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Strandarsaga

A Coast Story

Icelandic National League of North America

97th Convention and Annual General Meeting

Hosted by
The Icelandic Canadian Club of British Columbia

On Site April 29 and 30, 2016

Offsite activities planned for Thursday, April 28th and Sunday, May 1st

Registration and Venue Information
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ON THE COVER

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Editorial

David's Semitic Viking

by David Loftson

Courtesy of CBC News, December 12, 2015

David Loftson's religiously and culturally-diverse family finds ways to meet everyone's holiday needs

We had our Hanukkah dinner last weekend.

There were about 40 people in our house, including around 10 kids. My wife's Jewish family was there, of course, along with some friends who are Christian, others who are atheists and agnostics, too. My father was an Icelandic Viking.

"My wife's uncle and her cousin's husband (a gentile) stood over a stove for two hours, making latkes."

While we don't have a kosher home, we served mostly kosher-style food from an Eastern European palate (i.e. Ashkenazi).

My wife's uncle and her cousin's husband (a gentile) stood over a stove for two hours, making latkes. We served sour cream, apple sauce and pear mincemeat from the local Baptist Church with the latkes. A 12-pound brisket spent five hours in the oven until it was deliciously tender. The only mishap of the day involved the brisket; it was in a flimsy aluminum pan and someone moving it (it wasn't me, I swear!) did not take care when lifting it and half the juice (about two litres) went all over the dining room floor.

Guests brought humus, kugel (a sweet, creamy noodle dish) and a lot of salads, appetizers, desserts and cheeses. We also made spanakopita for the vegetarians. Wine, beer and fruit juices were also served, of course.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TUMBLR

For David Loftson's diverse family, Hanukkah, Christmas and other holidays come together with aspects of every culture incorporated.

Our next big meal at home will be Christmas Day dinner but it will be only about 20 people for a sit-down meal.

My wife's grandmother, uncle and mother will be at the table. Her sister's family is also coming in from Toronto — my brother-in-law is a Canadian whose parents are both from the Caribbean, and who was raised in the Baptist church.

We'll also welcome a bunch of friends, including atheists, Christians and Muslims. When we are having few people over for Christmas dinner, we often have lamb, which is delicious; beloved by Muslims, Jews and Icelanders and takes much less time to cook.

But, my brother-in-law hates lamb, so this year we're having a traditional turkey dinner. Well, traditional in the sense that it's turkey.

Food for everyone

We're going to use the recipe from my wife's sister's mother-in-law. A few years ago we were in Toronto for Thanksgiving and she cooked the best turkey I have ever eaten. She's of Guyanese descent and she transformed a boring Canadian turkey into a delicious Caribbean meal.

The turkey brines for at least 24 hours in a solution of water, salt and cider vinegar and other things that I'm not allowed to reveal ever, no matter how much you ask, and the turkey is turned every couple of hours. It is the juiciest, most tender turkey you can imagine. I made a soup one year from the leftovers and all I did was add water, carrots and barley and the soup was amazing. The seasoning was perfect.

Christmas dinner will be kosher and halal-friendly and I will cook a couple of Syrian dishes. We'll have fatayah, a small triangular spinach pie, and knafeh, a sweet dessert made with a shredded pastry called kataifi pastry (filo dough can also be used), soft cheese like ricotta, sugar syrup and lemon.

My wife's grandmother is 91 years old and for most of her life has kept a kosher home. Her husband was a kosher butcher. But all the kosher butcher shops in Winnipeg have closed — Ormnitsky's two years ago.

My wife's grandmother doesn't really

eat kosher meat any longer — it's too expensive and she says she has put in her time — but she still never eats pork and still keeps a kosher home, with separate dishes and utensils for meat and milk. We gather at her home for Friday night Shabbat dinners.

Anyway, eating kosher is very involved but the main rule is no pork or shellfish or mixing meat and dairy (no cheeseburgers).

My wife's grandmother often eats at our house and we do our best to honour her traditions by serving meals that are kosher-style, but we've let her know if she is ever craving bacon, she knows where she can get some, no questions asked.

We also have good friends who are Muslim and generally follow the dietary halal rules. My grandfather was a devout Muslim and he ate halal. The rest of the family did not, except there was never pork in the house. Up until 10 or 20 years ago, there were few halal stores or restaurants in Winnipeg. Now there are many. In fact, one of the closest grocery stores to us is a halal store at the corner of Maryland Street and Knappen Avenue. Early Muslims would often buy their meat at kosher butchers as kosher rules are more restrictive than halal rules. It does not work the other way, however.

My wife and I traveled to Turkey about 10 years ago during the month of Ramadan.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is considered a holy month because of the spiritually significant things that happened during Ramadan, such as the revelation of the Koran to Mohammad. All able-bodied Muslim adults are supposed to fast from sunrise to sunset. A meal is eaten before dawn — called suhur — and a meal is eaten at sunset to break the fast — iftar. Iftar has evolved into banquet festivals involving dozens or even hundreds of people and a lot of food.

When we were in Istanbul during Ramadan, we stayed near the Blue Mosque and every evening I would go by the Mosque, where the evening fast was broken in style. The carnival atmosphere was intoxicating. There was delicious food everywhere, little kids riding toy trains around ancient monuments, people everywhere talking and laughing.

Really, whatever you believe, the holiday season is a time for us to all come together and break bread. That's what our family tries to do with our Chrismakkah celebrations.

What are your traditions? How have they changed over the years?

Keeping our Dream Alive

by William D. Valgardson

How do you keep a dream alive? A dream that is impossible, that is guaranteed to shatter against hard reality?

When the Iceland emigrants left for North America, they had little knowledge of the continent and what they thought they knew was often wrong. This was no different from any of the other ethnic groups streaming across the Atlantic.

In Michael Ewanchuk's book, *Pioneer Profiles* he says that when the first Ukrainian settlers came to the New Iceland region, they went west where there was still land available, waded in swamps up to their waists, and when they came back to their wives and families, they cried. The information enticing emigrants exaggerated the benefits, the quality of the land, and living conditions.

The Icelanders came earlier, arriving in New Iceland in 1875, and instead of finding streets paved with gold, or even decent farm land, found bush and swamp. The marginal land in New Iceland defeated the dream of an exclusive Icelandic community. Faced with harsh conditions many left for Winnipeg or land further to the west.

In spite of this turn of events, they survived and for a hundred and forty years the Icelandic North American community has found ways to preserve its identity.

Although religion divided the community, the various churches provided a community where people could hear a service in Icelandic, could speak Icelandic and could receive help in dealing with the problems of being new immigrants. During my childhood and teenage years, the church still had a lot of authority. It taught religion and morals, a bit of history and provided solace in times of tragedy.

Few people today understand how religious the original immigrants were. The Icelandic immigrants who arrived in Manitoba were devout, intolerant, argumentative and wasted energy and resources in arguments which had little actual purpose. As usual, the religion was a vessel for containing differing views on social behaviour. Should the settlers isolate themselves, create a society that was exclusively Icelandic, that would exclude non-Icelanders, or should they attempt to integrate as quickly as possible? That question split the community.

The church services, once in Icelandic, gradually changed to English. Language is the centre of identity and it was being lost. The church, always a conservative institution loyal to the past, held on as long as it could but, finally, had to face the fact that many of its parishioners only understood English. At the same time, urbanization meant rural communities died, leaving behind graveyards and empty church buildings. The conservative forces of rural life and rural religion largely disappeared.

The Icelanders in Winnipeg created the Jon Bjarnason Academy. It was to be a Lutheran and Icelandic school. Icelandic was taught.

At first, it drew students with Icelandic backgrounds. Over time, the school drew non-Icelandic students because it was allowed to teach the equivalent of first year

university. When that right was extended to other schools, the need for people to pay for their children's education disappeared and the school closed.

Not one but two Icelandic papers were created: *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla.* One Lutheran and liberal and the other Unitarian and conservative. Once again, time, resources, money were wasted in fierce, bitter battles. Looking back at things that were written by Icelanders about other Icelanders, one is tempted to say shame on them.

When the Icelandic immigrants left Iceland, their leaving was often regarded as treason. Iceland was on the cusp of getting its independence from Denmark. Some people felt that people were leaving who were needed in the struggle for independence. Others, the wealthy farmers, for example, were opposed to emigration because they were losing cheap labour. Ordinary farm workers had been exploited, some so badly that they thought that black slaves in America were better off. The leaving created a lot of hard feelings on both sides.

Somehow, even though lack of experience and knowledge meant that the immigrants went to areas where there was little or no opportunity such as Nova Scotia where all the good land was already taken, to Kinmount, where the land was not suitable for farming, to New Iceland in Manitoba where the land was so marginal that it guaranteed poverty for most people, they survived. Not just survived, but over time, prospered and with absolute determination, kept hold of their Icelandic heritage.

It took time for society to become secular and more tolerant. In the interim, the churches did provide cohesion, education, and direction. Bringing people together for services and various celebrations and events, helped to create community, helped to provide assistance to those in need, helped people deal with all too frequent tragedies. They were a stabilizing force in a changing society. First formally, then informally, they helped preserve the Icelandic language.

Although the Jon Bjarnason Academy closed, the department of Icelandic was created at the University of Manitoba. It became one of the pillars of the community, providing instruction in Icelandic and in Icelandic literature and culture. The Icelandic library became a repository for historical documents and literature.

The two papers, *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla,* faced with the reality of people moving away from New Iceland and Winnipeg, with fewer people reading Icelandic, joined and became a single paper. Survival required that differences had to be set aside. The compromise created the rules that there would be no sex, no politics, and no religion. No sex was so as not to offend the ammas and aunties, no choosing sides in politics to get over the divide between the Liberal and Conservative ranting and raving, and no religion to stop the feuding between the Lutherans and Unitarians.

The paper, in spite of complaints about it not being just what any individual wants, is essential to the continuing survival of the Icelandic North American community. It is the second pillar of the community. Just saying North American is controversial. When I was editor, I had people threaten to cancel their subscription because I used North American instead of Canadian. As if all those people of Icelandic descent in Minnesota, North Dakota, Washington State, etc. don't exist or don't matter. We are a small group. Gathered together, we would hardly be noticed in the population in most major cities. We need every one of us. *L-H* needs every subscription it can get.

