

# ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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<b>On the Cover</b>	51
<b>Editorial</b>	52
Avery Simundsson	
<b>Guest Editorial</b>	53
Paul Sigurdson	
<b>Traveling Island: Grettir the Strong and his Search for a Place</b>	55
Astradur Eysteinnsson	
<b>Interview with Yrsa Sigurðardóttir</b>	65
Avery Simundsson	
<b>Father of Canola</b>	67
Betty Jane Wylie	
<b>The Royal Grave in New Iceland</b>	
by Natalie Guttormsson (with help from Salín Guttormsson)	70
<b>Canada, the Icelanders, and Lord Dufferin</b>	75
Dr. Ryan Eyford, PhD	
<b>Filling in the Pieces</b>	80
Kristín M. Jóhannsdóttir	
<b>Icelandic Camp: Music, Runes, and Legacy</b>	84
Sarah Painter	
<b>Poetry</b>	
<b>The Ancients</b>	88
By Simon Laurie King	
<b>Do You Remember</b>	90
<b>The Owl and the Wood</b>	91
By Lois Fridfinnson	
<b>Book Review</b>	
<b>Why Did You Lie to Me?</b>	93
Reviewed by Elva Simundsson	
<b>Contributors</b>	95
<b>The Back Page</b>	96

# ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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# ON THE COVER



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# Editorial

## Canada 2017 - 150 Years Young

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by Avery Simundsson

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This summer marks the sesquicentennial anniversary of Canadian Confederation, celebrated across the country with elaborate fireworks, parades and picnics, and celebrations of our history and culture. And of course, a shameless parade of commercial goods sheathed in the Canadian Maple Leaf. Nothing wrong with consumer patriotism!

One of the most enjoyable benefits that has come of the 150 year celebration is the free entrance into national parks across Canada through the 2017 Discovery Pass program. Canada is an incredibly vast country with a huge diversity that would take a lifetime to experience in its entirety. Most citizens never visit all provinces and fewer still visit the territories, opting instead for beach vacation with margaritas down south. As enticing as these trips are to folks who spend significant portions of their lives in the Canadian deep freeze, choosing Florida over Fredericton means missing out on some of the most beautiful places on the face of this earth. So many of our Icelandic forefathers and mothers chose this land over a hundred years ago as a place to settle and to create a new life for themselves and their descendants. We need to embrace it in all its varied scenes and seasons.

Canada has over 40 national parks showcasing the country's diverse

landscapes. These parks include mountains, grasslands, tundra, and boreal forest among other iconic ecosystems. They provide incredible learning opportunities and the ability to experience the world as it was shaped by natural forces rather than agriculture, industry, and urban life. The creation of national parks in Canada began in 1885 when 26 square kilometers was set aside in what is now Banff National Park, a world-renowned tourist destination. Canada's National Parks system has continued to evolve with the most recent park being added in 2012, the Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories. Every inch that is protected provides an opportunity to learn, discover, respect, and appreciate the land on which we live and depend.

Now may be a better time than ever to enjoy the natural wonders of Canada. Global ecosystems are changing unpredictably at a rapid pace and Canada is no exception. Receding glaciers and Arctic sea ice along with migrating or disappearing flora and fauna means that these treasures may not always be around to enjoy. Initiatives such as the 2017 Discovery Pass are an initiative to renew public interest and curiosity in the natural landscape. It reminds us that beauty exists in many forms in nature and that we have the power to preserve or destroy it. It seems a bit ironic to celebrate

Canada's 150 birthday by visiting sites that have been shaped over millennia. We need to remember that 150 years is nothing in comparison to the agelessness of the land that makes up the North American

continent. It is a salient reminder that we are guests on this landscape and it would be wise to remain respectful and grateful to our host.

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## Canada 1967 - Happy Birthday

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by Paul Sigurdson, Guest Editor 1967

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*Published in the 1967 Volume XXVI (1) issue of  
Icelandic Canadian on the occasion of Canada's Centennial year*

The last tick-tocks of Canada's first century sound in our ears and warn us of the closing hour.

The moment of the full and completed circle is at hand. While eternity hides in strange and unknown silence, marking man's petty hustle-bustle the world of touch, of feeling, of right and all reality rolls on. But today the measurement of hours, months and centuries is our amusement. We have now our excuse to celebrate, raise a clamour and a shout, ring the rusted bells and shoot off the dazzle of fireworks to remind ourselves of mortality and the horror of our perishability. Now we can try with noise and feverish activity, to immortalize our earthy existence and grasp something lasting and eternal while we yet have our life and our will.

So the whooping and the joy of our Centennial is for us all: the toddlers, fresh faced and wonder full-blooded and untamed will inject their enthusiasm into all their activities, their life-drives and



Paul Sigurdson

their serious foolishness. They will know that they are pent and teeming with their new power and that this Canada lies like a ripe watermelon patch for them to pick and feast upon; and they, when they should and cheer and clap their hands will sense the measure of a heritage they soon will clasp and fill. Those few who hold the reins of power – the teachers, the men of business, the mayor and his always-somewhat men, the bankers, traders and all who give the nod and raise the warning finger, they will try hard to compete with the youth, knowing with a deep-hidden, deep-hearted, yet utter certainty that time has turned against

Them, and they have struggled up the

mountain of life only to begin to slip down the other, less precipitous side. Only some of the old will wave their flag with peace, resigned to the imminence of eternity and surrendered to the dogged stalk of time.

And what are we celebrating, do you ask? Confederation's one hundred years. July 1<sup>st</sup>, 100 years ago Canada became a county, a union of provinces. And why the jubilation? What is 100 years? Perhaps in God's eyes, it is only a moment, yet to us and to the world it is our own span of peace, reason and godliness, an era in which man, the savage proved he could be man, the godly, the divine, the paragon of all; proved he could in spite of the mingled pettiness and meanness, maintain a place where liberty and right and free will could flourish.

That is why we are shouting. It is our way of thanking ourselves and our forefathers for the freedom we cherish. So we shout because we are free and we shout because in this way we can remind ourselves that we are real, that we can exist and that we are part of the glorious experiment called democracy. We shout because at each milestone of history it is good to be able to say to oneself "I was there".

So thrice bless you Canada, Sweet Mother of Liberty, yours has been a noble experiment in time.



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# Traveling Island

## Grettir the Strong and his Search for a Place

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by Astradur Eysteinnsson

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*Reprinted from Cotepra Reader Subproject n.7  
Beyond the Floating Islands  
Edited by Stephanos Stephanides and Susan Bassnett  
Cotepra, University of Bologna, 2002*

He wanted an island all of his own: not necessarily to be alone on it, but to make it a world of his own.

D.H. Lawrence, "The Man Who Loved Islands"

She was defensive, like most of her family, on the subject of the island. Knowing that they were often regarded as slightly eccentric because of how and where they lived. Always anticipating questions about the island's loneliness.

Alistair MacLeod, "Island"

Islands seduce us because sometimes the universe seems too big.

Bill Holm, *Eccentric Islands*

Islands align with the self in obvious and mysterious ways. John Donne's famous pronouncement that no man is an island is at one level an attempt to obfuscate the clear reflectional ties between an individual human body, moving through the air and an island an isolated piece of the earth, surrounded and demarcated by a body of water. Even more urgently, though Donne is crying out against mapping the soul or the life of the mind onto a locale bounded on all sides for an island is the edge of the world in a way that no continental coastline or promontory can be.

This is where the alignment of self and island becomes complicated, for while an island provides a clearly demarcated human territory a separate and surveyable sphere the notion of an island also often indicates a state of marginalization. Islands exist in a dependent relation to a continent, and the only way this can be changed is for the island to turn itself into some sort of continental space and take insularity to its extremes blocking pathways to other lands. But this implies a social effort and the metaphor - as well as in many historical cases the actual layout of the island may



PHOTO: VIGGÓ JÓNSSON

## Drangey

serve well to illustrate and translate even in a manipulative manner the cohesiveness of a social group even a whole society, or a nation. Or indeed it may ironically foreground a dividing line between such groups that split an island between them.

While the metaphoric quality of islands in expressing individual fate may seem a far cry from their service as iconic or actual vehicles of a society, these two dimensions ultimately create a mesh of interconnected threads. The island as utopia, the island as a colony or prison, the island as a fortress, the get-away island, the island of the castaway, the island as a place of new settlement, a New World: in all of these are to be read the insignia of individual self as well as social identity (see Eysteinnsson).

## II

The Sagas of Icelanders, *Íslendingasögur* (or “Family Sagas” as they are sometimes

called in English) constitute one of a number of saga genres that flourished in Iceland in the late middle ages, especially during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These particular sagas, forming a genre wavering magnificently between history and fiction, usually tell of feuds between key individuals and families in a country unique at this point in European history in that it was a stratified society with a parliament but without a sovereign or state executive machinery. While each of the main sagas tends to focus on events in a particular district within Iceland, they open with a historical and genealogical account of the central figures relating their origins in Norway in the ninth century and their emigration as Norway was in the process of being unified under one king. Many chieftains first move to the northern regions of the British Isles - an area ruled largely by Norsemen and where there is

a great deal of Viking traffic at this time - but then set sail for Iceland, an island on the farthest known edge of the North Atlantic and either claim virgin land there or accept a share sold or given to them by an earlier settler.

The course of events described before and during the settlement of this island, a separate and liminal sphere on the world map was clearly seen as an entry into the saga proper, almost like a legitimation for the subsequent scenes of life and conflict unfolded in the narrative. The crossing of the ocean - very much a translation, a carrying across - was referred to as going "out to Iceland," and it is noteworthy that this phrase became fixed in the language so that even generations later Icelanders returning home from a stay in Norway would talk about "going out" ("fara út"). Voyaging back and forth across the Atlantic is crucial to many of the sagas, some of the heroes joining Viking groups abroad, or enjoying the hospitality of royal courts where their talents as fighters or poets are appreciated. They bring back to their island country the oral and material capital of fame and fortune - even those forced to leave because they were outlawed for a certain period by the parliament, the Althing.

