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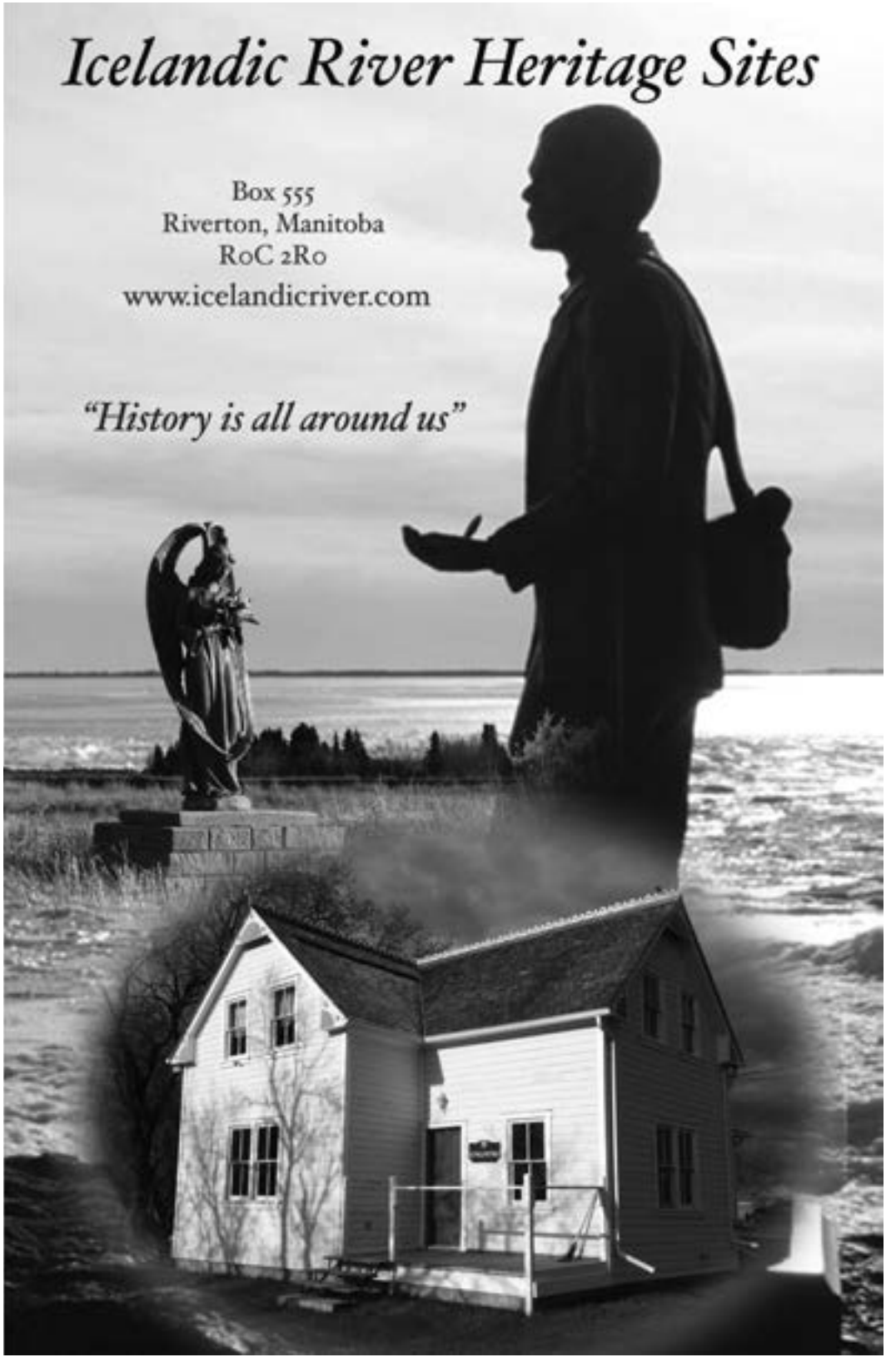
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ON THE COVER

PHOTO: THOMAS FRICKE

The Honourable Janice C. Filmon, C.M., O.M., Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, with Robert T. Kristjanson, O.M.