L-H is critical to the community because it tells us, or should tell us, about each other. It should entertain us but it should also inform and educate us. Without it, I wouldn't have known about the descendants

of the Icelanders in Nova Scotia. I wouldn't have known about the descendants in Washington State. Our greatest danger is that we will lose touch with each other. We will stop knowing who we are. Outposts that are forgotten die.

In support and recognition of our ethnic identity, an Íslendingadagurinn was created in Winnipeg in 1890. It was moved to Gimli in 1932. This celebration is the third pillar of our identity.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Icelandic flags, Viðey

This Icelandic Celebration has helped to give the community cohesiveness. Once a year on the first weekend in August, people travel from all over North America and from Iceland to join together. VIPs from Iceland, including the Prime Minister, the President, have come to join the party. Women put on traditional dresses from the time of emigration. Plastic Viking helmets are ubiquitous. There are speeches extolling our virtues and the virtues of our visitors. There is Icelandic Canadian food. There are displays of Icelandic goods and Icelandic Canadian memorabilia. What is important, though, is that the community congregates, renews friendships, re-enforces its ethnic identity.

Sometimes in the not too distant past, some say 1971, others say, 1975, there was a rapprochement between the Icelanders in Iceland and the descendants of the settlers. My great grandfather had so little use for the Iceland he left behind at the age of eighteen that he wouldn't even walk half a block to the site of the annual celebration. He wasn't alone. The emigration left a lot of bitterness on both sides of the Atlantic. The schools in Iceland taught that the people who emigrated were traitors, running away when they were needed. The people who left often harboured dark memories. A lot of people on both sides of the Atlantic have worked hard at changing that and turning old enmity into friendship.

Air travel has meant that people could go to Iceland and Icelanders could come to North America. As usual, when people get to know each other, they find their prejudices against others don't have much foundation. Now, with a tremendous effort by people like Pam Furstenau with her Icelandic Roots project, families are re-uniting. The Icelandic government has also made tremendous efforts to help the community rediscover its Icelandic identity.

We, as a community, need to provide support for *Lögberg-Heimskringla,* the Icelandic Department at the University of Manitoba and Íslendingadagurinn. We have a history in North America and in Iceland that is worth preserving and celebrating.

Musical Memories Musing in the Dark

by Lisa Sigurgeirson-Maxx

With the long winter nights upon us memories dance about bringing to mind many such evenings passed with extended family gathered around a piano; accordion, guitar, fiddle and voices all filling the room and pulsing and pressing against the rafters of the old family home. Multigenerational gatherings these were, with music and ancestral bloodlines linking each to one another.

Worn and gnarled hands with polished fingernails plunk at the keys on the old, upright piano. Other work-worn hands and fingers traipse across keys and buttons, while strong arms work the air through the accordion's bellowed lungs. A wizened face watches the hands at work on the keyboards, following their lead and his ear, to find his pattern on the neck of the fiddle he holds boldly on his shoulder. Still another, round of belly and glad of face, stands with a foot on the edge of a kitchen chair, his guitar braced between thigh and sternum, strumming enthusiastically, with the rise and fall of the cadence together this happily-gathered ensemble co-create. And all the voices, old and young – grand parents, great aunties, uncles-a-plenty, and third-cousins-twice-removed – all the voices sing. Harmonies spill out effortlessly. Laughter and delight add to the harmonic timbre filling the gladdened space. They sing the songs of the elders' youth, the "hits" of decades past. Most have never had any formal study in music in their lives. It is a natural gift, passed down through former such times in earlier generations. If the youngest ones don't know the tunes at first, they join in as soon as they can get the words to stumble and tumble off their tongues, often enough they've heard these old songs since attending many such a gathering while still in the womb, and later in their mothers arms.

Other sounds fill and warm the old homestead; women chatter and gossip about family details of those not in attendance, and catch up news of ones they haven't seen in a while; men tell stories, regaling laughter from the crowd; in the background a light tinkling and clinking of ice in the glasses the adults hold.

Children, tired of singing, or feeling the pull of childhoods' rush of energy and vigor, race from room to room, and out-of-doors if the weather is not too inclement, squealing with delight in seeing cousins – first, second and third, and so on – again, after some length of time since they last encountered one another's familiar antics.

Many are the cherished, childhood memories of happy, long, dark evenings filled with family and music.

While visiting the Árbæjarsafn museum – (Reykjavík's "Living Museum") – on our journey through Iceland in 2013, my sister and I both

PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA SIGURGIERSON-MAX

Lisa's afi Sigurgeir (Geiri) H. Sigurgeirson

teared up when we entered a small hall where there was a live band playing – to find they were mostly playing accordions, the instrument our afi played throughout our childhoods. He was known well on Hecla Island for playing at the dance hall during the 1920s and '30s. We'd had no idea the accordion was some kind of a "national instrument of olde Iceland!" No wonder we feel such a kindred connection to it.

Tonight, as I write, a home-studio is

PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA SIGURGIERSON-MAX

Playing accordion: Lisa's afi, Sigurgeir (Geiri) H. Sigurgeirson; behind him, on the left is Lisa's mum: Christina Sigurgeirson (nee Ross); her auntie: Victoria (Viki) Ellis (nee Sigurgeirson).

being created in my living room, making ready to rehearse and to record and to play; a new album or two – (one for adults, one for the (grand)children) – currently in the writing and in the works. Earlier this evening my grandsons entertained me during a short visit with the latest tunes they've found by ear plunking away on their piano at home. Soon they will visit again, at Amma's house, where a piano, a few guitars, a banjo, a ukulele and all manner of rhythm shakers and sticks await their eager, musical-by-nature - and by genetic predispositioning perhaps – hands and hearts.

It is interesting and fabulous how things like a love of and an affinity for music, for playing and singing, for writing and reciting, seem to be passed down a cultural lineage. The Icelanders certainly seem to

PHOTO CREDIT: LISA SIGURGEIRSON MAXX

From left to right: MaryJane Coffey (Lisa's redhead granddaughter standing at mic); Ryan Krayenhoff (sitting on chair; grandson); Michael Darragh (standing, playing bass; my romantic and musical partner and children's grandfather); Jordan Krayenhoff (playing drums; grandson).

have many a musical bone in the building of their generations. I delight in the musical memories still alive and singing deep within me, and in the musical times in which we are currently creating memories with the new ones coming in down the line.

Enjoyable indeed are the musings of dark, winter evenings.

Accordian band in Iceland

Thirteen Things About Þrettándinn

by Larissa Kyzer

Often known as the Twelfth Night in the English-speaking Christian world, Þrettándinn (directly translated as "the thirteenth") marks the end of Iceland's epic Christmas season. The last of 13 straight days of Christmas merry-making, January 6th is the season's last gasp—and not just because it's the last day that you can legally shoot off fireworks in Iceland, or the last day you can purchase Christmas beer. No, according to folk traditions and tales, Þrettándinn is much, much weirder, and gloriously so: it is a time of talking animals, aquatic metamorphoses, naked dancing, supernatural gifts, and precognitive dreams. It is what Helga Einarsdóttir, the Museum Educator at the National Museum of Iceland, calls a liminal time or "a border between two worlds"—namely the holy season around Christmas and the back-to-normal New Year which is just beginning. So here are thirteen things you should know about Þrettándinn:

1. Þrettándinn is "Old Christmas"

Around 1528, the Roman Catholic Church decided to shift from the Julian calendar, which was instituted by the Romans around 46 BC, to the Gregorian calendar, which is still in use today. The Julian calendar attempted to approximate the solar year, but minor inaccuracies in the calendar structure—basically, a few minutes not accounted for in the solar rotation—lead to a gain of roughly three or four days every four centuries. This meant that important Catholic holidays, like Easter, tended to drift over time, which the church didn't like at all. Thus the shift to the Gregorian calendar, which has fewer leap years, and which, by the time it was finally implemented in Iceland in 1700, had 11 fewer calendar days than the Julian calendar.

In practical terms, what this means is that holidays shifted significantly after the arrival of what 18th century Icelanders referred to as the "new style" calendar. So Christmas went from taking place on January 6th to taking place on December 25th. And so, as late as the end of the 19th century, Þrettándinn was known as "Old Christmas."

2. Þrettándinn is also Second New Year's Eve

What with all the confusion about calendar shifts and dates, a lot of holiday-related folklore got muddled along the way. So many of the supernatural occurrences and traditions originally associated with New Year's Eve in Iceland have shifted over time to Þrettándinn. "The last day of Christmas has also often served as second-string New Year's Eve," writes ethnologist Árni Björnsson, "when celebrations can be held if the weather on

© PHOTO: KENT LÁRUS BJORNSSON

"The bonfires celebrate all of the fairies and elves who are said to be departing on Þrettándinn..."

New Year's Eve is unfavourable."

3. It's time for bonfires and elf dances

Icelanders make the most of New Year's Eve and Þrettándinn, indulging their pyrotechnic sides: large bonfires are regularly held on both New Year's Eve and Þrettándinn. The bonfires celebrate all of the fairies and elves who are said to be departing on Þrettándinn, and many local celebrations elect Fairy Queens and Kings who lead 'elf dances' around the fire. Elf dance traditions may originate with a popular play called "Nýársnóttin," or 'New Year's Eve,' which was written by Indriði Einarsson in 1907 and first featured the King and Queen of the elves.

4. Þrettándinn is a good time for dreams

Þrettándinn also marks the start of Epiphany, the Christian holiday that commemorates the night in which Jesus's birth was revealed to the Three Wise Men in a dream or vision. And so, in some local traditions, such as on the Northern island of Grímsey, Þrettándinn is known as "The Great Dreaming Night." The dreams that you have on this night must be taken very seriously, as they may hold clues to the future.

5. Cows talk on Þrettándinn

On the evening of Þrettándinn, many folktales say that cows can suddenly speak. But while there are many variations on this story—in some versions, for instance, they specifically speak Hebrew—one thing is for sure: if the cows are talking, you don't want to be listening. In one version collected by Jón Árnason (Iceland's one-man Brothers Grimm), a cowhand hangs around in the barn after his work is done on Þrettándinn. Around midnight, the cows all stand up and begin to speak to each other in nonsensical rhyming couplets, which are supposed to drive anyone who overhears them crazy. The cowhand escapes before he fully loses it, but is obviously unable to prove his tale to anyone the next day. In other variations, however—such as one taking place on New Year's Eve—the cowman is not so lucky, and goes mad listening to creepy bovine poetry.