In their portrayal of this society, both in its separate sphere and in its relation to and dependence on the outside world, the sagas thus frequently remind us that they are island literature. This island, Iceland, exists in a peculiarly translational sense to the outside world, especially the old home country, Norway. It retains certain elements of that world's past, yet fuses them into what can only be called a surprising social experiment, which gradually would also emerge as a rich literary culture even as that experiment was floundering. The literature of the island is therefore also a boundary literature - in more than one

sense. It asserts the existence of the island as a separate sphere, yet constantly explores the ties to the other realm, generally shown as anchored by the king (for the Icelanders appear to have been as fascinated by king and court as they were unwilling to accept such elevated power structures in their own society). The sagas portray characters who could translate themselves powerfully into this other system if the need or desire arose. *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* is no exception in this regard, and in fact adds a significant twist to the saga location and the various saga boundaries.

### III

The early part of *The Saga of Grettir* is characterized by locational fluidity; all seems aflutter with seafaring, warring Viking expeditions and the struggle against king Harald Finehair, who is about to conquer all of Norway and expel those who have fought against him. Many of these independent-minded people are spread throughout the Celtic islands and regions, caught in an interim space in a sort of floating diaspora. Gradually as if out of a mist, Iceland emerges on the horizon of the saga providing a haven for transients, including Grettir's great-grandfather. Onund called Onund Treeleg, as he had lost a leg in battle.

The family prospers: Onund's grandson Asmund becomes a major farmer. But Asmund's son Grettir turns out to be a troublesome child. In some sense Grettir resists "growing up" in the time-honored sense of social adaptation, while in fact he grows to be a large man of tremendous strength and considerable acuity. Governed by his great temper and silent sense of justice, he gets into serious trouble at an early age, killing a man in self-defense in a rather "childish" skirmish. Thus he is brought before the general assembly, the Althing, here called the "Thing".

The case was brought by the slain man's heirs. Grettir was sentenced to *lesser outlawry* and was banished from Iceland for three years.

When they rode back from the Thing, the chieftains rested their horses at Sledaas before going their separate ways. Grettir lifted up a boulder lying in the grass there, which is now called Grettishaf (Grettir's Lift). Many people went up to look at it and were astonished that such a young man could lift such a huge rock.

*(The Saga of Grettir the Strong 70)*

After this "useless" show of strength - but a marvellous foreshadowing of modern sports - Grettir leaves for Norway, returning the narrative to the floating arena of its origins. Apart from fishing, the ocean generally brings to mind the activities of sailing and swimming and the fate of drowning. But water is Grettir's element as much as it is that of islands. Their ship leaks, but Grettir bails it out, exhausting several men who empty the buckets for him. Later the ship breaks near an island in Norway and this is where Grettir performs his first truly heroic tasks, ridding the island of both human and supernatural titans. The saga moves with ease into the realm of the supernatural for Grettir is a border figure, capable of taking on foes from both sides. One anthropologist goes so far as to say that "*Grettis saga* is essentially about separating the human from the non-human world" (Hastrup 309). While I find this a little too narrow a reading of a work that is quite complex, especially in terms of Grettir's character, it is true that this liminality runs through the saga, at times intersecting with the border separating the individual from society. For Grettir's struggle with the radically other and his clear urge to undertake such battles imply

an unwillingness to step fully into the socialized realm. As another critic puts it addressing the issue in psychoanalytic terms. Grettir "fights the law [law of the father] instead of submitting to it and becoming a man" (Tulinius 307).

#### IV

But the border is a slippery place and things have a way of turning against this exceptional figure who defies the elements - who swimming, twice conquers the ocean waves to reach another element, fire and bring it back. But the first time he does so in Norway this Promethean "culture hero" is mistaken for a troll as he enters the house. He takes the fire, but as he leaves a scuffle breaks out by the fireplace. The fire spreads and the men who had been staying there die in the blaze. Among them are Icelanders and this results in Grettir's being sentenced to the greater outlawry of twenty years.

Instead of making his third trip across the ocean, Grettir tries to stick out this long period as an exile in his own country, leading a perilous life, with bounty money on his head knowing no safe place. This makes the saga especially interesting as a narrative of travel and place, as well as the tale of the hero's acts and sufferings. The last phase of the nineteen consecutive years he survives as an outlaw in Iceland, Grettir spends on a small island, Drangey, in the middle of a fjord in northern Iceland. Drangey literally means "rock-island" and as such it refers the reader to the rocks Grettir is reputed to have lifted in various places in Iceland (see above) and to his physical prowess: but perhaps it refers also to his rock of a head, which is so hard that when his arch-enemy finally wrests his fabulous sword from his dead hand (by cutting the hand off) and chops at Grettir's head... the sword could not withstand it and a piece broke off half-way down the edge" (*The Saga of Grettir*,



PHOTO: VIGGÓ JÓNSSON

176). The reader knows however, that there are soft spots within this skull, no less than in the sword.

Grettir's settlement in and occupation of Drangey is a story of a beleaguered life on an island which is both within and outside a larger island - Iceland. This story both impacts on and echoes the fate of Iceland, paradoxical though that echo may be. The structure and gestalt of the narrative, along with the representation of character and place, result in Grettir's merging with Drangey as an enigmatic iconic entity at the end of his life. This fusion of character and place has in fact been carefully foreshadowed in the saga, as we follow Grettir from one "island" to another. For the saga bears out, quite strikingly, the island-like character of many places. A mountain, a valley, a farm - especially when the dweller must constantly look out for comings and goings, and even for the possible treachery of those in his company - such places

become islands. Grettir lives in some of the most barren places in Iceland, yet not all of his "islands" look quite that forbidding. In fact, he even once comes upon a valley surrounded by glaciers, a sumptuous place with plants and sheep aplenty (see excerpt, chapter 69).

## V

Although Grettir seems safe in this Icelandic and to some extent supernatural Shangri La (he is on good terms with a hybrid figure, a half-troll who reigns over the valley) he is brought down by the solitude and lack of human company and he leaves. This can be partially explained by an earlier event in the saga, where Grettir goes right to the limits of his powers fighting the ghost Glam. "Just as Glam fell, the clouds drifted away from the moon and Glam glared up at it. Grettir himself said that this was the only sight that ever unnerved him." Then before Grettir is able to cut off Glam's head (common practice

when eliminating ghosts), the ghost casts a spell on him, closing with these words: “And this curse I lay on you: my eyes will always be before your sight and this will make you find it difficult to be alone. And this will lead to your death” (106-107).

A Freudian reader, remembering that Grettir descends from a tree-legged man and noticing the drama of the eyes here (what Grettir sees or doesn't see), will hardly be surprised when a leg wound later immobilizes Grettir and leads to his death. Such an interpretation of the saga, relying on the Oedipal symbolism of debilitated legs and eyes, revealing as it may be, will not be pursued here. Suffice it to say that while Grettir may claim that this was the only *sight* “that ever unnerved him,” he is in fact made insecure of what he does *not see*, he becomes afraid of the dark. For most of the year this is a sorry state for an outlaw in Iceland. His horizon draws in on him: he becomes a border figure in yet another sense. This terror, thrown upon him by a supernatural force, is echoed in his social situation for here again the divide between the human and nonhuman is similar to that between the solitary figure and society. Descending from the hidden valley, he continues to roam the country, seeking help. He:

went across the south of Iceland to the East Fjords. He spent the whole summer and winter travelling: and went to see all the leading men, but he was turned away everywhere and could find neither food nor a place to sleep. Then he went back to the north, staying in various places (146)

As Grettir travels around Iceland, the reader, following along, drawing up a mental map, gradually *experiences*, and comes to understand in a stirring and somewhat terrifying manner, that this

country, in spite of its considerable size, really *is* an island. There is no way out: the border becomes ever clearer. This island emerges for Grettir and his reader as a non-place in social terms. At the same time Grettir becomes a more complicated character, a social outcast as much as an outlaw, a living legend but a “poisoned” individual. As Iceland reveals itself as a limited and insular social space in the saga, Grettir himself emerges as an island. The saga is in part a study of the loneliness of this long-distance runner, of the many borders that encircle his life and fate, borders that also run right through him. One of the characters notes of Grettir “sitt er hvort, gæfa eða gjörvileikur (*Grettissaga* 105), or that good fortune need not to along with great ability or gift.<sup>1</sup> “Gjörvileikur” is a difficult word to translate, for while it may refer to Grettir's physical looks and abilities, also it may refer to other qualities and talents: he is a poet when he wants to be and in the saga there are several references to Grettir as a clever and resourceful man, not unlike another great traveller and island figure, Odysseus. Odysseus was away from home for twenty years, though there is no returning home for Grettir. He is estranged from society in a more radical sense than Odysseus. In his famous essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot argues that the truly original poet or “individual talent” breaks with tradition in such a way as to change it and be united with it once it has reformed its “ideal order” (5). One assumes that this may hold true for all truly talented individuals who find a forum for their gifts. They make their mark, apparently outside the existing order, but this mark is assimilated as the order slightly adjusts itself.

## VI

Grettir's talents lead to a radical break with the social order. He is an outlaw,





PHOTO: VIGGÓ JÓNSSON

### On Drangey

someone whose life is not worth that of those who live within the law, except perhaps in monetary terms when his life is extinguished and the bounty collected. In an attempt to step outside the constant threat of ambush or attack, this travelling island of a man decides to go to Drangey where he is told he will prevail over “weapons or trickery provided you keep a close watch over the ladders” (*The Saga of Grettir* 155). His brother Illugi, in part to alleviate Grettir’s fear of the dark, decides to accompany him. On the way there they agree to let the slave Glaum join them. The first description of the island is reminiscent of the hidden valley: there is grass, birds aplenty and a fair number of sheep. “Grettir settled down there” (*The Saga of Grettir* 159; see excerpt, chapter 69).