Editorial

The Anthropology of Lake Winnipeg

by Sölmundur Karl Pálsson

On August 30th, 2012, I had arrived in Gimli, inspired and excited to start my MA research on the commercial fishery on Lake Winnipeg. I was sitting on the Kris' Fish and Chips restaurant patio in Gimli with a couple of my friends on that sunny day, eating deep fried pickerel and trying to feel the vibe from this Icelandic-North American town. While I was eating this Manitoba delicacy, as my server informed me, I remember the thought popping into my head, and asking myself, "*what the heck have I gotten myself into?*" Even though I had read many reports, old news articles in *Framfari* or books on Lake Winnipeg, I still had no real understanding about Lake Winnipeg, or commercial fishing on the lake for that matter. Seven years later, I am doing my PhD, but I am still learning something new about Lake Winnipeg and commercial fishery every single day! Lake Winnipeg and the people who interact with the lake the most, the fishers, are truly great teachers.

It was an accident that Lake Winnipeg became the focus for my research, but if it was not for Dr. Berkes, a professor at the Natural Resource Institute at the U of M, suggesting that I and my advisor, Dr. Johnson, check out Lake Winnipeg as a possible site for my research, who knows where I would have ended up. What a privilege it has been that I ended up here, on Lake Winnipeg. It certainly has been an unbelievable journey, that hopefully will continue for years to come. I want to give you all a glimpse of what I believe makes Lake Winnipeg and commercial fishing on the lake special.

Through the centuries, food has been crucial in strengthening bonds between people and communities. Food forges friendships, trades have been made, and when we celebrate, we want to eat food. As we anthropologists like to say, food does not only sustain us, it bonds us to each other. Family bonds and of course food creates communities. Fish as food is as healthy as any food, but fish also creates employment and therefore a vibrant community. Communities around the shores of Lake Winnipeg would not be the same. Just imagine Gimli, Fisher River or Norway House up in the north end of the lake without the fishery? Impossible. The vibe and the closeness to the lake is indescribable. When I ate at Kris' Fish and Chips, knowing the fish was caught just a few miles away made the experience unique. In fact, buying a wild caught fish directly from a fisher in a time when demand for locally sourced food is high, is

something that cannot be taken for granted, but for many of us, we have it in our backyard!

Small-scale fisheries struggle around the world, despite being vital for food security and providing employment for millions of people. Lake Winnipeg provides hundreds of people employment, a way of life to support one's family and provide healthy food, not just for their neighbors but for the world. For those who do not follow Manitoba news, the Province of Manitoba has pressured the fishers on Lake Winnipeg with proposed changes that might jeopardize what I believe makes Lake Winnipeg special in the future.

Sölmundur Karl Pálsson in his winter gear working with one of the winter fishers

I have been lucky to witness fishers on Lake Winnipeg spend hours on the lake working hard in catching and filleting the fish. Other fishers spend hours and energy to smoke their whitefish, catfish and goldeye. All of it is a true Manitoba delicacy. One can drive through Gimli for example, and see signs that read *"Pickerel for sale"*. One must remember that buying a fish from a Lake Winnipeg fisher, one is not only buying food – the fisher is giving a small piece of themselves. The fish represent all the hard work and energy the fisher puts into his/her effort to catch that particular fish. Here is what makes commercial fishing on Lake Winnipeg so unique and proves that it needs to be preserved. Lake Winnipeg is still a small-scale fishery where the individual fisher is the one who owns the boat and benefits from the fishing and not a big, faceless corporation like in many other countries.

On Lake Winnipeg, one has incredible access to the fishers, to buy directly from them and simultaneously ask them about their fishing operation. Such interaction between a buyer and a food producer cannot be replicated. It is simply not the same as buying a pickerel or a whitefish fillet from a major supermarket chain as it from a fisher. That is a privilege that needs to be celebrated even more because

commercial fishers make Lake Winnipeg special and the province of Manitoba culturally richer.