6. Seals take on human form, get naked and get down

There are many folktales about seals transforming into humans on New Year's Eve and Þrettándinn. In one fascinating variation, seals are actually the animal incarnations of an ancient Pharaoh's army, drowned in the Red Sea while chasing Moses and the Jews out of Egypt. The drowned soldiers became seals, but their bones remain much like human bones. So once a year, they become human, shedding their skins and dancing naked on beaches.

In one very famous tale (also collected by Jón Árnason), a man goes walking on a beach and sees many seal skins lying on the shore. He takes one home with him and locks it in a chest. Later, he discovers a beautiful naked woman crying on the same beach because he's taken her skin and she cannot return to the sea. He takes her home, marries her, and they have many children, but he keeps the seal skin locked away so that she can never escape. One day, however, he forgets to take the key to the chest, and the woman retrieves her skin and returns to the ocean.

7. Þrettándinn is moving day for fairies and elves

Þrettándinn is often thought to be the day in which fairies and elves leave their current dwellings and find new homes. In some traditions, residents walk around the home asking for the family's continued well-being while those spirits who have arrived to come in, and those who want to leave go on their ways.

8. It's the last day to see a Yule Lad

Þrettándinn is a time to "say goodbye to the spirits," says Folklorist Terry Gunnell. So as the fairies take their leave and the elves move house, so also is the last Yule Lad leaving town. Iceland's thirteen Yule Lads arrive one by one on the days leading up to Christmas, and then also leave one at a time on the thirteen days following. The last Yule Lad to leave is Kertasníkir, or "Candle Beggar."

9. It's a good time to sit at a crossroads

If you want a chance to meet one of the magical beings flitting around on Þrettándinn, your best bet is to sit at a crossroads and wait. In many folktales, people who sit at crossroads are met by elves who give them gifts of gold, food, or second sight. In some stories, the elves will tempt you with gifts all night, but you must not accept them. If you can last the

© PHOTO: KENT LÁRUS BJORNSSON

night having accepted nothing, the elves will leave all their treasures behind for you. If you take the gifts before daylight, you may go mad. But usually, Terry says, "if you treat them well, they'll treat you well. It's a business transaction."

10. Water is magic

Some folktales have it that water will turn to wine on Þrettándinn, while others suggest that dew is particularly potent and powerful on this day.

11. The unknown is made visible, sometimes at a cost

"If something is hidden from you," says Helga, "it will open up to you on Þrettándinn." In one exemplifying tale, a shepherd has particular success keeping his animals through the winter. He repeatedly disappears throughout the season, never telling anyone where he has been. One Þrettándinn, a curious farmer follows the shepherd, and finds that he has been travelling to a hidden mountain valley, which is still green even in the dead of winter. But this discovery comes at a cost: one of the valley dwellers curses the farmer for his curiosity and he dies three days later.

12. It's the last day for Christmas decorations

You're probably tired from all the bonfires and merry-making, but don't slack off and leave your Christmas trees and decorations hanging around the house for the next month. It is considered bad luck by some to keep your Christmas paraphernalia up after January 6th.

13. It's time to burn out, eat up, and play out Christmas

Traditionally, Þrettándinn is the last day for people to get their fills of Christmas decadence. So Icelanders would "burn out" Christmas by finishing off the remains of their candles, "eat up" the season by finishing all the leftovers, and "play out" the day with long card games.

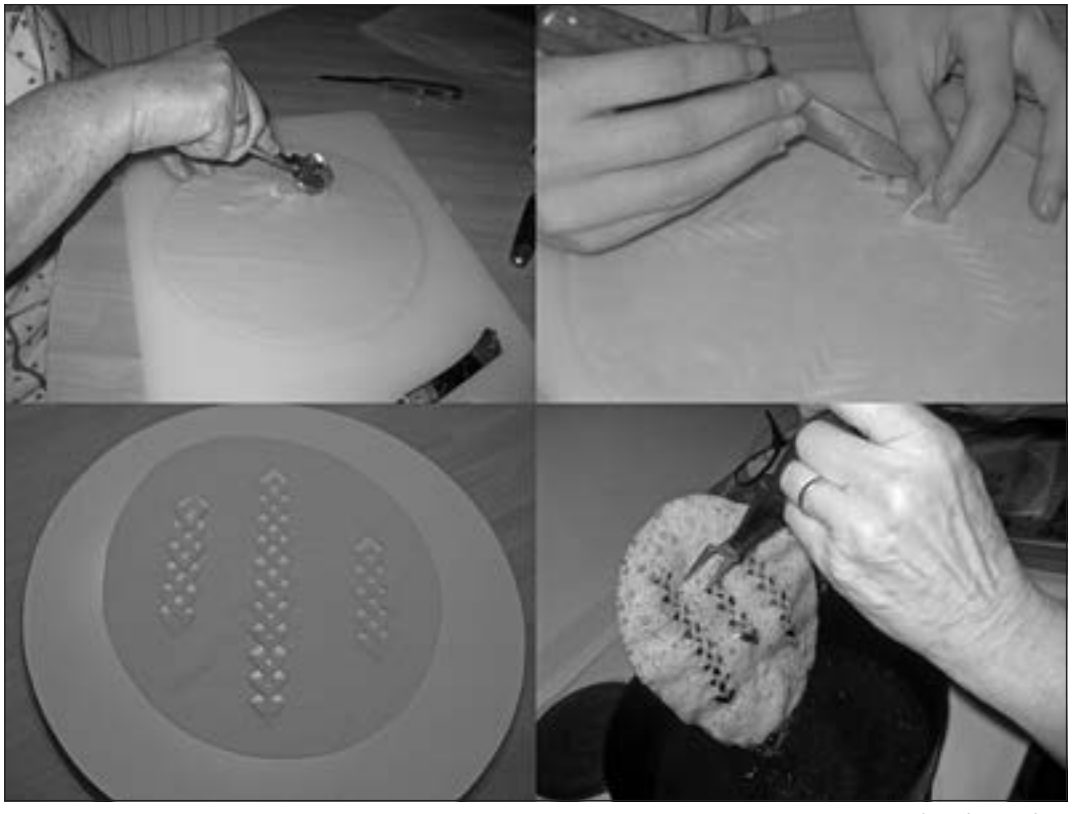
Making Laufabrauð

by Kristín M. Jóhannsdóttir

Ever since I remember, my family has made laufabrauð. For those that don't know, laufabrauð are thin, circular, deep fried cakes, mainly made out of flour, sugar and milk, and decorated with leaf-like pattern that people cut into various shapes. These cakes are originated from North-Iceland and when I was a kid they weren't particularly common in other parts of the country. It even resulted in a joke: What did the Northerner say the first time he saw pizza? – Who vomited on my laufabrauð! I have no idea where this joke came from but as a kid I found it funny. Now, not so much.

Laufabrauð is only made at Christmas and for some families it marks the beginning of the Christmas preparation. We usually make these delicious cakes in November or early December and it's a family project. Everyone takes part. Even the smallest children are given knifes so they can cut out the pattern. Children, who in general would never be given a knife for any reason. But they want to take part and they are usually fairly good at this. In fact, the only time I remember where I did not love making laufabrauð was in my teenage years. And that was mostly because I wanted to sleep till noon and not wake up at nine or ten to make laufabrauð.

I already said it was a family thing, making laufabrauð, and that is correct. No one should make laufabrauð alone in his kitchen. There's no fun in that. And it's not particularly smart either, because it's lots of work. Or at least it used to be. Today people usually buy the cakes from



PHOTOS: KRISTÍN M. JÓHANNSDÓTTIR

the bakery, already flattened out but uncut. But we used to make it from scratch. In my family we started early on Saturday or Sunday mornings. My amma would come over before I awoke and start making the dough. She was dough master. Actually, she was overall Laufabrauð-master as she was in control of not only the mixing (which she did till the day she died) but also the flattening of the dough – no one else was allowed to touch this. And flattening out the dough is hard work. The cakes have to be so thin. It wasn't until in last few years that my dad was allowed to take over that part.

By the time the first cakes were ready to be cut, the whole family would be sitting around the kitchen table or standing at the kitchen counter, with knifes in hand, ready to cut the little leaf-like pattern . What you do is to cut out endless little v's in a row and then you flip up every second one and roll it back, making leaves. And here the artistic side of people would be allowed to blossom. Usually people fall into two main categories when cutting: the ones that always do the same two patterns or so (two or three lines next to each other), and the ones that are always trying to come up with something new and interesting. My middle brother used to be a master of carving. He could cut the pattern so tiny that one Christmas he actually cut out 'Kristín' out of tiny leaves. I was probably about eight years old and very impressed. Still talk about it. Now you can buy a special laufabrauðsjárn (leaf-cut-iron), small and extremely expensive equipment that cuts out the little v's for you so all you have to do is fold. And I'm sure the little

The laufabrauð partí group with Kristín Jóhannsdóttir

kids are not trusted with knifes anymore!

When a few cakes are ready, someone starts the deep frying. It's actually a two person job because someone else has to stand beside with a flat pot lid (my dad made one specially out of wood) and thrust the cakes down so that they don't bulge up. And here's another thing that is necessary, and usually done in the cutting process: You have to use the tip of the knife to make tiny little holes all over the cakes because if you don't, huge bubbles will form in the frying. This year we had a guest cutting with us and she kept forgetting to do this, resulting in unhappy deep fryers who sent the message upstairs (they were frying in the basement) that we absolutely had to make the holes. I had never actually thought about why we did this, always just did, but there was the answer.

When all the cakes have been deep fried, the deep fryers fry the offcuts (that's what you get when you have cut circular cakes out of the flattened out dough – you always have to cut off whatever is around it). Someone makes a huge pot of hot chocolate and everyone gathers around drinking the chocolate, eating the delicious off cuts. I've sometimes wondered why we spend all this time flattening the cakes and carve the pattern since the offcuts are the best anyway. But when you see the cakes, piled high on a dish, centered on the Christmas table with the hangikjöt, you know why. They are not just delicious, they're also so very beautiful.