In one sense, this may seem like a miniature version of the settlement

of Iceland. The three men form a little society, ranging in power from Grettir to Glaum. The absence of women is perhaps somewhat alleviated when Grettir swims to get fire again (a feat that would make him the best-known swimmer in Icelandic history), for there is in fact not only fire but a woman at the end of that swim. It is noteworthy in fact that Grettir’s connection with women constitutes a separate kind of sphere; he more than once helps women in need; he and his mother are very close; and the one time he is captured in the saga, it is a woman who sets him free. But women in this society do not have the power to provide a secure haven for Grettir; they can only help him on his way.

The “settlement” of Drangey is however, crucially different from the original settlement of Iceland, for the

former is also an invasion and an occupation. The island is indeed a fortress and when the farmers come to fetch their sheep, the new lord of Drangey is standing tall and looking down at them in their boat. "I'm not letting go of what I've got my hands on" the outlaw says (*The Saga of Grettir* 160).

For a while, Grettir eludes the weapons and tricks of the farmers' leader, a man appropriately called Thorbjorn Hook. But Grettir's little dominion seems fated to fall. Perhaps there is no way of escaping society and the outside world on a get-away/cast-away island. Perhaps the social structure replicated on the island was doomed - certainly slavery only lasted a short time in Iceland after its settlement, and the saga may also be signalling the end of a heroic age. It is interesting that Grettir's doom is sealed by two parallel factors, as so often in the story, a human and a supernatural one: the slave fails the brothers at crucial moments and witchcraft is used to cause Grettir's axe to hit his own leg.

## VII

The reception of *The Saga of Grettir* seems to confirm the theory that the mark of the gifted will be assimilated by society. This mode of reception actually begins within the saga, for as soon as he is dead, Grettir seems to have paid his debt. The poison disappears and he is hailed as a man of remarkable strength and abilities, one who is avenged by his only surviving brother in Constantinople, which seems as much the centre of the earth as Drangey appears to be its very periphery. Thus the sagaman (or narrator) appears to approve of the killing of the evil Thorbjorn Hook, although he and his companions had "lawfully" killed Grettir the Strong who is called "our fellow countryman" at the end of one of the manuscripts of the saga.<sup>2</sup> This attribute is picked up by the leading Icelandic novelist Halldór Laxness in

an afterword to his edition of the saga, where he states that the saga shows us, "in a supernatural size, the picture of Iceland and its man, with the middle ages as a backdrop. Here is the story of the man who alone and bereft is condemned to fight the wilderness, tempests and the dark, the story, perhaps, of the strong man who has no ally, except the heart in his breast, in his struggle with nature, human society, godly powers - and himself" (284).

Laxness aptly conveys the manner in which many readers have taken *The Saga of Grettir* to heart. In this reading Grettir the outlaw has become a national hero, someone who personifies and sums up the travails of many an Icelander in dark times of hardship, restricted movement and an island's loneliness (cf. Hastrup's useful summary of the reception of the saga). This interpretation even finds in the Drangey occupied by Grettir a true Iceland, a world of his own making and seems to recast the "other" Iceland as a space hostile to more than just the single outlaw, perhaps viewing it as the colonial island it had become when the saga of Grettir was written - or in any case, as a universe too big.

- 1 In the new English translation this is rendered thus: "fate and fortune do not always go hand in hand" (*The Saga of Grettir*. 105.) i.e., "fortune" here seems to stand for "gjörvileikur," which is a little misleading.
- 2 As in the case of other sagas of Icelanders there is no original manuscript of *The Saga of Grettir*, only later copies. The new English translation used here does include the words from this manuscript: "Here ends the Saga of Grettir Asmundarson, our fellow countryman" (*The Saga of Grettir* 1911).

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# Interview with Yrsa Sigurðardóttir

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by Avery Simundsson

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*The combination of civil engineer and professional writer is one I have never heard before! How did that come about?*

I started out as an engineer, the writing came later. It was not planned at all; I was very content being an avid reader. Although there are not many engineers writing novels I think crime fiction writers have a very mixed background, more so than writers of fine literature for example. I know crime writers that have careers ranging from being lawyers, doctors and actors to fishermen. There is no one correct career that leads the way for writing good crime fiction. This is one of the reasons it has such variety and often good insight.

*Do you think having a background in engineering has influenced or helped your writing, or vice versa? Do they have complimentary skill sets?*

I think there is a bit of overlap, for one, having pretty good oversight of the big picture. I also think my professional side has helped me when it comes to doing research, I know when to stop and can pretty easily pick up on the bits that matter. But in most other aspects the two are different, a difference that makes it easier to do both in conjunction, i.e. work a full day as an engineer and then come home to write. Because of the difference in the two tasks, such days do not feel too tedious. I have never had any problem regarding separating these two professions, it just happens automatically. This being said I must note that in the beginning of

my writing career my editor pointed out to me that I had to stop describing rooms using measurements.

*How did literature and stories play a role in your life when you were young? Do you think Icelanders have continued to value literature as much as they have in past decades?*

My entry into writing came about from a longstanding love affair with reading. I have always been a very enthusiastic reader, from the time I learned to read. The year I turned twelve I gave myself the challenge of reading one book a day for one year and only real books counted, i.e. no graphic novels, comics or picture books. I managed up until my birthday in August when my aunt gave me *Gone with the Wind* as a birthday present. It was hundreds and hundreds of pages but so engrossing that I couldn't put to down. But I lost some days and was unable to recuperate from that so I failed my challenge.

Regarding Iceland, literature has long had a very high standing here. It is a large part of our heritage and has remained important even to this day when competition with various other forms of entertainment or leisure are now available. A book for example is still a very traditional Christmas gift and probably the most common thing to be found under the Christmas tree in most Icelandic homes. A Christmas where you don't get a book is considered a flop.

*What drew you into crime fiction? How*



PHOTO COURTESY OF YRSA SIGURDARDÓTTIR

*did you decide to pursue that after children's books?*

When I decided to put children's books to one side and write for adults it seemed sensible to write the sort of book I would like to read and that is crime fiction. I think most authors would agree with me that it feels most natural to write the type of work one enjoys and respects.

*Were you expecting your novels to be such a success internationally?*

My international success came as a complete surprise to me and I have never even given it a thought as it seemed so outlandish. It still does, to be honest, and I continue to write for my original audience which is the Icelandic reader. I think if I tried to write something I believed to be successful abroad I would probably shoot and miss. One must be authentic if one's work is to be any good.

*Why do you think that Iceland, a land of incredibly low crime rates, has become so engrossed in crime fiction stories, both readers and authors?*

I think that Icelandic readers are no

different from readers elsewhere when it comes to what they like. Crime fiction, with its feeling of justice at the end of the books, appeals to people in most parts of the world. Prior to the rise of local crime fiction such novels in translation were very popular. As soon as the realization came that it really does not matter what the actual crime rate is when you base a crime novel in certain location then the writing of Icelandic crime fiction took off. The thing is that crime fiction is just that, fiction. It is not true crime. As long as the story has the feel that it could happen you are OK.

*Why do you think that genre has become so popular on the island? Do you still think it would be as popular if crime was more prevalent?*

I do not think that the popularity of crime fiction is related in a big way to crime rate. The format is simply compelling, it engages curiosity and allows the reader access to a much more in-depth analysis of what serious crimes like murder entail than what one reads in the paper, although

imaginary. Crime novels have also proven to be a very effective method of social commentary that is relatable to most. The characters, often flawed, are also an important part of the appeal, as is the sense of justice that is so often lacking in real life.

*Why do you think the crime rate has stayed so low, even the Reykjavik, compared to other locals of a similar size?*

I think the low crime rate is really a byproduct of the minuscule population size. We are around 320.000, living on an island. It is easier to monitor those that are about to go off track in such a small group of people than in larger cities or countries. Also, solving crime is easier as the pool of suspects is not that large. Coupled with these demographics we have a stronger social system in place than many other countries, so desperation is usually not an incentive for criminal behaviour.

*How do you engage in the creative thinking process, or idea generating?*

It really comes down to thinking in my case. I get a seed for an idea and then I focus quite rigorously on how to expand the idea and bring other things to the table until I have a wider ranging storyline. Getting a fully formed idea in one go is the exception for me, not the rule.

*When writing crime fiction, do you usually work the story around a pre-decided conclusion? Or do you start with your characters and see where they go?*

Once I have formed the story in broad strokes in my head I begin to write. I might write the first one or two chapters without knowing the conclusion just to get the thought process going but when I start writing for real I always know who did it and why. That is not to say that I never veer from the original plan reading the body of the work. Much to the contrary, I very often add various twists and turns I had not originally envisioned during the writing process. But very seldom do I change the planned conclusion.

*Do you ever draw inspiration from actual crimes you read about?*

Yes, I have done that on occasion. Usually I prefer to come up with an idea of my own making but I have taken elements from actual events and spiced them up a bit. I do however make sure to never use actual people as characters as I do not want to add to the hurt of those that have already been through an ordeal.

*What is the best investment you have made to increase your writing success?*

I think the biggest difference to my career was realizing that one needs an agent for the foreign market. In Iceland there are no literary agents as these are not needed due to the small scale of things.


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PHOTO: LORNA TERGESEN

## Father of Canola

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by Betty Jane Wylie

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I have a lot to write and think about these days so I'm going to serve two connections with one obligation.