Lake Winnipeg is a unique body of water. In fact, it is so much more than just body of water. It is almost like a family member, as one fisher told me once. Lake Winnipeg should be celebrated throughout our province because like its food, it creates bonds between us and it sustains us. Whether we are a commercial fisher supporting their family and keeping their family tradition alive; a sport fisher, escaping the busy city life to spend time with their children, or simply someone standing on the shore of the lake, absorbing the energy that this huge expanse of water gives off itself, we are enriched by it. You will get a glimpse of this attitude from some of the essays in this issue of the *Icelandic Connection.* Once we are in its spell, we find the need to cultivate our relationship with the lake, to make sure that Lake Winnipeg is here for us for years to come – for that to happen, our powers that need to stop thinking about the lake as just a body of water or just a reservoir, but rather think about how their decision-making will affect the relationship between the lake and the people and the animals that are dependent on Lake Winnipeg.

Reminiscences from a Lifetime on Lake Winnipeg by Robert Kristjanson, O.M.

From an interview with Lorna Tergesen

Robert Kristjanson comes from a Lake Winnipeg fishing family. His afi, Sigurdur Kristjanson immigrated to Canada from Iceland in 1885. They were from a farm named Stoppa, near the town of Sauðarkrókur, in Skagafjörður. The Kristjanson family settled in the town of Gimli where Sigurdur started what would become the Kristjanson dynasty in the Lake Winnipeg fishery.

As soon as they were old enough to work, Sigurdur's sons, Ted and Hannes, joined him on the lake. Then grandson, Robert, son of Ted, joined his father and afi, making him the third generation fisher in the family business. Robert is married to Sigurros Markusson. They have two children, son Chris and daughter Roberta. Robert's son Chris fishes with his sons, Trevor and Devon. Roberta's husband, Bill Buckels also fishes with the family. The dynasty continues.

Robert is more than a fisherman. From the stories of his afi's and father's experiences on the lake along with his own, he has well over a hundred years of observations on Lake Winnipeg, its fishery and ecology, its changes and cycles. He is

PHOTO: JENNIFER KRISTJANSON

Robert Kristjanson with his Order of Manitoba medal and his boat in the background

a fount of traditional knowledge and its most ardent spokesman.

On July 12, 2018, Robert was awarded the Order of Manitoba. This was for his lifetime work of advocating for the fishing industry in many ways. He led the implementation of the Canadian Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, served in the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary for 35 years, worked with the Red River Basin Commission, and was one of the advocates for the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium just to name a few of his initiatives on behalf of the fishery community. Along with the Order of Manitoba, Robert received a special tribute from the Indigenous community of the Fisher River Cree Nation. The community presented him with a beautiful handmade quilt in the traditional star pattern that now adorns his bed. The Fisher River Cree Nation relies heavily on the Lake Winnipeg fishery industry and recognized both the quality and quantity of the advocacy that Robert has done on behalf of all Lake Winnipeg fishers.

Robert is obsessed with keeping the environment unspoiled and clean. His life-long goal has been to keep Lake Winnipeg a viable fishing ground. He has been very alarmed at the algae blooms that have literally covered the north basin much more frequently in the summers in the last number of years. He cites the City of Winnipeg partly to blame for allowing un-treated and partly treated sewage to enter the Red River as it flows through the city on its way north into the lake. For many years the city has been given an ultimatum "to clean up their act" but the problems persist. The sewage waste water contains high levels of nutrients that feed the growth of the algae blooms.

Because of the pattern of the water

flow, the currents run along the east side of Lake Winnipeg and hence they suffer more from algae issues each summer than the western shores of the lake. Water from the Red River travels along the eastern side of the lake, mixing with the water that flows from the Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods through the Winnipeg River watershed from the western-most edge of the Canadian Shield. Fortunately, the water coming from this rocky base has little or no nutrients.

The run-off from farms and small industries also contribute to the high nitrate and phosphate overload. The farms and towns on both sides of the Canada / United States border that drain to the Red River as well as those within the Assiniboine River basin all contribute to the nutrient problem.