The Christmas Bird

by LaDonna Breidfjord Backmeyer

Reprinted from Winter 1994

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, before your pappa was born, even before your grandfather was born, a small family journeyed across the stormy seas upon a ship. They travelled from Iceland, their old home, to America, their new home. This family had loved Iceland very much, but the times were very bad there, so bad that the father, Einar, was afraid that his family would surely starve if they were to stay in that old land. So the family sold the sheep, the cattle and the horses (those that had survived the avalanches and the volcanoes). They packed up the books and the spinning wheel, some wool from the sheep and the old coffee grinder, and they sailed to America to find their fields of gold.

However, as you and I both know, it takes many, many years of hard work and quite a bit of good luck to become rich in America, so the family remained poor for a very long time.

It so happens that the year in which our story takes place was an uncommonly poor year for that farmer and his family. It had been many years since this small group of people had immigrated to the new land, but although they had worked unusually hard, that bit of good luck had eluded them. All through the spring of that year the rains had fallen heavily. The meadows were undrained and swampy, and Einar, being a determined farmer in spite of bad health, would come home each day after clearing more land, wet to the waist and cold. One of the horses had died from swamp fever; the other went lame from a barbed wire cut and had to be sold. And the lambs were dying, most of them shortly after their birth. So by the time summer finally arrived, the family had only five or six sheep, one milk goat named Rósa, an old cow named Branda, a two-year-old heifer named Krossa, and one yearling whose name cannot be remembered. One would think that all this was bad luck enough, but there was more bad luck to be had. One night the old cow, Branda, fell into the manger and twisted her neck. The next morning the oldest child of the household found that blessed creature dead. "Mamma, Mamma," the child cried out. And the whole family came running to view that dear though wretched old beast, each of them fighting the tears that they shed.

It rained and it kept on raining throughout the season. There was not much sunlight that year. It rained so often that the sod of the roof had no time to dry, so the oldest children, Þura, Willy and Friða, slept under the bed more often than they slept on its top. One night it rained unusually hard and the rain dripped everywhere through the sod of the roof. Guðný cradled her baby close to the warmth of her own body.

She held that baby, who was much too small to crawl under the bed with the

older children, and she stood behind the cookstove, the one dry spot in the house. All through the night she stood in that spot, keeping the rain water off her baby, praying that her children would not get sick from the cold and the damp. And Einar, who kept a smudge pot burning to ward off the mosquitoes, stood by her, prayed with her. Their whispering voices were drowned in the roar of the rain.

To be sure, these times were very bad indeed. Even though the rain continued to fall, and even though there were no horses to help with the work, the farmer had to farm his land. Einar sowed the seed for his crops, scattering the seed by hand that summer. He cut his hay with a scythe, and when the hay had cured – thanks to a short span of relatively good weather – he rolled it into bundles and carried it home on his back. Einar often thought that, when he had a little money in his pocket, he would buy himself a team of oxen. He especially thought about that team of oxen when he walked the fifteen-mile trip to town for groceries – and when he made the trip home from town, lugging the flour in a one-hundred-pound sack on his back. Oxen were good animals, sturdy and strong. It was during the fall of that year that Einar began to use a cane whenever the air was damp.

And so the year passed, until it was nearly Christmas and there was no money to be found on that poor homestead. There would be no bright and shining toys bought from Eaton's catalogue that year. Not even one gift, not even the smallest gift could the couple afford.

"We must make do, " the mother said.

"We've not much choice," said the father.

And so they did.

Every weekday morning, after a breakfast of oatmeal and milk-coffee, Guðný would bundle the older children into the mittens and caps she had made from the wool that Einar had sheared from the sheep. Then, before sending the children off to school through the cold and the snow, she would draw a pair of Einar's great wool socks over each little pair of legs, fastening each sock tight at the top with a piece of string. And, for each child, she had one hug and a kiss and one old and much-used lardpail of lunch. "Go and be blest, little daughters of mine," said the mother each morning as she lifted the latch on the door. "Go and be blest, little son."

And for Willy, being the only boy of the household, she had one more extra-light hug. "Be careful," she would call out to them. And as the snow drifted through the doorway, she would draw her sweater closer to her chest, protecting herself from the draft. "Be careful to watch for the bear and the wolves," the mother would warn as her children entered the Fort Pelly Trail that led through the woods to the school.

Then, after Einar had finished the chores, had chopped the wood and drawn the water, after the baby was asleep for her morning nap, the farmer and his wife would work with scraps of wood and bits of cloth and paper in the small log cabin with its tufted and snowcovered roof, making toys for the young ones for Christmas. And when each gift was finished, it was wrapped in brown paper, tied with a string and stored in the trunk or the shed. Þura, Willy and Friða never did get much for Christmas, usually only one gift apiece and one not too-filled stocking from Santa, but that didn't make these three any less curious.

Even Gudda and Gunna, Guðný's two little sisters who lived on the farm at the other side of the field, would stop each day on their way home from school to peep and to peer in to every corner as they sat on the stools by the table, swinging their brown-stockinged legs and eating kleinur.

Only Ásta, the baby, remained unaware, she being too young to have any knowledge of the giving or hiding of gifts.

There was so terribly much work that had to be done, for according to tradition the home would have to be spotlessly cleaned in honour of the birthday of Christ. So while Einar was cleaning the barn or the chicken hut, Guðný would spend her afternoons with a broom and a rag. She swept and dusted, scrubbed and polished, until at long last not one speck of the hateful though normal grime remained in any corner. Even the canning jars, both empty and full, were polished. She cleaned while the bread was rising, and while the rice soup was cooking for the evening meal. She cleaned as the seven layers of the Christmas vínarterta were baking in the wood-fed stove, and as the filling for this Christmas treat popped and bubbled in its heavy black pot. Every day she cleaned once again all of those things which she had cleaned the day before, and she cleaned a little bit more.

And in the evening, after the lamp was lit and the supper had been eaten, Einar would entertain the children with tales of Grýla, the wretched giantess of the mountain, or of the jólasveinar, Grýla's mischievous Christmas boys. Guðný would sew or she'd weave, making clothes for the family for Christmas. All of God's people, or so Guðný believed, had to have at least one new piece of clothing to wear for Christ's birthday, even the baby. This was a very old and treasured custom. Styles were copied from the pictures in the catalogue, and new dresses were made for the girls from old dresses of a larger size. Guðný made an apron for herself out of an old scrap or two of cloth, and she wove new cloth for Einar's vest and Willy's pants. The baby's white gown had been made

months before. Trimmed with embroidery work and hand made lace, the gown had been carefully wrapped and placed in the rough-cut Icelandic trunk that served as a chair near the home-made and equally crude table. Only Willy's pants were not ready by Christmas.

Guðný had run out of thread and there was no money for new thread. The woman wiped away her useless tears and took the stitching out of that part of the pants she had finished. Then, using the thread she had saved, she stitched two neat patches onto Willy's old pants, and that on the day before Christmas.

Then came the eve of Christ's birth. There was no hangikjöt this year, due to the loss of the lambs, but a pot of rice pudding was bubbling gently on the cookstove, ready for the Christmas Eve supper. There were even a few raisins in the pudding, these being gained by Guðný through barter. The table was set with a meagre though tempting Christmas feast, and the family and friends, all of them dressed in their very best, stood quietly with heads bowed while Einar recited the evening prayer. Guðný's father and stepmother, Jónas and Jóhanna, and the youngest of their children, Dóri, Gunna, Jói and Gudda, had joined the family for the festive evening, as did old Kristján Skagfjörd and his son, Alli.

These last were good friends and well thought of as neighbours. Einar recited the prayer with great dignity and humble gratitude, but his voice, as always, cracked a bit as he mentioned the people back home in the motherland.

"May God bless all who gather here," the farmer prayed. "And may He also bless all those whom we have left behind." Einar stopped for a moment, then he continued: "We thank Thee, my God, for all of the blessings which You in Your goodness have already bestowed upon us, and we hope that we who have gathered within this humble home can be worthy of the love and the care that You have given to us. We honour Thy name and the name of Thy son, Jesus, on this the holiest night of the year." And all of the household repeated in unison, "Amen." Kristján Skagfjörð took a hanky from his pocket and blew his nose as Jóhanna wiped a tear from her cheek with the back of her hand. And the children, who had displayed quite a bit of patience up to this time, grew restless and wanted to eat.

There certainly was no grumbling about any lack of food. Everyone present agreed that the feast was truly festive.

Johanna had contributed brown bread, slatur and skyr to the table. And Kristján

PHOTO COURTESY OF EINAR AND ROSALIND VIGFUSSON

Carving by Einar Vigfusson of Arborg, Manitoba

Skagfjörð had trapped two rabbits on the day before. The old man had dressed these rabbits and had baked them in buttermilk. After being warmed in the oven, they too were added to the feast. Guðný's rice pudding had been topped with cinnamon and sugar, and each pönnukaka had been spread with wild cranberry or strawberry jelly before being rolled. The vínarterta, which had mellowed with age, sat at the centre of the table, between the platter of freshly warmed rabbit and a bowl of steaming potato soup. No person left this table hungry. Even Jónas, big though he was, looked very much like a satisfied man. With his hands resting on the plank of the table and the dampness of coffee glistening on the red of his beard, Jónas leaned back after the meal had finished and said, "That meal was fit for the King of Denmark, daughter of mine" To which Einar replied, "Any meal is fit for the King of Denmark. This one was fit for an Icelander, especially an Icelander of Canadian persuasion." And

they all laughed before rising from the table.

The living room, which also served as a bedroom, was lit with tallow candles, and the Christmas tree that Einar and the children had brought home from the woods stood tall at one corner of the sparsely furnished room, its trunk placed in a milk-pail of hard-packed sand, its branches draped with paper chains and delicate paper snowflakes, all of which were child-made. An angel rested at the top of the tree, the golden-haired cherub nesting on a cloud of white fluff. Einar stood close by the tree holding the Bible in the palm of one hand as he turned the terribly thin and ancient pages to the book of Luke. The man's voice did not falter as he read the story of Christ's birth to his people. In fact, no teacher at Cropper Tops school had ever read so well. The children were very proud of this farmer who stood so straight and read so beautifully. And after the man had closed the book gently, the children in turn thanked him for his reading. "Thank you, Pappa," said his own children as they each gave him a kiss.

"Thank you," said Guðný's little brothers and sisters, and they too kissed the farmer for this was the proper way to show one's appreciation in those days.