Some of you may be aware of my Icelandic connection. My maternal grandparents were Icelandic; they came separately as immigrants to Winnipeg where they met and married and eventually moved up to Gimli (90 miles north on Lake Winnipeg) and raised their family. My mother, born in Winnipeg, was the first in her family to marry outside the genetic bloodline, so I'm only half

Icelandic, but my roots are deep. Iceland calls anyone on this continent who has such roots "Western Icelanders".

I'm a member of ICCT (the Icelandic Canadian Club of Toronto); I subscribe to Lögberg-Heimskringla, the oldest ethnic newspaper in North America, and to The Icelandic Connection, a biennial magazine, and I contribute to them occasionally, not just money but writing. And I'm studying Icelandic, a very difficult language to learn, especially if you don't do your homework. At present,





**Baldur Stefansson**

I owe a piece to the *Connection* about a man I never heard of (shame on me), but who, when I suggested him as a subject, was well-known to the editor, my cousin, Lorna Tergesen. All Icelanders are related, one way or another, which is why we look so much alike, but my cousin, a widow like me, was married to my first cousin who shared a grandfather with me. She's a real kin keeper and the closest thing to a sister I have. Enough genealogy.

You have to know the provenance of my suggestion. I swim every morning and

have become friendly with another daily swimmer (when she's in the city). Ruth Hayhoe is professor of comparative higher education at the University of Toronto but that ID on the book I am about to discuss barely begins to describe the range of her scholarship. She has spent half her life in China, still dividing her time in two countries, teaching and writing, fluent in language and friendship. She was telling me about her latest book that she edited (she writes books in two languages), with Julia Pan, another

swimmer and UofT research associate at OISE. The book's title didn't mean much to me, nor will it to you: Canadian Universities in China's Transformation (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016). It's about collaboration in different areas such as environmental sciences, marine science, engineering, management, law, agriculture, medicine, education, minority cultures and women's studies. The last chapter is the one I took note of, introducing Baldur Stefansson to me (and to you?). That's Professor Stefansson of the University of Manitoba's Department of Plant Science, a very modest man, by all accounts, which may be why I never heard of him.

Baldur Stefansson ((1917-2002) was born in Vestfold, Manitoba, and educated at the University of Manitoba (Dip. Agriculture, 1949; BSA, 1950; MSC, 1952; PhD, 1966. With another scientist, (Dr. Keith Downey) he developed a variation of rapeseed for use as an edible oil - known to us now as canola. Did you know that Canada sells more rapeseed than wheat? (Latest figures 2014; the rapeseed cash crop surpassed wheat in 2012.) Stefansson worked with his agriculture counterpart in China to produce a rapeseed crop suitable for livestock and human consumption. A human advantage was a greater opportunity for women in agriculture. Apparently rapeseed is not as physically demanding to tend.

The Father of Canola, as Baldur came to be called, was honoured with so many awards, it's hard to list them all. I will cite them here and leave it to my editor to condense the list (courtesy of Google):

Royal Bank Award in recognition of a contribution to humanity, 1975; Fellow, Agricultural Institute of Canada, 1975; Honourary Life Member, Canadian Seed Growers Association, 1976; Queen's Jubilee Medal, 1977; Grindley

Award - In recognition of a singular contribution to Canadian agriculture, 1978; H.R. MacMillan Laureate in Agriculture, 1980; Agronomy Merit Award, 1980; CSP Foods Canola Award, 1981; Manitoba Institute of Agrologists Distinguished Agrologist Award, 1981; Canadian Barley & Oilseeds Conference Award, 1982; Honourary Life Member, Manitoba Institute of Agrologists, 1984; Officer of the Order of Canada, 1985; Professor Emeritus, University of Manitoba, 1985; GCIRC International Award for Research in Rapeseed, 1987; McAnsh Award, 1989; Canada Iceland Foundation Scholarship honouring Dr. Baldur Stefansson, 1991; Honourary Doctorate, University of Manitoba, 1997; Wolfe Prize in Agriculture (Israel), 1998; Order of the Buffalo Hunt, 1998; Order of Manitoba, 2000; Order of the Falcon (Iceland), 2000; Honourary Doctorate, University of Iceland, 2000; Inducted to the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame, 2002.

Not bad for an Icelandic-Canadian boy from the prairies!

*Rev. Stefan Jonasson*

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## The Royal Grave in New Iceland

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by Natalie Guttormsson  
(with help from Salín Guttormsson)

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What I love most about being part-Icelandic is our people's obsession with stories and genealogy. For such a small country, Iceland's detailed and preserved historical records are incomparable. Although there were many reasons for, and reactions to, the great migration of 1875-1915 from Iceland to North America, today there is a collective enthusiasm to revive the connections between the Western-Icelanders and ancestral homeland of Iceland. As a volunteer genealogist for Icelandic Roots and a descendant of Friðrika Björnsdóttir, who is the woman at the centre of the "Friðrika Björnsdóttir

Memorial Restoration Project", I am both excited and proud to share her story.

The heart of the Royal Grave Memorial project has been to preserve and mark the grave of Friðrika Björnsdóttir, which was a site known only to select family members until a few years ago. Friðrika died in 1884 and was buried on her homestead, Árskógur, in what is now the Municipality of Bifrost-Riverton in Manitoba. Until the fall of 2016, her grave consisted of a worn picket fence surrounding a lone chokecherry tree in a patch of earth overgrown with weeds in the middle of a field at Árskógur. There was no visible



marker to indicate that a remarkable woman with ties to the Danish Crown was laid to rest there.

The preservation project began ten years ago in 2007, when a local history enthusiast, Nelson Gerrard approached a descendant with the idea. This descendant gave a generous donation which led to the formation of a committee made up of several of Friðrika's descendants. The purpose of the committee was to create a plan and raise money to commemorate the gravesite of their ancestor. The project stalled many times over the years due to committee members being spread out across Canada and a lack of funding. Eventually it picked up momentum and enthusiasm in early 2016 as a plan came together with a final goal in mind and a timeline was determined. Family members have repaired and restored the original picket fence, have pruned the chokecherry tree and culled the weeds as best as they could, despite a case of poison ivy!

In the spring of 2016 a simple plaque marking Friðrika's name and dates of birth and death, along with her husband's name was installed with a triangular limestone pillar meant to represent the past, present and future, to permanently mark her grave. Then in the fall of 2016 a historic homestead sign was installed at the Árskógur farm, which is currently privately owned. Additionally, in the Riverton Memorial Centennial Park an interpretive panel was erected to tell the life story of Friðrika Björnsdóttir, explain her Royal connection and share some history of home burials in the New Iceland region.

Friðrika's Royal connection has been the focus of the campaign because it makes her story of survival and perseverance



PHOTO: SALÍN GUTTORMSSON

all the more interesting, even though she did not enjoy any glory in being a descendant of Danish Royalty. Friðrika's maternal grandfather, Samúel, was the son of a woman known as Soffía María, the daughter of a Danish merchant in Copenhagen. His father, as stated in Danish church records, was the Crown Prince Frederick, later to be King Frederick VI of Denmark. Samúel was raised at royal expense by a foster family in Copenhagen. In his early twenties, he emigrated to the trading port of Eskiðfjörður in East Iceland, where he stayed working as a carpenter and craftsman. He then married an Icelandic woman, settled in the region of Fáskrúðsfjörður, and had several children.

Samúel's eldest child was Lovísa María, Friðrika's mother. While working on farms in the area, Lovísa met a man named Björn,



PHOTO: JOHN MOWRY

Four generations. Left: Andrea (Guttormsson) Mowry, Great-great-granddaughter, mother of Natalie/Amma to Thor. Centre: Natalie Guttormsson. Great-great-granddaughter, mother to Thor in baby bucket: Thor Guttormsson-McLeod, Great-great-great-grandson. Right: Meredith MacFarquhar, great-granddaughter. Vilborg (Friðrika's second daughter born in Canada) had six children, two of whom were Pétur and Halldóra. Andrea, Natalie, Thor come through Pétur. Meredith comes through Halldóra.

and together they had Friðrika in 1849. But, as it was for many of Iceland's lower class, Björn and Lovísa were never able to marry (if they had wanted to) because they did not own their own land. At the age of ten, Friðrika was fostered to a new family and her parents split to work on different farms. Friðrika was very lucky because

the man who took her in as a foster child was the town Doctor in Eskifjörður, Bjarni Thorlacíus. Bjarni and his wife, Gytte Elín, had no children and treated Friðrika as their own until she met and married her husband Pétur. Even though Royal blood was in her veins, Friðrika did not receive any special treatment. She



PHOTO: MEREDITH MACFARQUHAR

still had to work to survive, like any other Icelander of her stature.

Friðrika, along with her husband and their three children, as well as her mother Lovísa, emigrated to Canada in 1876 to start a new life. Their life in Canada is better known, as the emigration story of Icelanders has been told many times over. Friðrika and Pétur spent the first winter at Sandy Bar where their first three children all died of smallpox. After such a devastating loss, the couple went on to have five more children, all daughters, and to settle at the homestead they named Árskógur, where they lived a decent life. It was shortly after the arrival of their last child that Friðrika died from complications after birth. The year was 1884. The original community cemetery had been closed and a new site had not yet been decided. For this reason, Friðrika and many others now forgotten, were buried at their homesteads.

Of Friðrika's five daughters, four went on to have families of their own. Here in North America, Friðrika's descendants number in the hundreds and are scattered across both Canada and the United States. Through the "Friðrika Björnsdóttir Memorial Restoration Project", we have been able to reach out and connect with some of these descendants of Friðrika. The four family names of those four daughters are: Magnússon, Guttormsson, Vídalín, and Jónsson. We've also been able to connect with descendants of Samúel's other children who are still living in Iceland and telling the same story of Samúel's royal blood that we in North America have heard.

The "Friðrika Björnsdóttir Memorial Restoration Project" has also led the committee of family members to make new and stronger connections within the Icelandic-North American community. Media support has been led by the team

at As It Happened Productions, who also created a documentary about the project that debuted at the Riverton Reunion Days/Canada 150 Celebrations (June 30-July 2).