The nutrient-overloaded waters entering the marshes at the south end of the lake feed the reeds and allow the carp to feed. These marshes have also changed over the years. In the past, the marshes were important trapping and waterfowl nesting areas, while also acting as natural filters for removing nutrients from the water entering the lake. Due to our human drive to alter our environment to suit our purposes without fully understanding the consequences, large sections of the natural marshes have been drained and converted to farmland and residential areas. Now there are still some marshes to provide reeds for the carp to feed on, but there is no longer sufficient wetland area to provide sufficient nutrient filtering or to provide enough protection for the muskrats and wild fowl that used to inhabit the marshes.

Fishing patterns have changed over the years. Robert explains that we are back to the bountiful yields for fishers as there were in his grandfather's day. The life of the lake is cyclical. Ted, Robert's father reported that in 1917 while winter fishing for tullibees at a place called Dog Head, the tullibee were always most abundant just after the lake froze over. In November of that year, he and a hired man pulled from one net of 3 ¾ inch mesh size, eighteen boxes of tullibees. (In comparison, ten boxes of fish would be considered a very good pull from a net.) Today tullibee are back and the market is prime again. The tullibee are now filling the nets so that very few other fish are caught. The tulibee roe is currently selling at good prices. The caviar you enjoy in your fine dining experience may well have originated from Lake Winnipeg. Whitefish roe is also sold, and the livers from from the lake whitefish are also a real delicacy that many consumers have discovered.

Whitefish was usually sought after in the winter months. The best areas for the whitefish catch are in the northern part of the south basin of the lake. It was a staple of winter ice fishing in the earlier and mid-twentieth century. It is still a desirable catch, but it is far from the days when fishers would head out in the spring with as many as 150 boats to bring in their bounty. Sauger has also been a backbone of the fishing industry since the 1930s and is currently bringing in a fair price.

Goldeyes have recently made a comeback after almost disappearing altogether. They are now plentiful but the marketing board is not able to market all that is being caught. Most fishers try to freeze the excess until they are able to smoke them. The goldeye had all but disappeared from the lake but the recent years have seen an explosive comeback. The abundant return of this species is an excellent example of the cyclical state of this lake.

Historically, the tullibee market collapsed in 1929 when some scientists declared they were unfit for human consumption because there were parasitic worms in them. The tullibee that were

PHOTOS: JENNIFER KRISTJANSON

Family shot of the fishermen. Left to right: Devon Kristjanson, Joel Goodman, Trevor Kristjanson, Chris Kristjanson and Robert. Below: Bill Buckels also fishes with the family.

caught were used for mink feed or else taken to an oil rendering plant that was based in Clandeboye, Manitoba. This operation burnt down many years later and was not rebuilt. Also, the market for mink coats and furs in general has virtually disappeared and with that, so have the mink farms.

Fish oils or fish dried and ground into fish meal was, and still is, used to augment feed for livestock and poultry. When hay is of poor quality, fish oil can be added to make it more nutritious. More recently, much of the excess fish is sold to pet food canning companies, primarily for cat food.

Over the years various varieties of fish have been considered more desirable than others. For years, saugers (often called grey pickerel) were the backbone of the industry. Mariahs, ciscoes, whitefish and pickerel were most sought after. The whitefish subspecies that Robert's father and grandfather fished is no longer in the lake, as a new strain

has taken over. This was due to a different variety that was released from the hatchery at Clear Water Lake. The fish eventually worked their way into the Dauphin River and in to Lake Winnipeg.

Each variety of fish needs a specific mesh, or timing to be successfully caught. The first nets that were in common usage were labour intensive, needing to be mended and or dried. The entire fishing family was generally involved in the net-mending activity. Today's nets are now lightweight, nylon and more durable. This is a far cry from the past where heavy cotton that was much more susceptible to deterioration and tearing was the only option. The synthetic fibres now in use are a huge improvement.

Freshness is vitally important in the selling and exporting of fish. Today's quick freeze in vacuum packs preserves the fish so that the consumer experiences right-from-the-water ideal quality. This was not how it was handled in years gone by. Sometimes the catch was packed in ice, other times the fish were salted but that left much to be desired. Maintaining quality fresh-caught fish depended on weather, transportation options and speed of delivery. This was addressed by the provincial government in the 1940s and 1950s when provincial roads in the area were improved. Good roads allow for quicker delivery.