Alli Skagfjörð tuned his violin and the family and friends gathered to sing the carols that told of the blessed birth of the Christchild. Einar was song-master as his voice was true. Even little Ásta seemed to be singing along, though her words were but sounds of soft coos and gurgles. On the other hand, Fríða and Gudda sang with great gusto, especially when they alone sang *O Lillie Town of Bethlehem.* They sang it in English as they had been taught it at school. And they sang songs of Iceland and Iceland's seabirds, while birds with silver suntipped wings, sailing up, up over

Iceland's cliffs and down to the sea again.

It was later that the people of the house opened their gifts, after the children had draped strings of cranberries around one of the trees at the front of the cabin and had put out seeds and grains for the birds and the beasts. It was then that Einar and Jónas began to hand out the gifts that had been placed beneath the tree, one at a time, one to each person. Stilts and blocks, scarfs, treasure boxes and embroidered handkerchiefs, and picture-books made from scraps of oil cloth and pasted on pictures from Eaton's, all had been opened save one, and that one for Guðný from Einar. This was a special gift and all of those present on the evening of feasting knew that this gift must hold some special quality.

Whereas all of the other gifts had been wrapped in brown paper, this last one was wrapped in a tissue of white.

"How?" asked the woman.

"I dug deep," said the man, and his eyes grew bright-like a mischievous child. " ...For the paper that is," and he laughed lightly as his eyes grew tender with the look that one has when one loves another. "...Open it," the farmer said to his wife.

And all in the house tried to peek as Guðný pulled back the tissue, some peeking over her shoulder, some standing on tiptoe close by her side. The gift was of wood and in places had silvered. A small hand-carved sea bird sat on the cloud of white paper she held in her hand.

"Oh-h-h," said the family and friends as they studied the masterful work of the bird. "Oh-h-h."

And the farmer was very proud of his work, of the time he had spent in the fields, in the woods, away from the house – whittling in spare moments, in stolen moments. And he was proud of the woman.

"It's like you, konan mín," the farmer said with great tenderness. "The bird is like you... it's home, konan mín ... The bird and you... they are home," and he touched her cheek to wipe away the happy tear.

And that is a part of the story of your heritage, little friend of mine. Of such as these are memories made, a Christmas bird and blue knee-patches, and an evening ended with a game of Whist. But there is a secret key to the passage of happy memories, and if you were to look hard enough within these pages, I think that you will find that key. As a man named Ellard Swanson once told me, "Those were hard times... very, very hard times, but we were very happy." And his voice sang.

Sleeman

by Leagh Isberg

Running parallel to the river, a narrow paved road connects eight villages like a string of beads; both ends anchored by a town.

Fort Frances, lying to the east, is known as "The Fort"; to the west is Rainy River, called "Rainy". West of the Fort are Crozier, La Vallee, Devlin, Emo, Barwick, Stratton, Pinewood and Sleeman.

Sleeman was our destination one cold Christmas day. We rose early to light the fire in the cookstove, and while we ate porridge and toast, several clay bricks warmed in the oven.

Before leaving, the hot bricks were pulled from the oven, wrapped in gunnysacks, and placed in the front and back foot-wells of the unheated car. With rubbers pulled over shoes, feet resting on hot bricks and a faint smell of scorched rubber permeating the air, we started out. It was still cold enough to see your breath: cold faces, hot feet, warm fingers melting thick frost on the inside of the back windows; still dark.

In the trunk was enough food for a feast, and packed into the back seat my brother, two sisters and I, wrapped in woolen blankets smelling faintly of mothballs, settled in for the long slow trip to my grandparents farm.

Jim, our step-father, whistled all the way and my mother called for her favourite melodies while the back-seat quartet sang an endless repertoire of songs in two part harmony.

When one song ended, one of us would belt out the first line of the next, often prompted by a topic: the moon, the sun, the river, lost love and Christmas. Then we would travel the world in music with songs from Italy, France, England, Scotland and Ireland, followed by current tunes on the "Hit Parade".

We loved to sing and we sang everywhere: at the dinner table, around the piano, in a boat crossing the lake, in the bathtub and even in church. As a family, we had little to do with organized religion; but every Easter, Glenn and Elsie would show up for choir practice at the United Church of Canada to sing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus", only to disappear until the following spring.

We left the highway for three miles of snow-covered gravel road running north of Sleeman. Thick snowflakes drifted in slow motion, adding another layer to fence-posts and the bare branches of trees lining the drive. Lamplight beckoned us into the large farm kitchen and our Grandmothers arms.

Augusta Mary Louise, born in 1872 in Wayside, Wisconsin to Herman and Henrietta Nohr, was known as "Gustie". Slight in stature with her white hair rolled in a bun, she was kind and generous, and took delight in telling us humorous tales in her thick German accent, often attempting to teach us rhymes in German. In earlier photos she appeared quite beautiful and stylish, a real "hotsietotsie" we thought.

My grandfather Ole, was born in the village of Odda, Hardanger Fjord, Norway in 1858 and as a young man of fourteen years, had been a fisherman in Lofoten and Thondheiru He dreamed of free land in America, and in 1885, landed on American soil. Travelling by train, he journeyed to Detroit, Michigan then on to Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, where his brother Peter,

a Lutheran minister, had immigrated and settled three years before, At this time, Ole changed his name from Ole Nickkelson to Ole Isberg.

Ole set up a blacksmith shop but preferred farming; at the age of twenty-seven he travelled north to Grand Rapids, Minnesota where he met "Gustie". In three months they married and moved to Pelican Rapids where their first two children were born: Henry Odin in 1894 and Elmer Michael in 1896.

There was no free land in the United States and they soon departed for Canada. The trip was an arduous one, first travelling to Spooner, Minnesota then crossing the Red River by barge. In an area north of Sleeman, Ontario, they claimed their free one hundred and sixty acres of land. Here, in the township of Blue, they built a log home and a blacksmith shop.

Grandpa was so quiet and still; he would sit for hours in his rocking chair. When he smiled, we hardly noticed, as much of his face was covered by a great white beard and moustache.

My brother Glenn thought the Norwegians were "grim" and "stoic", for it was rumoured that in some Scandinavian countries one could be arrested for laughing out loud in public. What I noticed was the twinkle in Grandpa's blue eyes and this, along with the knowledge that he used to play the violin in a dance band, assured me that there was more to Grandpa than we could see.

My grandparents had already lost two children: Henry Odin, the eldest, who died during WWI when he was shot for cowardice – a family secret kept even from my grandmother – and Elmer, my father, their second eldest child who died of cancer, leaving Norman, Harvey and Florence.

The Christmas tree stood in the small parlor at the front of the house, decorated with paper cards, strings of popped corn and candles in metal holders. Precious glass balls, brought from dark boxes to shine with new promise, caught the light from the bay window.

For me, the whole place was magical, from the cookstove heating the kitchen, to the black metal pump at the kitchen sink, and the sliding pocket-door leading to the steep stairs to the second-floor bedrooms.

Under supervision we were allowed to enter Grandma's bedroom to explore the contents of her large trunk, brimming with precious hand-made linens all trimmed with crocheted and tatted edging. On a chair were pieces of quilts, each one designated for her five granddaughters; each one stitched by hand. She let us hold, and examine, her jewellery from velvet boxes on the tall chest of drawers we called a Highboy, as well as the sepia photographs in oak frames. I thought how wonderful it must be to have your own bedroom, for at the time, I was still sharing a bedroom with my sister.

After dinner, the four of us dressed in layers and headed out to explore the farm. We climbed the ladder in the barn, leading to the hayloft, poked around the blacksmith shop and peeked through the windows of the summer kitchen. We strapped on the old skis and snowshoes we found in the implement shed and tromped around the yard to discover old farm machinery under the snow, all the while posing for black and white photos with our Brownie camera, Our winter outerwear, sewn by our mother from used woolen coats, quickly absorbed moisture like lampwick. Cold and wet, we returned to the house and hung our damp coats on the backs of chairs to dry. Soaking wet woollen mittens hung over the stove, the moisture dripping and sizzling on the stove-top. The kitchen was filled with the smell of wet wool.

Grandma gave us hot cocoa, slabs of fresh bread and butter with blueberry jam and all the gingersnaps we could eat. We were ravenous.

As the sun drifted west, we prepared to leave. Our coats were still damp when we put them on, and we carried our wet mittens and scarves into the cold car, bracing ourselves for the long trip home.

This was my last happy memory of time spent on my grandparents farm. The following year, 1947, my grandfather died, and Jim, my stepfather left our family. It was never the same again.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Kristján Hólasmali

The story of Kristján the shepherd boy at the farm, Hólar

by Einar Vigfusson

Long ago, the farm called Hólar in Hjaltadalur in the Skagafjörður region, was the seat of the church in northern Iceland. At that time there lived a beloved Bishop, well known and well respected, who was the head of the local church there. His name is not revealed in this writing. He was married, as most church leaders were at that time and had one young daughter, Ástríður by name.

He had, as was the custom for Bishops of that time, a very large land holding and

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The church in Hólar with Hólar University College in the background

many animals, mostly sheep. He had eight workmen who looked after the affairs of the farm. There were also twelve men who spent their time on small rowboats, harvesting the sea. These men returned to Hólar a short time before Christmas with a variety of seafood as well as birds of all kinds. They were used in the feasts of the Christmas season.

Drangey, the largest and highest island in the fjord also lay within the boundaries of this diocese, so some of the Bishop's sheep were kept there all year where they waxed fat and were a very important food supply for the festive season. The workmen (seamen) used the largest ship to transport the sheep from Drangey just before the Christmas celebrations.

A young boy named Kristján was also brought up by the Bishop. The boy's father, Thorsteinn, a long standing employee of the Bishop, asked on his deathbed that the Bishop would raise the boy as his own child and bring him to adulthood in good faith, which he agreed to do. Since the Bishop had only one child, the boy Kristján and Ástríður quickly became very good friends and playmates, she being only a little younger than he.

The boy grew to be a fine young man, willing to help and happy to fit into his new position. When Kristján reached the age of twelve, he was already working at many different things around the farm- looking after the sheep in summer and in winter was responsible for providing feed and water for the oldest horses. He often let it be known that he would like to go out to Drangey when the men retrieved the sheep at Christmas, but the Bishop thought the other young men might cause Kristján some trouble.

The Bishop promised Kristján that he would be able to go to Drangey when the next opportunity arose. When the men were preparing the big ship for sailing to Drangey to collect the sheep, it was decided that Kristján should wait till next spring because Ástríður had also been promised that she could go then and so

they would go together. The Bishop's wife tried to dissuade Kristján from going as she reminded him that now was the time of year that he should be studying rather than associating with the workmen who might tease and torment him and work him too hard.