The project has been covered in local media, national media, as well as in articles in Iceland and Denmark. A full list of all the media coverage the project has received can be found on the project webpage under "media". The project has also helped us maintain and/or create ties with the Icelandic River Heritage Sites Inc., Icelandic Roots, the Scandinavian Cultural Centre, the Danish Consulate in Winnipeg, as well as other Icelandic groups both in North America and Iceland.

The project committee is also very grateful for the donations and grants received from family members, the community, Icelandic Roots and the Manitoba Government Heritage Grants program. Fundraising efforts have been successful, but donations are still needed to reach the final goal to cover the costs of the project. Full details of the memorial and how to donate can be found on the project website: <http://tindratales.wixsite.com/fridikamemorial>

Friðrika Björnsdóttir also has her own Facebook page. Email inquiries can be made to: [fridikamemorial@gmail.com](mailto:fridikamemorial@gmail.com)

Further information can be found through the following sites:

Canada Alliance 150 page: [https://alliance150.ca/author/the\\_fririka\\_bjrnsdttir\\_memorial\\_restoration\\_projec/](https://alliance150.ca/author/the_fririka_bjrnsdttir_memorial_restoration_projec/)

Canada 150 Passport page: <https://passport2017.ca/events/fridrika-bjornsdottir-memorial-restoration-project-dedicationunveiling-ceremony>



# Canada, the Icelanders, and Lord Dufferin<sup>1</sup>

by Dr. Ryan Eyford, PhD



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

Lord Dufferin in 1878

Canada is celebrating a big anniversary this year. It is 150 years since the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick formed a new confederation called the Dominion of Canada. In 1867, there were no Icelanders in Canada (so far as we know). The first Icelander to settle in Canada was Sigtryggur Jónasson, who arrived in 1872. By that time, Manitoba and British

Columbia had become the fifth and sixth provinces of the Dominion. The first large group migration from Iceland to Canada occurred in 1873, the year Prince Edward Island joined Confederation, and some of those people became the first settlers of New Iceland in 1875. In the years leading up to the creation of the eighth and ninth provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905, thousands of Icelanders migrated to Canada. The majority of them found homes in the west, especially here in Manitoba. In the 1911 Census of Canada, more than 12,000 people gave “Icelandic” as the answer to the question about their “Racial or Tribal origin.”<sup>2</sup>

When I began working on my book *White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West*, one of my main research questions was: how did Canada become home to so many Icelandic immigrants? Such an outcome was far from inevitable. In fact, there were many compelling reasons that might have prevented such an outcome, including distance. The journey from Iceland to Manitoba in the 1870s and 1880s was time-consuming and arduous. In the early 1870s, it was probably more likely that the Icelandic migrants would settle predominantly in the U.S. Midwest, where there was already a well-established pattern of migration from the Nordic countries. Indeed, many Icelanders did settle in Wisconsin, and later Minnesota



Lord Dufferin

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

in the 1870s. So again, why Canada?

The basic answer is that the government of the new dominion desperately wanted immigrants, especially farmers, farm labourers, and female domestic servants. Canada's official immigrant recruitment efforts were focused almost exclusively on northwestern Europe, and immigration officials worked diligently so that at least some immigrants from the Nordic countries would choose Canada over the United States. Various forms of travel subsidies and bonuses were offered to convince migrants to choose Canada over the United States.<sup>3</sup> The 1873 Icelandic immigrants each received a per capita bonus from the Province of Ontario (\$6 per adult, \$3 per child) for settling in the Muskoka district of that province.<sup>4</sup>

Canada especially wanted immigrants to travel to its recently acquired territories

in the Northwest to help colonize the homelands of the Cree, Assiniboine, Anishinaabe, Dakota, and Metis peoples. The Department of the Interior was even prepared to offer land reserves for the exclusive use of particular European ethno-religious groups. This was how the Icelandic reserve, or New Iceland, came into being in 1875.<sup>5</sup>

In sum, Canada wanted white settlers to colonize Indigenous lands in the Northwest, and was willing to offer subsidies, loans, land grants, and other forms of government support to encourage migrants to choose the young dominion over the mighty

republic to the south. But this general context still doesn't answer the question of "why Icelanders"? Norman P. Macdonald, a historian of Canadian immigration policy, once expressed his puzzlement as to why Canada went to great lengths, and incurred significant expenses to recruit a group of migrants who, in the 1870s, had almost no experience as settlers in North America.<sup>6</sup> Why did Canada begin to actively encourage Icelandic immigration?

The answer to that question involves a popular and influential Irish lord, Frederick Hamilton Temple Blackwood, the 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, better known as Lord Dufferin, who was Governor General of Canada between 1872 and 1878. The fact that Lord Dufferin played some role in fostering Icelandic migration to this country and the creation of New

Iceland has long been part of the story of the Icelanders in Canada. However, Dufferin's exact role has been somewhat ambiguous; did he invite the Icelanders to Canada?<sup>7</sup> Did he intervene to convince skeptical Canadian ministers to fund the New Iceland colonization scheme?<sup>8</sup> What I've found in Dufferin's papers and the records of the Department of Agriculture is that the Governor General did give his endorsement to Icelandic immigration to Canada just as it was getting underway. In 1873, Canadian emigration agents noticed a few Icelanders passing through ports in Britain and on the European continent. John Lowe, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, sought Dufferin's advice on whether or not to actively recruit Icelanders as immigrants. Dufferin wrote in reply, "I should say, the Icelanders would make good immigrants. They very much resemble the Norwegians. They are quiet peaceable folk, Lutheran in religion but not fanatical."<sup>9</sup> With that endorsement, the Canadian government began offering subsidies to Icelandic immigrants.

Dufferin continued to support Icelandic immigrants when their prospects seemed bleak. In 1875, the Barbadian-Canadian missionary John Taylor appealed to Dufferin to help relieve the suffering of the Icelanders at Kinmount in Ontario, who had lost their employment on a railway project. Dufferin's executive secretary Henry Moody forwarded Taylor's letter to the Minister of Agriculture along with the statement: "His Excellency will be glad to learn that you feel at liberty to make some recommendation calculated to relieve the distress of those who have already settled here as well as to promote the arrival of more immigrants from a country in which his Excellency feels the warmest interest."<sup>10</sup> The recommendation that the Department of Agriculture formulated

was to send a delegation to the Northwest to choose a site for a colony. This was the Icelandic Deputation that chose the southwest shore of Lake Winnipeg as the site for an Icelandic reserve.

In sum, Lord Dufferin was consulted on the question of Icelandic immigration government officials and continued to express support for Icelandic immigrants through their difficult first years in Canada.

However, there is another question to answer: why was an Irish lord considered an expert on Iceland and Icelanders? What was the origin of that "warm interest" that he had toward the people of Iceland? In large measure it was because Dufferin had spent a few weeks in Iceland as a young man. In 1856, Dufferin—then thirty years old—journeyed the North Atlantic in a schooner called the *Foam*. He wrote about his travels in a series of letters to his mother, which was later published as the book *Letters from High Latitudes*. The book proved to be very popular and was continuously in print for many years afterward. A major reason for its success was its humour. For instance, Dufferin recounts a banquet in the home of the Governor of Iceland where there were so many toasts that he quickly became so drunk he had difficulty remembering what happened. "Then began a series of transactions of which I have no distinct recollection; in fact, the events of the next five hours recur to me in as great disarray as reappear the vestiges of a country that has been disfigured by some deluge...I gather...from the evidence...that the dinner was excellent."<sup>11</sup> The Canadian civil servants who worked to recruit and resettle Icelanders derived their knowledge of the country and its inhabitants from Dufferin's book. Edmund Allan Meredith, deputy minister of the Interior, recalled having a laugh-out-loud moment on a

train while reading Dufferin's Letters.<sup>12</sup> In his introduction to the 1910 edition of the book, the Icelandic scholar Dr. Jón Stefánsson wrote "How strongly forever after he was under the spell of Iceland was seen in 1877. In that year, [Dufferin] went out of his way to visit the little Icelandic colony on Lake Winnipeg."<sup>13</sup>

At the time Dufferin visited New Iceland, the Icelanders were in desperate need of friends. They had just come through the crisis of the 1876-77 smallpox epidemic, and some influential Manitobans, including the physician, Dr. J.S. Lynch, who had come to treat them during the crisis, were openly questioning whether Icelanders were "racially fit" to be colonists.<sup>14</sup> Dufferin was advised against going to the colony, but insisted on visiting Gimli. Weather almost prevented the trip, but the Governor General arrived in the little village on September 14, 1877. Dufferin toured the village and entered the homes of a few of the settlers. In his remarks that day, he told the Icelanders that he had "pledged my personal credit to my Canadian friends on the successful development of your settlement." Dufferin expressed his sorrow at the hardships they had gone through, especially the smallpox epidemic, but categorically rejected the idea that the Icelanders were racially unfit to be colonists. All they needed was an opportunity: "Beneath the genial influences of the fresh young world to which you have come, the dormant capacities of your race, which adverse climatic and geographical conditions may have somewhat stunted and benumbed, will bud and burgeon forth in all their pristine exuberance...."<sup>15</sup>

Lord Dufferin is unquestionably a significant figure in the early history of the Dominion of Canada. He made several significant contributions during his time as Governor General, including helping to guide the country through its first major

political crisis, the Pacific Scandal that forced John A. Macdonald from power in 1873, and granting amnesty to the leaders of the 1869-70 Red River Resistance.<sup>16</sup> He was also a champion of immigration, and frequently spoke publically on the subject.<sup>17</sup>

However, Dufferin, like many of the Dominion of Canada's early leaders, is a figure with whom it is hard to identify with. He was born to privilege, part of the hereditary nobility in a profoundly unequal society with a rigidly hierarchical class structure. He was an imperialist, later becoming Viceroy of India, and a powerful imperial functionary during an era when Indigenous peoples around the world were dispossessed on an immense scale, including in the Canadian west. But at the same time, Dufferin was also humanist, a skilled diplomat, and an opponent of religious intolerance. He believed in the ability of immigrants to make important contributions to the economic, social, and cultural life of the country. While visiting Gimli in 1877, he stated: "In becoming Englishmen and subjects of Queen Victoria, you need not forget your own time-honoured customs or the picturesque annals of your forefathers. On the contrary, I trust you will continue to cherish for all time the heart-stirring literature of your nation, and that from generation to generation your little ones will continue to learn in your ancient Sagas that industry, energy, fortitude, perseverance and stubborn endurance have ever been the characteristics of the noble Icelandic race."<sup>18</sup>

Dufferin hoped that Canada would be a place where the disadvantaged would be able to make a new start, and with their hard work, build new lives for themselves and for their families. On the 150th anniversary of Confederation, that is a vision of Canada that remains as relevant as ever.



