Groups of Minneapolis/St. Paul celebrate Liefur Eiriksson by hosting a church sermon,parade of flags while wearing traditional costumes and of course, coffee served with traditional foods.
The photo is of the food the Hekla club sponsored.This year they will be celebrating their 25th anniversary.

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