As usual, the seamen came home from the fishery a week before Christmas, just in time to make the annual trip to Drangey to gather the sheep and bring them home to Hólar. There was a woman traveller, Anna by name, who had stayed for a time at Hólar. She was quite homely, demanding in nature and ancient looking. She had a lot of personal items with her and asked for help to move all of her belongings to the shore in preparation for her departure.

After the Bishop's wife had given the old lady some additional items for the trip, she ordered the workers to move Anna and her belongings to the shore where she could board a ship and sail away. She waited by the doorway with her luggage. The workers came to the door seemingly glad to help, but then called to Kristján to help her and told him he would be a good boy if he did this. They would give him a new name – "old ladies´ helper" and they laughed. Kristján took no offence at their teasing and said he would gladly take her to the seashore and help haul her belongings in a sleigh. Anna said she would help, which she did.

The seamen watched him load the sleigh and helped to tie her belongings onto it. As Anna and Kristján went on their way, the seamen called out all kinds of nasty words at him. "Old ladies' helper". The old lady, Anna, turned to them and said: "this name will not be used in regard to Kristján, and mark my words – you will find yourselves, one day, standing before him, your cheeks red with shame, asking his forgiveness." Kristján went with old Anna and was quite happy to do so. She gave him some wheat cookies and candy for his effort.

Now Christmas was drawing near and on the day of Thorláksmessa, the twenty third of December, six men were outfitted for the trip to Drangey to retrieve sheep to be used in the festivities. These six men encountered Kristján at the horse barn at the north end of the pasture. He asked them: "Are you now going to Drangey?" They said: "yes." He asked them to wait for a few minutes while he got permission and better clothes and said that he was going to go with them. They goaded him and said he would be stupid not to go right now, since he had been promised this trip. They started off towards the ship and he decided to go along, even though he felt it was wrong to leave without telling anyone.

The trip to the island went without incident with a clear sky and moonlight, as the darkness set in. On the way they told him frightening stories of the huldufolk (hidden people) on Drangey and sea serpents that walked ashore there. When they got to the island they herded the sheep into a compound built of rocks near the sea – actually on a small skerry. This sheep fold was situated between two high rock formations and made a good place to keep the sheep until they could put them aboard the ship. Kristján explored the area and discovered several caves in the cliffs surrounding the compound.

There, the group ate their meager meal and began to move the sheep out to the ship on a small boat. Then, when they got back they pretended to notice that one of the mealbags was missing. They asked Kristján to fetch the bag which hung on the wall of the compound. So he ran to get it. He quickly ran and found the mealbag, but when he looked back he saw that all the men had gone onto the row

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Drangey Island

boat and were rapidly rowing out to the ship. He called to them and asked them not to leave him alone on the skerry, but they kept on rowing. He heard the voices of the young men as they disappeared over the water – it is easier to think about this than to describe with words, what a tragedy this was for the twelve year old boy to be left there all alone in the darkest days of winter on the skerry known as Eyðiey.

He now saw the mistake he had made in going with the young men to Drangey. He had not told his loved ones at home that he was going to do this. There stood the boy, knowing that he would now suffer much from hunger and cold that would come to him. He had not yet begun to think of all the terrible fear he would encounter when the ghosts and hidden people and sea dragons made their appearence. Even the sea frightened him greatly. After crying for a while about what his fellow men had done to him, he lost hope. Now he looked around at the little skerry that would become his last home. It was now covered with hoarfrost and was glittering in the moonlight, becoming a series of ever changing colored scenes.

Kristján said to himself:

"What should I do now? I could cast myself into the sea but I won't do that because God would not like it. I will not go into the sheep compound because I am sure there are huldufolk there. I will not stay by the seaside because the seamen told me there are probably sea serpents there. I will look for a place to stay, high in

the rock formations surrounding the sheep compound. From there I will be able to see the sheep still remaining in the fold, for company."

Kristján found a little hollow in the rocks and made himself comfortable as the real darkness of night set in. He did not see any huldufolk or monsters now and that made him feel much better. He recited all the good things that the Bishop had taught him and thought to himself: "God has many ways to help me out of this danger." As daylight approached, he finally fell asleep but then awoke shivering, so that when it got reasonably bright he made a tour of his little island but now kept the sheep in sight for company.

Now he thought about what would happen when the young men returned to Hólar. What would happen when they found him missing? Would the young men tell the truth about their evil deed and the terrible trick they had played on him? He also imagined the Christmas celebrations and the nice, new clothes he would have recieved.

Now the day waned and he returned to the same night spot that he had discovered up in the rocks. He suddenly realized he was very hungry. Without thinking he still held on to the mealbag. He looked inside it and found one dry cookie and many dry bones. "Is this food ?" he said to himself as he went to his shelter in the rocks. "This will be my Christmas cookie. I am here as the shepherds of the past and God's light will shine here all around me."

Now came the night – Christmas eve and soon after darkness set in, he looked out at a small reef not far from him and noticed a large raft-like object that seemed to have come up out of the sea and onto the reef. He thought to himself: "this must be a sea monster" and became deathly afraid. He ran down into the sheep fold where before in his imagination, he had been frightened of the hidden people. There he found a little cave where he could hide and observe.

Now, he was suddenly frightened by the scene before him. Loud talk and laughter sounded throughout the compound. His curiosity won out and he peeked out over the stones and saw many men standing at the door to the fold. He hunkered down and kept hidden as well as he could. These people came quickly into the fold and brought with them many beautiful, silk curtains as well as torches and holders for them and proceeded to set them up all around the compound. He was delighted to see that two of the curtains were joined by buttons right in front of his hiding place.

Driven by his curiosity, Kristján unbuttoned three of the buttons, so as to have a better view of the compound and the activities inside. He could see the people decorating the curtains and fastening the torches into the holders which appeared to be made of gold and silver. Now the fold was completely lit up. Then chairs and tables and stools were brought in and were set up all around the compound. Next they brought in food and drink and he could smell the delicious flavors wafting over him. Now this group of people celebrated happily and had no knowledge of the boy whose eyes followed their every move in this incredible scene.

The fold was full of well dressed people who were both handsome and friendly in their actions. Men and women were seated together on the benches. One couple in particular stood out as special. They were very well dressed and it was obvious that they were the king and queen of the group.

The meal went forth with much good hospitality and much good cheer. At the

end of the meal the tables and chairs were moved and set up along one wall of the compound, very close to the spot where the boy was hiding. The people cast off their coats and began to sing happily and danced around the compound. Kristján did not understand a word that anyone spoke or sang. After awhile they all went to have some more wine and refreshments.

Suddenly Kristján choked on something and began to cough loudly. In an instant the people were frightened and quickly left the fold en masse. But Kristján unbuttoned one of the corners of the tent and ran out to witness the group leaving. He saw that they they hurried out to the reef, picked up the large raft and threw it quickly onto the ocean. All of them proceded to climb aboard and then they suddenly disappeared right in front of him.

There stood the poor boy, still all alone, just as amazed as before, but confused over the sight he had just witnessed.Then he said to himself: "At least these were not sea monsters, they were humans, but what kind of humans?" Then he turned back to the fold and looked at all the valuable items still there and said to himself: "Is this a dream or have I entered another life??" He looked at the tables and saw there was plenty of food and wine which had been left behind. "I will be able to nourish my body with all of this and trust that God has sent it to me ."... and so he did. He was not used to drinking wine so it quickly took hold of him and he now forgot all about his very serious situation. He became very happy and he chose one of the beautiful golden robes that lay there, put it on and began singing and chanting the words of the Bishop that he had learned under his tutorship at Hólar.

Now the story changes and we are now at home at Hólar,where little Kristján does not appear at the main meal before Christmas on Thorláks Day and no one knows what had become of him. After a few questions and searches it was now evident that he had gone with the young men out to to the island. On the morning of Christmas Eve, the island farers had now come home from Drangey. It became obvious that the boy was not with them but the boatmen swore that they knew nothing of his whereabouts.

Now the plot thickens. The Bishop ordered his men to search the grounds at Hólar, thinking that the boy may have died suddenly somewhere on the property and he wondered whether everyone had told the truth in this matter. The whole area was searched and no sign was found of him. As was customary, all the chores were finished early on Chrismas Eve because the singing and celebrations of Christmas would soon begin.

Now the tables were set up in the rooms of Hólar, where all the people would sit together as was commonly done on Christmas Eve. The Bishop usually walked about as soon as everyone was seated at the tables. He would give communion wine and bread and count the number of people there. The women now carried in a treat called laufabrauð along with candles.

The young men had come together to wash and clean themselves before the festivities. The Bishop appeared and he looked shaken and worried and said: "Now there will be sadness here for most of us and it will spoil the happiness of Christmas since our little friend is missing from the gathering." Then he said: "I wish and I would hope that one of you in this crowd has kept the memory of Kristján in your heart and would tell us if he knew of the boy's disapperarance."

Then one of the shepherds suddenly spoke up. He was not aware that the boy was missing and had not been around

when they were looking for him. He said: "Is this true? That young Kristján is missing? Very early on the morning of Thorlaksdagur, while it was still almost dark, I was tending the sheep when the young men came by on their way to take the ship to Drangey. I thought I saw the boy running toward them. It was somewhat dark and I cannot be absolutely sure that he went with them but I think he did."

As he spoke one of the sailors became agitated and the Bishop quickly noticed this. The angry Bishop now called the seamen into his office and it wasn't long before the truth came out. The one who was so nervous, now spilled the whole story and every aspect of it. He swore that he had been against leaving the boy behind, alone on the skerry. He also said that it was impossible for him to carry this deed in his conscience forever and that he would be relieved to tell the horrible tale of their treatment of little Kristján. He asked the Bishop for protection from the others who had been involved.

Immediately the Bishop had the other five men placed in chains and locked up without food until the well being of the boy was confirmed. He ordered eight men to go on horseback to the ship. He sent with them warm clothing, food and woolen blankets.