## Endnotes

- 1 Adapted from a speech given at the Arborg Thorrablot, 18 March 2017.
- 2 See Library and Archives Canada, *1911 Census*, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1911/Pages/about-census.aspx> (accessed 1 August 2017)
- 3 For more on Canada's immigration and colonization policies in the late nineteenth century, see chapter 1 of Ryan Eyford, *White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016).
- 4 Archives of Ontario, Records of the Department of Immigration, RG 11-19, volume 3, "Refund Bonus Paid to Immigrants."
- 5 See chapter 2 of Eyford, *White Settler Reserve*.
- 6 Norman P. Macdonald, *Canada: Immigration and Colonization, 1841-1903* (Aberdeen, UK: Aberdeen University Press, 1966) 212.
- 7 David Arnason, "The Icelanders in Manitoba: A Myth of Beginnings," in David Arnason and Vincent Arnason, eds., *The New Icelanders: A North American Community* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1994), 3.
- 8 Walter J. Lindal, *Canada Ethnica II: The Icelanders in Canada* (Winnipeg: Viking Press, 1967), 113.
- 9 Lord Dufferin to John Lowe, 13 May 1873, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Office of the Governor General of Canada fonds, RG 7, G 20, vol. 129, file 3066.
- 10 Harry Moody to John Lowe, 16 April 1875, LAC, Department of Agriculture fonds, RG 17, A I 1, volume 131, docket 13750.
- 11 Frederick Temple Blackwood, Marquis of Dufferin and Ava [Lord Dufferin], *Letters from High Latitudes Being Some Account of a Voyage in the Schooner Yacht "Foam" 85 O.M. to Iceland, Jan Mayen & Spitzbergen in 1856* (London: John Murray, 1857), 60-61.
- 12 Sandra Gwyn, *The Private Capital: Ambition and Love in the Age of Macdonald and Laurier* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984), 164.
- 13 Jón Stefánsson, introduction to Lord Dufferin, *Letters from High Latitudes* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1910), vii.
- 14 "Lt. Governor of Manitoba Transmits Report by Dr. S.S. Lynch on Condition of the Icelandic Settlement, Lake Winnipeg, 1877," LAC, Department of Secretary of State fonds, RG 6, A I, vol. 28, file 536.
- 15 *Speeches of the Earl of Dufferin, Governor General of Canada, 1872-1878: Complete* (Toronto: J.R. Robertson, 1878), 93.
- 16 See Ben Forster, "BLACKWOOD, FREDERICK TEMPLE, 1st Marquess of DUFFERIN and AVA," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003-, accessed August 1, 2017, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/blackwood\\_frederick\\_temple\\_13E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/blackwood_frederick_temple_13E.html).
- 17 *Canada: A Place for the Emigrant as Shewn by Speeches Delivered by His Excellency Lord Dufferin, Governor General, During a Tour Made in the Summer of 1874* (Toronto: J.M. Trout, 1874).
- 18 *Ibid.*, 94.

# Filling in the Pieces

## How I received help in piecing together the story of my great great aunt

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by Kristín M. Jóhannsdóttir

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I can't remember when it was exactly that that my cousin Siggí first told me of my great great aunt, Katrín Geirsdóttir, but I remember that her story touched me. She had the bad luck of being born into poverty but falling in love with a man of standing. She bore him a child but he didn't want to or wasn't allowed to marry her. Another man wanted to marry her and take the child as his but she was proud and demanded that the father of the boy acknowledge him. Instead the child was taken away from her, as poor unmarried women were not allowed raise their own children in those days. She then moved across the country, met another man, had with him two children and moved with the young family to Canada. We didn't really know more.

It wasn't Katrín's emigration that had touched me but the love story that occurred in the south of Iceland, the child torn from its mother, her pride, the question why she rejected the man who wanted to marry her knowing that she was risking her future with her son. She must have been hoping for a better life of higher standing. A hope that was all in vain, it seemed

Through the years I have researched her story, tried to add more pieces trying to understand what kind of a life she had lead. I've read everything that I have found that could help me in this search. However,

the most important part of the search has been the people that have helped me. I want to tell you about them and how the kindness of family, friends and strangers has helped me piece the story together.

It was during my years in Winnipeg, in July 2000 to be exact, that I received an e-mail from my cousin Siggí (Sigurjón Vilhjálmsson). He's the one who had originally told me about Katrín and from him I've learned more about my mom's paternal family than anyone else. Siggí told me that he had been speaking to a relative of ours, Jóhanna Guðmundsdóttir, who had been to Manitoba several times and she had told him that Katrín's children, Guðrún and Björn had lived in Manitoba. Both had died without any children of their own. Along with the letter, Siggí sent me information about the family as well as a photocopy from Vesturfaraskrá where Katrín is listed along with husband Skúli Þorsteinsson and two children. Siggí asked me if I could try to find out more, seeing that I was in Winnipeg.

This was before the time of Facebook but the Icelandic National League of North America had a fairly active mailing list where you could post messages. I decided to try to use that list, so I posted a message where I asked if anyone knew the name Katrín Geirsdóttir and what had happened to her. Not many hours passed before I

received mail from Nelson Gerrard, the great Manitoban teacher and historian. He hadn't known Katrín but for what seems a sheer coincidence, he had letters of hers, borrowed from one Lorraine Sigvaldason of Stonewall, Manitoba. He offered to make me a copy of the letters and invited me over for coffee.

These letters more than hundred years old turned out to be a treasure for me. Amongst them were letters from Katrín's parents, my great great grandfather and grandmother, as well as from her brother, my great grandfather. It particularly struck me how his handwriting was the same as that of my afi, his son. This wouldn't have been strange if had he raised him, but my afi was raised by foster parents and not by his own parents. But that's a side story.

It was immediately clear, though, that the letters wouldn't tell me anything about my great great aunt's stay in Canada because only one of the letters was written during her years in that country. All the other ones were from her time in Iceland. But what did that tell me? Did her family stop writing to her after she moved west or were only those letters lost? Somehow that didn't seem so believable and it made me think about what I had read, that many people at home weren't happy with the emigration. This also fit with what cousin Siggí had told me about great grandfather. Whenever Siggí asked him about Katrín he only answered with: "She moved out west." And that was it. No more discussions of Katrín.

Nelson's letter was not the only response I got to my query on the INL mailing list. I got a phone call from Stan Jonason of Marquette, Manitoba. Stan hadn't known Katrín himself either but he knew a woman named Anna Johnson who did and he offered to take me to her. In his exceptional Canadian courtesy, he picked



PHOTO COURTESY OF KRISTÍN JÓHANNSDÓTTIR

### Guðrun with her husband John

me up in Winnipeg and drove me to Oak Point where Katrín and her son had lived next to Anna. Anna received us graciously, gave us coffee and cake and then told me everything she had known about Katrín. Before this her life in Canada had been a total blank for me, but now suddenly the picture had started to come together and I learned so much more about Katrín and particularly about her children. I found out that Björn and Guðrún had not been easy names for English-speakers, so they became Barney and Gertie. And they



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KRISTÍN JÓHANNSDÓTTIR

Four ladies, my great-great aunt **Katrín** is seated right. Daughter **Guðrún** left.



**Gertie and Barney.**

took up the family name of Skulason. So now my great great aunt was **Katrín Skulason** and not **Geirsdóttir**. I learned about **Gertie's** husband and their life in **Winnipeg**, where they seem to have done fairly well for themselves and I learned about their later years. I also found out that **Katrín's** life hadn't been total dance of roses in **Canada** either. According to stories, her husband **Skúli** had become mentally ill and ended his life in a psychiatric institution.

I haven't found any corroboration for this but it is clear from later information that he disappeared early from the family's life.

After our visit to **Anna**, **Stan** took me to **Katrín's** grave and I picked some flowers and lay them down by her headstone. It was strange to sit at the final resting place of this relative of mine that I had never met and say goodbye to her, before I had ever really gotten to know her properly.

Not long after I came home from **Oak Point** I received another letter from **Anna** and in it lay yet another treasure — a picture of **Katrín**. The first I had ever seen. No picture that I know of had existed with anyone in my family in **Iceland** but here she was and she looked so familiar. Same strong chin as in my family. The same broad nose. I had absolutely no doubt that she was my relative.

But the letter from **Anna** was not the only one I received after I came home from the **Oak Point** trip. **Stan** had become my strongest supporter in this endeavor and he went searching for more. He had gone through books about **Icelandic** settlements



and in two of them he found information about the family. In one of them Barney Skulason himself had written about his childhood. Unfortunately, it doesn't say in the clippings he sent me from which book this was and I have yet to find out. But this description was the third treasure in my search. The Skulason family life was getting clearer to me.