There has been a recent quota buy back of licences by the provincial government to reduce the numbers of fishers on the lake. Commercial fishing is difficult work requiring long hours, often in miserable weather conditions. Quotas are being given up as many fishers do not want to go out on the lake in the cold winter months. Currently, there is also an on-going dispute with the provincial Department of Natural Resources administrators regarding the mesh size of the nets. Fishers are protesting the changes that were introduced without consultation with the people involved in the industry – people who know the lake and know the fishery. People like Robert.

Forever, as long as there have been people living along the shores of this great lake, it has provided food for fishers and their families. For over a hundred years, the commercial fishery has been providing jobs and sustainable livelihoods from this local industry. Never static, frequently rewarding, always evolving but not without great struggles.

Lake Whitefish

Mina-Skan: When Friendships and Work Began with a Fish Box

The Life and Times of Leifi Hallgrimson and Walter Nanowin

Scene 1 – Big Black River Station, June 1936

He awoke to a rattling sound. "What the hell is that?" he thought, opening his eyes. He looked across the room to the window over his desk. Damn window pane. Most men, after realizing it was a window pane, would have pulled the eiderdown over their head and snored on. Leifi was not that kind of man. He ran a tight ship.

The wind had shifted to the northwest overnight, blowing cold air across the long expanse of the Artic and over the still-frigid waters of Lake Winnipeg. The barometer had been right. The dial had dropped all day, which he knew from experience signalled the south wind would likely shift to the northwest. Luckily, the freighter had pulled in at eleven that night. From then until 1 a.m., when she pulled out of the station, the shed and dock had bustled with activity as the boat crew, shore crew and many fishermen

A classic picture of a Lake Winnipeg Fish Station taken in 1954 at The Sigurdson Fisheries Station in Berens River 1954. The Black River Station, while different, would have looked similar in many ways with the ice houses, the docks, the boats and the fish boxes.

helped get supplies from the south off the boat, then loaded seven hundred boxes of fish into the hold.

Leifi looked at his watch. It was now 5:30 a.m., and the boat would be in the lee of Georges Island, soon pulling into Georges Harbour to pick up another five hundred boxes, after which she would be fully loaded for the trip south to Selkirk. It was a good start to the 1936 season.

He pulled down the zipper of his eiderdown, shifted, slipped out of his down cocoon, buttoned his shirt and pulled his sweater over his broad shoulders. He pulled his pants and woolen socks up and put his feet into his heavy shoes, all in a familiar rhythm. He felt currents of cold air forcing their way into the camp, through every crack, knothole and that damn pane. The ice had only melted off Lake Winnipeg in mid-May, and here, almost at the top of the lake, ice had still been floating when they travelled to Big Black River Station on May 29 on the Grand Rapids. The season opened on June 1.

Leifi pulled open the hinged cover on the space heater and saw a few cinders till smoldering. He stuffed in some newspaper, kindling and wood pieces split last fall and dried over winter. Given the heavy draft that would come over the pipe to take the smoke outside, he knew there would be a roaring fire in no time. He opened the draft to its full position. Soon its tin belly and the long pipe stretching up through the ceiling would radiate heat across the small shack.

He walked past the stove, leaned over his desk and wedged a couple pencils between the frame and window pane to stop the vibration. He needed some putty to put in there. He looked out the window. The north sky had an ugly look, with heavy, dark grey clouds hovering over the land and water as if ready to jump on some prey. He had endless tasks to do to bring the station back to life after nine months of sitting lonely and unattended.

Everything needed to make the station operational for another season had been unloaded from the Grand Rapids. At the end of each season everything was packed in cartons, boxes and trunks – tools, pots, pans, cutlery, ledgers, everything other than the mounted equipment and buildings – and moved to the next station for the next season. Leifi's fall station was located on the west shore of the lake at Kenowa Bay, much further south. During the winter season he operated out of his home base in Riverton where he bought and packed fish out of a huge warehouse for shipment by rail to Winnipeg, and beyond. Now he was back once again to the Big Black River Station for the summer season.