Nothing is told of their journey to Drangey until they arrived on the island. The men couldn't believe their eyes. The sheep fold seemed to be illuminated with a beautiful light. They were frightened and wondering because they couldn't understand how the boy would have been able to light a fire. They walked ashore and were no less amazed when they saw young Kristján standing there, wearing a robe, chanting and singing, just like the Bishop. They didn't like what they saw and though he was found they wondered whether he had lost his mind. Very quickly, he was able to tell them his story and then he offered them some of the food and drink on the tables, which they accepted. They did not move anything else. They extinguished the candles and hastily prepared themselves for the journey home.

On Christmas morning the men returned to Hólar with Kristján. There was a very happy homecoming when Kristján was seen walking towards them, dressed in the fur coat that the Bishop had sent to him with the men who rescued him. The Bishop paced the floor near the entrance to the church at Hólar as the group rode home.

Kristján quietly walked up to the Bishop and asked forgiveness for having gone without permission and he forgave him immediately. Kristján then told him the whole story and the Bishop appreciated this very much. He said that he would go with him out to Drangey after New Years and they would gather all the beautiful items left in the sheepfold and take them home to Hólar.

Now the Bishop saw to it that Kristján would go in and get some rest as he looked very tired. The boy refused and said that he would rather try on his new Christmas clothes and go to church. The Bishop let him have his wish. After that, the people all sat down to a fantastic feast and everyone was glad except the five sailors that had left Kristján on the skerry. They sat in chains awaiting the verdict of their judgement. The Bishop was still very angry with them and asked Kristján how he would have judged the men, had he been a lawyer.

Kristján said: "Had I been a lawyer, I would probably have judged them fairly." The bishop then asked: "Let me hear how you would have judged

them." Kristján answered: "I would first have allowed them to sit in on the Christmas celebration tonight." "Your wish shall be granted" said the Bishop and sent for them. When they had seated themselves, the Bishop informed them of the boy's wish. They were much ashamed and asked Kristján's forgiveness. He said that he did this for himself but that would not be enough to wipe out their guilt. So they were allowed to take part in the festivities.

When everyone stood up from the table, the Bishop again asked little Kristján: "How would you have judged them now?" Kristján replied: "I would not have wished to take their lives, although they sought mine, but I would have made them unholy in the eyes of God and the Bishop and have them marked as long as they live to the Bishop's decree." Then the Bishop patted the head of his little friend and said: "You are the material for a lawyer or a judge." The story says that this judgment fell upon these five men as Kristján had requested.

After New Years the Bishop went to Drangey and took Kristján with him among others. Everything was untouched at the sheepfold. The Bishop said: "Has my sheepfold become the palace of kings? In your name Kristján, I take possession of all these beautiful objects here". They then proceeded to take them aboard the ship and went home with all these wonderful items. They were careful to see to it that none of them were broken in transit.

When they got home, the Bishop said he would send these wonderful treasures to a foreign country where they would be auctioned off for a large fortune. One of the chalices was kept behind by the Bishop and he gave it to the Hólarkirkja (the church at Hólar) and it is said that it remains there to this day. It was used only on special occasions where bishops presided and it was used when they took the sacrement there.

Little Kristján Thorsteinsson would become the owner of all the wealth that they brought home to Hólar after the treasures were auctioned off. Soon Kristján began to study theology under the guidance of the Bishop and became a minister (prestur) for he loved to sing and chant. He was assigned to a very nice parish which lay close to the seat of the church at Hólar and besides that, the Bishop gave him the hand of his daughter, Ástríður in marriage.

Séra (Reverend) Kristján was a good minister and profast for many years and he and his wife had many wonderful children. Old Anna whom he had helped so long ago, recieved much help from Séra Kristján in her old age.

I read this story in a very old Icelandic book. It was first written down in the 1800's by a lady from Húsavík in Iceland and later put into print in 1908 by a story gatherer in Akureyri, Iceland. The publisher's name was Oddur Björnsson who gathered old manuscripts and published them on his printing press.

I am a long time farmer of Icelandic descent who learned early in life to speak, read, and write in Icelandic and have always been fascinated at the ability of Icelanders to write beautiful prose and poetry in their descriptive language. I did this translation while I was going through some very serious medical treatments and it helped to take my mind off things while doing it.

Einar Vigfusson, Farmer at Arborg in Manitoba, Canada.

POETRY

Spirits of Christmas

By John Felsted

Reprinted from Volume 53#2, Winter 1994

Christmas is coming!
A bleak time for most
Whose money has gone
Like a Halloween ghost

There are desperate looks
On unemployed faces
Who can only afford
A few Christmas traces

The wondering eyes
Of small children behold
Mom lugging the groceries
On foot, in the cold

The car's broken down
No cash for repair
It's hard not to quit
And cry in despair

Yet, Jesus was born
In a stable so poor
With straw for a blanket
And dirt for a floor

He came to the poorest
And taught us of love
We must keep for each other
And the Lord up above

His words have helped us
Through two thousand years
Brought joys and laughter
And banished our fears

A king and a commoner
A rich man and thief
Have all stood together
As one in belief

This Christmas just give
Your comfort and love
To all those you care for
And the Lord up above

Give thanks with your children
Your family, your friends
That we have the power
To change how it ends

Take courage in Christmas
And the lessons therein
There's no greater gift
Than a true, happy grin

On the faces of loved ones
A neighbour, a friend
just love you back
With no gain as an end!

Norn drawing by Irene Kuziw titled "Tomten"

POETRY

Night of the New Year

By Stephan G. Stephansson
Translated by Paul A. Sigurdson

Reprinted from Volume 53#2, Winter 1994

Forsake me not, soul of the passing year!
Now let me feel the sanctity of others;
My destiny enweave with all my brothers,
Sharing every joy and every care;
Forgetting those most dark in prophesy,
Sullying that virtue which is golden;
Truth and freedom e'er to be beholden;
Treasure, dearest thing to me.

Let me, when rank with rank contends for gain,
Speak for the weaker men, their worth revealing,
Fight those with hearts of little feeling,
Minds too cold to care for common pain.
Let me defy those groups which ridicule,
Scorning me, themselves the profits taking,
Virtue's bloom and kindliness forsaking,
Making arrogance the rule.

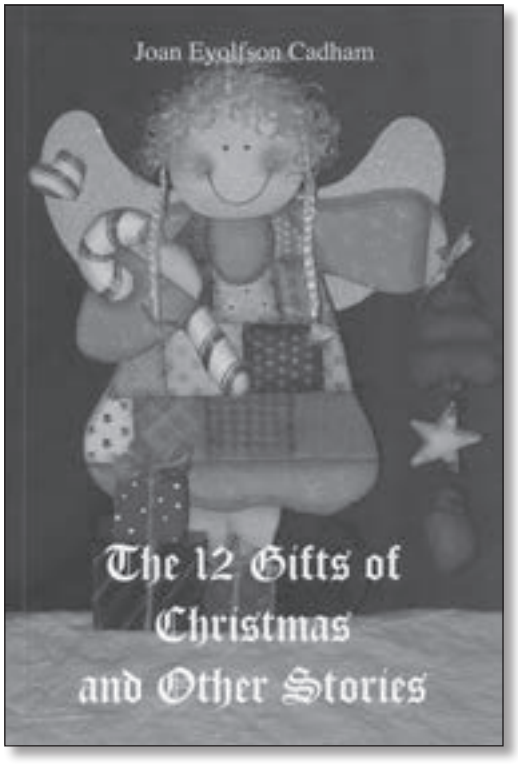
Give me heart to guard, however slight,
The will of others trusting and believing,
Caring hands with worthy fingers weaving
Laurel wreaths to crown the brow of Right;
Rejoicing when the day can tell the tale
Of some new victory – the night beginning –
Tells that goodness had another winning.
Love right though my help may fail.

Let me forsake the travelled ways, and strong in will
Steer to the deep – all troubles leave behind me;
Weary, but stronger from experience, you'll find me,
Braving the sea of life in gloom and chill.
I've reached the half-mark on life's morning sea;
The heavens shine in spite of stormclouds showing;
I sail, my guide, my inner beacon glowing,
Dark though New Year's night may be.

Book Reviews

The 12 Gifts of Christmas and Other Stories

by Joan Eyolfson Cadham



Reviewed by Karen Olafson

Soft cover, 160 pages
Publisher: Saskatt Books, Foam Lake, SK (2015)
Printed by St. Peter's Press, Muenster, SK
ISBN: 978-1-896971-93-3

The night before Joan died she received word from her printer that the book was printed and ready for sale. Although Joan is no longer with us her book is a comforting reminder of her and her life. Joan's newest and her last book is a very personal journey of her Christmas memories. It is a slim volume that you could read from front to back in a long day or you could savor it like fine chocolate a page or two at a time.

Joan was the tenth child of eleven born five years after the next youngest sibling at the end of the depression and the beginning of World War II. Her memories of a child's Canadian prairie Christmas are like a postcard of the Rockies – picture perfect. We are either of a certain age to have acquired the same memories or we have read of them. She remembers the hustle and bustle of baking on a wood stove, visiting older married siblings with families of their own, the excitement of brothers coming home on leave, or of sisters returning home from the city, the teasing of older siblings when they empty her stocking on Christmas morning (replacing her gifts with a piece of coal), the special gifts that are never forgotten, and how heartbroken she was when a beloved teacher unintentionally spilled the beans (or candy) of Santa's

true identity. She shares her memories of moving to town and then moving away from home to Toronto.

Joan attended the Ryerson School of Journalism. One of her stories from that time at Ryerson compares an "Eastern Urban Christmas and Western Rural Christmas". It shows how accomplished her writings were already at that first stage of journalism career. The story rings as true and reads as well now as it did 50 years ago.

Joan married, had three children and followed her husband all over Canada but in "Chaos Castle" she tells us about ending up in Ste-Anne-de-Bellvue on the western tip of Montreal Island. She incorporates stories within the story from her own three kids, Joe, Ruth and Inga plus her adopted daughter/niece Elaine, adopted son Marc and his wife-to-be Lucie. Each of them keep you entertained with their remembrances of Christmases as re-told by their mother Joan.

Soon Joan introduces the reader to the love of her life, Jack Cadham. They married in 1984, Joan, Jack and three cats moved back to Saskatchewan, by happy coincidence, to Foam Lake and embrace small town life. They moved into the community in true Joan-style, joining service clubs, and becoming involved in church life. Santa Day, local Christmas concerts and craft sales. Joan lost Jack in October 1995 so she had mourned during many a holiday. In Jack's memory, she has devoted a chapter for those among us who struggle with the season.