Stan also connected me with Lorraine Sigvaldason, the lady who owned the letters that Nelson had so nicely photocopied for me. I called her and she invited me for coffee in Stonewall where she lived at the time. However, this was Manitoba winter and just before I headed out, Lorraine called me and told me the road was closed. I better stay home. So, I postponed that trip and when I finally got around to a visit she had moved to Riverton. We had a wonderful chat and she told me how she had been the executor to the Skulason estate. As neither Barney nor Gertie had an heir, their possessions were sold and then treated according to Canadian law. But Lorraine had kept a small box of personal belongings. She had hoped that one day she would meet someone who would appreciate them. She handed me a box. In it were not only the letters that Nelson had already returned but the family photographs of Gertie Skulason. Amongst them was a picture of Katrín Geirsdóttir with her two young children. It was the only photo of its kind in the albums. All the other were from Gertie's years in Winnipeg, but that



**Katrín and her children,  
Guðrún and Björn**

one picture was the fourth and biggest treasure of them all, a fairly young Katrín with her little children Björn and Guðrún.

Stan Jonason, Anna Johnson, Lorraine Sigvaldason and Nelson Gerrard; all these people helped me to piece together the story of Katrín Skulason, nee Geirsdóttir and her children Barney and Gertie. It's not a full picture, there are holes everywhere, but it's part of the picture of my formerly lost great-great aunt's life and I hoped that one day I might be able to share that picture with all of you. If anyone knows anything more about Katrín, I'd love to hear it.



PHOTO: ELVA SIMUNDSSON

# Icelandic Camp Music, Runes, and Legacy

---

by Sarah Painter

---

Morning breaks perhaps earlier than we are prepared for. The summoning tones of the bell are carried on gentle gusts of cool breeze into the cabins where our mighty heroes rest. Somnolent campers tumble from their bunks and slowly congregate on the deck for their morning dunk. My sleepy Vikings follow me to the lake and emerge reborn and powerful. A breakfast of eggs, bacon, cereal, and porridge awaits their baron stomachs - but first, a creative deed awaits; a clever presentation of their top five favourite things about camp. A hot pink stuffed dog named "Pinky Pie" and myself are charged with judging the four teams. We take in a variety of programs, ranging from a full

synchronized monologue in Icelandic, to a fancy can-can dance line, a charming little ditty, and last but not least, a very exotic haiku. All campers show impressive and varied talents; but of course the group who delivered their material *Á íslensku* are the victors of this quest.

With full bellies and hearts of adventure, our campers plunge into rotating activities. Mallory Swanson leads a station of strategy - giving each group a handful of dry spaghetti, a long piece of tape, a cup, and a marshmallow with the objective of building the tallest structure possible. There is an added task of treating each teammate with respect and kindness (or height would be deducted from the

finished product). Brett Lamoureux facilitates an interactive language class where each child is coached on describing their favourite part of camp and summer *Á íslensku*. Brad Hirst acts as choir director, helping our barbarians to polish their stage presence and vocal stylings. Guðmundur Hafliðason, or “Gummi” as we lovingly call him, orchestrates big games in the field where our energetic campers can burn off steam. All of this prepares our campers perfectly for lunch.

A brief health promotion moment is required part way through the day. Things had gotten a little fancy-free around the camp: many children have been running in and out of their cabins in bare feet or haven't seen their shoes in days. I have my hands on about 20 pairs of filthy camp feet with various issues ranging from abrasions, to slivers, broken nails and blisters. After feeling like I have been running a foot clinic, we finally gather to have a good, long talk about the many, many benefits of footwear. My band-aid distribution decreases by about 60% following this public service announcement. Nothing like a little health promotion and injury prevention!

With our big performance on the horizon, there isn't any time to waste. We gather the children and practice, and practice, and practice until our musical arrangements are just perfect. Mothers, Fathers, Ammas and Afis will be coming from miles around to take in the program.



PHOTO: SARAH PAINTER

We want to make sure that they can see how hard we've worked at our new Icelandic songs!

After dinner, we load our polished, performance-ready barbarians into a school bus and drive to the big stage in the park. Family came from far and wide to cheer on these tiny wonders and hear their Icelandic songs: *Hann/Hún á afmæli í dag*, *Syngjandi hér, syngjandi þar*, *Sá ég spóa*, and *Krummi krunkar úti*. They perform each one perfectly and their fans go wild! After our presentation, Gummi surprises the whole camp with special Icelandic National Soccer Team jerseys - special just for them! You can't even buy these if you wanted to! The children and their parents erupt in cheers of excitement for these special gifts all the way from Iceland.

But before we can take our shining stars back to their cabins, we have just one more special stop. The children have



PHOTO: MALLORY SWANSON

learned about the runic alphabet this week. They made a craft where they chose special stones and decorated them with rune letters. Armed with their own personalized

bag of stones, our next secret surprise is waiting for them at an exciting location....

Many readers will be familiar with the Viking statue in Gimli, Manitoba. It



has been under construction for some time and is due to be unveiled as "Viking Park" for the first time on Saturday of the *Islendingadagurinn*. Our campers are the very first to get a sneak peek before it is open to the world. Grant Stefanson, Co-Chair of the Viking Park Committee, meets us to talk to the children about the meaning of the park. He tells them all about the significance of the symbolism and the history that has been left by so many Icelanders who bravely came to this land to begin anew. "You are a legacy" he tells the children, inciting them to carry their culture and the heritage of our ancestors with fervour and pride. His final message remarks on the specialness of the first visitors of this park being the children - who bear the future of our traditions. He instructs them to take their runes and disperse them amongst the rocks. Armed with a variety of stones, they can hide them secretly and know that only they can find and rediscover them. They can also choose to place them openly where family, friends and other visitors may find them. If they return and the runes are gone, they can take comfort in the fact that they may have been collected and have brought someone else happiness. With the act of laying these stones, our Icelandic campers will not only be the first visitors to the park, but will become a permanent piece of it; there is a beautiful significance of our future generation holding our sacred past in their hearts and carrying it forward. The children are released to frolic through the park, their excited laughter heard echoing in every nook and cranny in the new and beautiful winding walkways that now surround our mighty and familiar Viking statue. Our tiny Vikings scurry everywhere, looking for the perfect places to leave their runes. We finish the evening with pictures in front of the Viking so that we can remember this

special evening forever.

We collect our excited but weary campers and take them home to rest. A bedtime snack of *pönnukökur* along with *skyr* that was brought all the way from Iceland is served a special treat.

With our ruthless Vikings tucked safely into their bunks, I find myself reflecting on legacy while I write to you tonight. As a child, I had the opportunity to spend time with my Amma Helga Malis in Gimli; who has worked so tirelessly to instill a sense of identity and pride in my heritage. I too, was once an Icelandic Camper. Later, when I was in the right place in my life, I accepted my quest to travel to Iceland as a Snorri<sup>1</sup> and explore my own independent connection to my ancestors and my country. To me and the many other camp alumni, counsellors, volunteers and Snorris, this is our commitment and contribution to legacy. Once when I was a child, people brought Icelandic Camp and the Snorri program to life for me so that I could deepen my relationship with my culture and my roots. And so it has been an honour and a privilege for me to pay this forward. The gift of legacy that has been entrusted with me carries with it the responsibility to pass it on to the next generation and into the future.

So to my tiny Vikings, the future of our Icelandic-Canadian traditions, I say *Góða nótt*. And... to the many family and friends who read this now, please know that our future is in good hands.

Love always,  
Sarah

<sup>1</sup> Snorri – refers to the 'Snorri Program', a six week program designed for young adults (ages 18 to 30) to research their ancestral roots in Iceland. See [www.snorri.is](http://www.snorri.is)

# POETRY

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## The Ancients

By Simon Laurie King, the pagan poet

After nearly three million years had passed,  
The Journey to the place, pre-ordained and between two great stars was reached by  
the ancients.

Their Dormant Ark at rest for so long was now awoken.

There was work to be done by those who had been chosen to travel from so far away  
and entrusted to undertake this sacred vocation.

A world to form and to seed was their purpose and In this act, memories and the old  
world would live again.

In the beginning, One of the two stars was extinguished and pulled closer, its energy  
substance and force put to its new task.

Their technology which was impossible to look upon or describe here descended  
From their Ark, the work for the Ancient Builders had now begun.

For three billion years they toiled to created the earth and its interaction with their  
Ark and that of the chosen great star.

The oceans were set down and divide from the land. When this was done; from the  
Ark were carried seeds of many forms.

Some would fly, some would crawl , and some would swim.

The forms were cared for and given other forms that provided sustenance.

Plants and trees of all variance were placed upon their creation.

Through these placements of animals that would procreate and the mineral kingdom  
which would sustain the plants,

A balance had now been achieved.

The Arks relation to the earth and that of the remaining great star would determine  
the tides and the weather and also keep them safe from the traveling  
sky fire that was born so long ago from the deep Abyss of space .

the builders from the Ark saw their work almost complete but for their most  
precious seed .

Female and male in a form exacting their own likeness were then to be placed upon their creation.

Through the many following centuries the builders would visit and guide their descendants through morals, lore and stories attributed to their journey.

Thousands of years moved forward as many of the descendant generations had now come and gone from those first seeds placed.

Precious Knowledge was passed to their seedlings, of mathematics, astronomy and agriculture.

The working and raising of stones to echo time and origin, with seemingly impossible scale and long forgotten purpose would be taught.

And finally, when satisfied with their creation the time had come for those who'd come from infinity to return to their sleep once more.

Their Ark would silently and for a mountains' age continue to orbit around their creation, shining in the night sky illuminating the months and patiently Awaiting the great return.

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## Do You Remember

Do you remember holding me when I was just a babe,  
Did you just sit and stare at me, I'm sure I did the same.  
I was the first of frilly things, bright colors were for me,  
But four more like me were to come, pink is all you'd see.