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about Christmas are all answered starting with the Evolution of Christmas Celebrations. The differences in Canadian and American traditions are explained. There is a brief history of Christmas cards, the tradition of Christmas music both English and French. There is a Christmas quiz and Christmas related quotes plus the vignette of Joan's "Going to Decorate the Best Tree in History".

Joan was a storyteller par excellence and shared her definitions of folklore and legend. There are the stories of the Christmas animals with little known tales such as the one about tabby cats having the shape of the letter "M" on their foreheads as a thank you from Mary for comforting the newborn babe. Joan explains the history of the theme "Giver of Gifts". She starts with the Three Wise Men and moves thru Frigga, Perchta, La Befana, St. Nicholas, Pere Noel, the Jolasveinar to Santa Claus. She tells us about the ones who are still "here" and the different traditions in various countries. She talks of Christmas superstitions and the legend of the Christmas Spider which I love, but then I love tinsel.

Joan tells stories about how traditions originate. You will chuckle when you read of Joan's pride in what she thought of as "The Family Tradition" of only ever serving roast chicken at Christmas and when she asks her mom about this family tradition, she finds out it wasn't a "tradition" at all but done because they raised chickens on the farm and couldn't afford a turkey.

In Christmas 1995 Joan is still mourning the death of her husband Jack. She received a Corn Husk Nativity Scene in the mail. There was no return address nor the name of the sender. The next year she received a Corn Husk Angel with Braids. Now, Joan was a Blonde, Icelandic (Viking) woman who loved her braids and was very well known because of her editorial writing in two local papers. The anonymous sender understood Joan and kept sending her a gift every year for ten more years. The gifts reflected her love of writing, her love of the Prairies, and her love of Christmas. Joan wrote about the anonymous gifts in a newspaper essay and the mystery captured the imagination of a large portion of Saskatchewan. The gifts were mailed from

all over the province. Great care was taken in the packaging. There was never a return address. The last gift had a letter and an explanation as to why Joan had been chosen to be the recipient of a Secret Santa. Joan knew, but the secret remains intact, the stories of the 12 gifts and the anticipation that built every year make for enjoyable reading.

The 12 Gifts of Christmas and Other Stories ends with her tried and true recipes that she used to feed hundreds during the holiday season. If you use some of these recipes, keep in mind that Joan had an aversion to garlic – she couldn't eat it as it led to many a nasty migraine. When you use her Tourtiere recipe remember to add garlic. There are vegetarian recipes, salads, Icelandic treats and special desserts. There is everything for a spectacular Christmas dinner

Some stories will make you laugh, others, weep. You will be moved by Joan's narratives told in her unique personal style. Reading *The 12 Gifts of Christmas and Other Stories* is like receiving a strong, warm hug from Joan. This book will be a treasured family classic.

Ten Plays – Tíu leikrit

by Guttormur J. Guttormsson
(Translated by Elín Thordarson and Christopher Crocker)

Reviewed by Joel Friðfinnsson

Hardcover, 320 pages
Publisher: Kind Publishing
2015-02-01
ISBN: 9781987830002

The name Guttormur J. Guttormsson is synonymous amongst the giants of Icelandic literature, and his literary contributions still permeate the very soil of New Iceland to this day. Most widely known for his prowess in poetry and essay composition, Guttormur also devoted a period of his life to writing dramatic plays. This new collection of translations of his 1930 publication *Tíu Leikrit* takes the reader on a journey across the sprawling chasm of human emotion, from our weakest vulnerabilities and fears to the deepest joys and love which

human beings are capable.

The beautiful cover page of this collection is a powerful introduction in itself, as the poet/playwright stands over the grave of Betsey Ramsey, a victim of the 1876 smallpox epidemic in which so many Icelanders succumbed. Perhaps Guttormur's most well known and beloved poem "Sandy Bar," chronicles this tragic event from history in which the Icelanders and aboriginals share. The foreword of the book is written by Guttormur's granddaughter Heather Alda Ireland, who provides the reader with insight on the humble beginnings of her grandfather at his lifelong home of Víðivellir in the Fljótsbyggð (Icelandic River) district of New Iceland. She recounts many stories from visiting there as a child, the adventures they would get into, how afi would frown upon them for being mischievous, and general warm memories that most people who are fortunate enough, share of their grandparents. Guttormur J. Guttormsson, though being born at Víðivellir in 1878, is the only Canadian poet to write only in Icelandic. To quote the former President of the Republic of Iceland, Frú Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in her forward to this collection:

> "Those who know the works of Guttormur J. Guttormsson cannot help being fascinated by their uniqueness. Not least because he chose to write in Icelandic and not English- as a second generation of an Icelandic family who had emigrated in the late 19th century. And his command of the language was just as good as if his family had never left the old country."

This collection is professionally translated from the original Icelandic by Elin Thordarson who holds a Masters degree in Icelandic language from the University of Manitoba Icelandic Department of Language and Literature and Christopher Crocker who also holds a Masters degree in Icelandic from the University of Manitoba and is currently continuing his doctoral thesis in Medieval Icelandic Literature at the University of Iceland.

Guttormur's early life was plagued with death, losing his mother at the tender age of 7, and his father at 15, and this theme of death, loss and the unknown haunts many of the plays in this collection. In the opening play entitled *The Shadow*, an elder and a youth are embarking to attend a play, when a sailor ominously warns them of impending death. The response from the youth is characteristic of a young person, "We shouldn't stay here, if it's true, that Death is wandering through these parts tonight." To the response of the learned elder, "Death doesn't do any harm. It's life that causes harm. I'd like to wait and see. Death isn't scary. You're just afraid because you are young and you don't understand what it is." *The Ring* is yet another play with a focus on death, telling the story of a young family who cannot find their way out of the forest. It is also the only one of Guttormur's plays to be dramatically performed. To quote the translator Elin Thordarson, "*The Ring*" is another glimpse at death. In it he explores what it might be like to die, and again reveals a depth to a reality we cannot fathom."

As a great admirer of Guttormur's poetry I wasn't sure how I would approach his plays. My experience in reading and performing plays is limited to the mandatory Shakespeare we're all expected to consume in high school. When I first delved into this collection I was surprised at the subject matter of the works. I was expecting the settings of the dramatic works to be around Riverton, not in surreal valleys, forests, caves, white rooms, and garden patches. I assumed the subject matter would be humorous and loosely based on the colourful and larger than life characters of New Iceland (of whom there are no shortage.) On the contrary, what I had discovered was a poignant and beautiful commentary on human nature, evoking ideas as relevant today as they were when it was written. The focal point of *Tíu Leikrit,* for me is the fascinating play "*The Lame*". A brutal criticism of the grisly dangers of greed, corruption, malice, and selfishness, Guttormur cynically reflects on the fatal path in which hedonism and materialism can lead us. The play is told from the perspective of many characters such as Reason, Sensitivity, the Mouth, the Nose, the Left hand, the Right Ear and Gold. Each character's hedonistic self centeredness is in the forefront from the beginning, with the mouth only concerned about when they will find good things to eat, the eyes concerned with beauty to gaze upon, the feet concerned with never having to climb a hill, and the hands with other various toil. The characters Reason and Sensitivity however keep these others in check until Gold is introduced (material wealth). They allure of Gold is too much even for the voice of Reason, and Sensitivity dies as a result in the pursuit of Gold. As they all become corrupted in the face of Gold and become its slave, they realize what they have done, and that escaping the clutches of greed is easier said than done.

It is rare that people will sit down and read a dramatic play as opposed to seeing one performed in a theatre, but perhaps we should. The New Iceland area is so vastly rich in culture, literature and history, much of which is not accessible to the non-Icelandic speaker. With this publication of the translations of Guttormur's Ten Plays, many of us now have a chance to experience his work. Whether you have an interest in drama or not, don't miss out on this opportunity to revel in a work masterfully put to paper by New Iceland's incomparable wordsmith.

Contributors

LADONNA BREIDFJORD BACKMEYER was born in North Dakota, but spent most of her youth in Thief River Falls, Minnesota. The prairies and the Icelandic pioneers formed a lasting impression on her. She resides in Rock Island, Illinois.

JOHN B. FELDSTED was born to Agnes and Asgeir Fjeldsted at Gimli in 1940. He continues to write, enjoying espousing political views in the newspapers. He now resides in Winnipeg.

JOEL FRIÐFINNSSON is a farmer in the Geysir district. He has studied Icelandic language and literature at the Universitiy of Manitoba and the University of Iceland. He is a founding member of Icelandic River Heritage Sites Inc. in Riverton and currently serves as President for Esjan, the Arborg Chapter of the Icelandic National League of North America.

LEAGH ISBERG After attending the Creative Writing Workshop with David Arnason, Dennis Cooley and John Weier in 2010, Leagh as written poetry and short stories. "Those guys were like divining rods" and as an artesian she has been bubbling to the surface ever since, laughing all the way to Prairie Ocean.

KRISTÍN M. JÓHANNSDÓTTIR has a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of British Columbia. She now teaches in the Department of Humanities and Social Science at the University of Iceland.

LARISSA KYZER is a freelance writer and student living in Reykjavík. In 2012, she received a Fulbright grant to study contemporary Icelandic at the University of Iceland, where she is now completing a Master's degree in Translation Studies. She blogs about language learning and life in Iceland at https://ethandthorn.wordpress.com/.

KAREN OLAFSON, a member of The Vatnabyggð Icelandic Club of Saskatchewan, can trace her friendship with Joan back to the late '70s.

PAUL SIGURDSON was a poet, fiction writer, translator, dramatist and composer. He passed away in 1991. In his lifetime he was a strong support of the magazine, readily sharing his writing. es at the University of Akureyri.

LISA SIGURGEIRSON-MAXX was born in Steveston, BC, in the home of her paternal amma and afi and grew up steeped in the Icelandic heritage. Lisa currently lives on Salt Spring Island. She works as a freelance writer and a parenting educator and musician – singer-songwriter, currently developing a family-nuturing business – the singing amma. She is super excited to be preparing to perform and speak at the INL of NA convention in April 2016 and hopes to meet many *Icelandic Connection* readers there.

EINAR VIGFUSSON is a retired farmer who lives on the family farm just outside Arborg, MB. He is well-known as a realistic wildfowl wood carver.

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The Back Page

New Year's Eve in Reykjavík

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