Do you remember melodies while relaxing in your chair,  
Of five familiar voices that used to fill the air.  
Your eyes were bright, your body stretched, you stood out in the crowd,  
I stood up straight and sang out loud, knowing you were proud.

Do you remember Sunday drives along the country roads,  
Now who lives there, the crops are good, don't get ice cream on your clothes  
The boys would get the backseat windows, the youngest sat in the front,  
The remaining four would wiggle and squirm and give out little grunts.

Do you remember those tall trees that laid across the fence.  
We used them to go up and down, it just made our mother tense.  
You placed a plank across a stump that took us round and round  
A house of bales made hide and seek not easy to be found.

Well I remember all these things, so vivid in my mind  
Those happy memories I have, not every child can find.  
Two parents I do thank for this, the highest you do rank,  
For this Sunday it is Father's Day, so today Dad, its you I thank.

*Written for my dad in 1996.*

*Lois Fridfinnson*

## The Owl and the Wood

The weathered wood had better times,  
Stood strong for many years.  
A structure filled with laughing sounds,  
Yet also wept with tears.

The walls surrounded love and hope,  
Of a young man and his bride.  
Then graced the wood with baby sounds,  
Of coos and grunts and cries.

Grandpa came to stay awhile,  
When he was old and frail.  
The wooden floors heard shuffled steps,  
And saw he was so pale.

The children wrote upon its walls,  
And ran into them too.  
But mother gently scrubbed the marks,  
And kissed all the boo boos.

A stranger came to call one day,  
Asked the father if he might.  
Take the pretty girl a dancing,  
In the soft and clear moonlight.

The wood is much more tired now,  
It rocks beneath the chairs.  
A lifetime passed amongst the walls,  
And answered many prayers.

The house became abandoned,  
It weathered and it fell,  
Some structure still does stand there,  
There's a new life there to dwell.

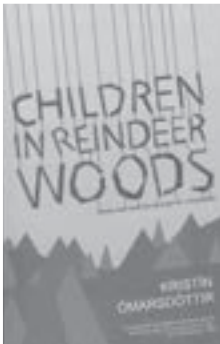
The wisest of them all, is said,  
To sit upon its perch.  
He listens to the tales of past,  
It's all about the search.

The search for love and happiness,  
You find within four walls.  
Will never end and stop there,  
For the wise owl knows it all.

*Written by: Lois Fridfinnson, January 2, 2016*

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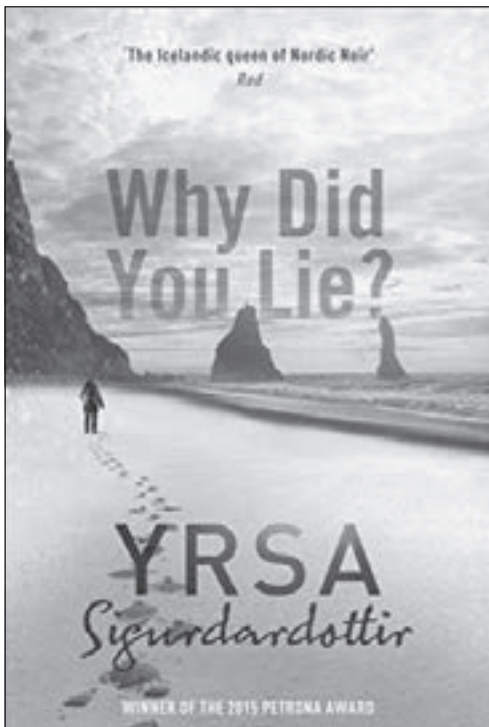
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# Book Review

## *Why Did You Lie to Me?*

by Ýrsa Sigurðardóttir

Reviewed by Elva Simundsson



*Why Did You Lie to Me?*  
Ýrsa Sigurðardóttir

UK: Hodder & Staughton Ltd. Publishers, 2017; first published with the title *Lýgi* by Veröld Publishers, Reykjavik, 2013)

The front cover of the paperback edition of *Why Did You Lie to Me?* states that the author is “Iceland’s Queen of Nordic Noir”. It’s true, there is a lot of “Nordic Noir’ happening here. The story tells three (apparently) separate dark and chilling stories of disappearances, suicides and deaths. Each of these stories are punctuated with unexplained shadowy sightings of ghosts and other shadowy figures, acts of vandalism and seemingly irrelevant messages that appear suddenly written on walls, in the possessions of a companion who appears to have met his death through misadventure or just slipped under the door of the family’s home.

I began to think: ‘nothing is as it seems’ and thoughts of one story fragment run through my mind as I read a fragment of the other sub-plots in the book, trying to connect each to the other. Three stories within a story keep the reader guessing where this is all going. Helgi is stuck in fog on a rocky lighthouse ledge out in the North Atlantic. His overnight adventure unravels into a seemingly never-ending nightmare. Nína struggles with trying to make sense of her husband’s apparent suicide attempt



that went so horribly wrong. Nóri continues to question what happened to their American house-exchange guests who have apparently disappeared into thin air – Why did they leave clothes behind? Why is there a dead cat in the barbeque?

Ýrsa is an engineer by profession. The stereotypical engineer is generally considered to be introverted, methodical and obsessed with detail. True, you can't always judge a person by such a generic stereotype but bits of this stereotype fit the profile of the creator of this crime fiction. The story is meticulously built. The landscape and the scenes are solidly outlined. The three stories are woven separately with each built on a technically

solid foundation. Bit by bit the puzzle pieces start to germinate in the reader's mind and a pattern slowly emerges. The engineer is fitting the pieces of the separate projects into the whole. Unlike an architect who builds a model first so the viewer can envision the big picture, this creator/engineer keeps pieces of vital information hidden from the reader. As we are drawn into a criminal investigation by Nína, who is a police officer by profession, we start to see the rather ugly facts emerge. As in any great crime fiction novel, 'nothing is as it seems'. Ýrsa certainly knows how to make that happen between the covers of this great piece of Nordic Noir.

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# Contributors

DR. RYAN EYFORD is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University of Winnipeg where he teaches Indigenous and Canadian history. His research brings together Indigenous and immigrant histories, and links the history of western Canada to the global history of settler colonialism.

ASTRADUR EYSTEINSSON is Professor of Comparative Literature (since 1994) and former Dean of Humanities (2008-2015) at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik. He was a visiting professor in Icelandic Studies at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, 2016-2017. He has worked mainly in the areas of literary and cultural theory, modernist studies, and translation studies, and is a practicing translator. He has written and edited several books in these areas, and his publications include co-translations of most of Franz Kafka's narrative works into Icelandic.

LOIS FRIDFINNSON is the daughter of Kjartan and Lillian Fridfinnson. She was born in Arborg, Manitoba, and has resided in the Geysir district of Manitoba. She has been writing poetry since she was a young girl, but it has only been the last year that she decided to share it.

NATALIE GUTTORMSSON is a great-great-great granddaughter of Friðrika through the Vilborg line. After visiting Iceland twice and seeing the farms where Friðrika and her family had lived, she knew she had to join the Restoration team. Natalie is a writer, genealogist, and new mom who lives on the James Smith Cree reserve in Saskatchewan.

SALÍN GUTTORMSSON, B.A. (HONS.), LL.B., winters in Winnipeg and summers at "Bog", her own "homestead" in Loni Beach, MB. She is a great-great granddaughter of Friðrika, through the "Vilborg Line" and describes herself as the Lead on the Restoration Project, though more by default, rather than design. Faced with an inquitable number of obstacles and hurdles in seeing the Project to fruition, Salín likes to believe she inherited a trait for perseverance from Friðrika and, as regards any similar future undertakings, has made solemn promises to her immediate family to learn to just say "nei".

KRISTÍN M. JÓHANNSDÓTTIR has a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of British Columbia. She is a professor in the University of Akureyri Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.

SARAH PAINTER is a Registered Nurse who practices at STARS Air Ambulance and Children's Hospital Emergency in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She spent her childhood summers on the beautiful beaches of Gimli visiting her Amma who has worked tirelessly to keep Iceland alive in her heart. One of the youngest campers on record, her adventures at Icelandic Camp began at the tender age of four. Her fond memories of time spent amongst other children of Icelandic Canadian descent and commitment to her Amma were the guiding forces that lead her to become a Snorri in 2011. Sarah returned to Icelandic camp in 2014 as Camp Nurse and has been hooked ever since.

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.

AVERY SIMUNDSSON grew up on a farm in rural Manitoba. She has a degree in Mechanical Engineering from University of Manitoba and works in that profession.

ELVA SIMUNDSSON, MLIS, is a member of the *Icelandic Connection* board of editors and a random book reviewer and proofreader for the journal. She lives in Gimli, MB.

BETTY JANE WYLIE is a writer of Icelandic Canadian descent. Her favourite book is *Letters To Icelanders: Exploring The Northern Soul*, now out of print and priced too high for a used copy at Amazon or ABE books.





RUTH ANN FURGALA  
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF TRUSTEES, EVERGREEN SCHOOL DIVISION

This photo is of the first Dinner on the Bridge in Riverton, Manitoba. It was modeled after Winnipeg's "Dinner for 1200" and organized and put on by the Djorfung Ladies Aid. The town's picturesque walking bridge that crosses the Icelandic River was damaged beyond repair due to flooding in the spring of 2011—the fourth bridge in 120 years to be wiped out by a flood. A new bridge was designed and built, and unveiled in 2012. It is a beautiful piece of architecture for the town of just under 600 with LED lights that provide a peaceful glow at night.

There is a second Dinner on the Bridge being planned for early fall to support furnishing a student study room in the Riverton Collegiate, the local high school. At that time of year the beautiful lighting will profile the event and highlight the bridge in a truly grand style.

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## The Back Page

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