When the nets first hit the water on June 1, fishing was heavy from the start. The crew had worked hard over the last two days. It had been a short night. He told his shore crew that breakfast would be delayed until 7 a.m. from the usual 6 a.m.

Breakfast for the fishermen, on the other hand, was usually 4:30 a.m. They wanted to get to their nets as soon as possible after first light, especially since the barometer was dropping quickly signalling the likelihood of a sudden change in weather, not unexpected on Lake Winnipeg at this time of year. They watched their barometers closely. If it dropped much further, they would try to get their nets pulled up before the storm had a chance to twist the nets into a roll of twine, corks and leads, leading to endless hours of untangling and spreading.

Along one wall at the back of the Big Black River Station store was Leifi's spring bunk, on the opposite wall his desk and toward the front a counter with shelves behind. There was no shortage of things to get done, but his mind quickly focused on priority number one. He sat at his plywood desk, perched on a fish box with a pillow,

This would be the kind of scene that would have presented at the Black River Station daily as the " whitefish boats" returned to the stations loaded with the prized hump back whitefish known in the markets of Chicago and New York as "Selkirk Whites."

and began working through the fish receipts sent by the weighman after receiving, sorting and weighing each fisherman's catch. The receipts needed to tabulated and inserted into individual ledger sheets, which also documented every item purchased in the store and other transactions.

Leifi concluded his paperwork, as he called it, and heard the clanging of a bell, which was a signal from the cooks that breakfast was ready. He got up from his desk. As he walked out into the fresh air, he made a mental note that he would need to finish stocking the shelves with supplies right after breakfast as the fishermen would be coming in soon and making their way up to the store looking for everything from flour to lard, oilers to rubber boots. This small humble building serving simultaneously as his bedroom and office, store and the social center was grand central station at the Hallgrimson Fisheries station at Big Black River and Leifi's home for the next two months.

Scene 2 – Big Black River Station, 1936

Walter could feel the wind slapping the wall of the tent. He lay quietly with his eyes closed, waiting. Finally, he heard the sound of his dad awakening. He heard the flap of the tent flap pulled open. That was his signal to get up quickly before his mom and the other kids awoke.

He watched his dad walk across the field and into the big building everyone called the cookhouse. He ran over and waited for him to come out after eating breakfast with all the men who worked on shore, sorting, weighing, packing, and icing the fish as it came into the station, tagged as to the species and held in the freezer room until the next boat south. The shed was always bustling with activity. Some men were up in the big ice house cutting out chunks to be sent into the noisy machine that chipped the ice into smaller pieces. Walter's dad was the shed boss, sorting and weighing in each individual's catch and giving him a slip tabulating the catch for the day, one copy for

the fishermen, and one up to Leifi to enter into each fisherman's individual accounts to be settled up at the end of the season.

Walter loved being around all the action, especially being at the shed as the men came in after a day of lifting. They would talk and clean fish while standing in groups of three or four around plywood sheets placed over gas drums with the tops cut off. There was a hole cut through the plywood so the guts scraped from the fish could slide into the barrel. As the men stood around the dressing table, he heard familiar sounds together with a strange language he came to know as Icelandic, interspersed with the conversational English he was just starting to understand. Some men spoke better than others.

He saw Mina-Skan – as he was called by the community – come out of the store. Walter saw him look in his direction and walk toward him. Walter stared at his shoes, hoping he was not in trouble.

"Last night when the boat came in, I saw you work hard pushing the fish boxes down the rollers from the cooler room to be loaded onto the tug." Leifi knelt down and looked Walter in the eye. With a smile, he asked, "What's your name?"

"Walter."

"You are a Nanowin, aren't you?" asked Leifi. "Yes, good men, all the Nanowins. I saw you sitting beside your cousin Willie yesterday, watching him nail the fish boxes together. Do you think you could do that work, Walter?"

Shyly, Walter responded, "Yes, I could. I watched Willie the last two days and saw how he put together the ends and bottoms and sides and nailed them into a box."

"Would you like to do that?" asked Leifi. "I need another man like you working on the boxes. Without men nailing the boxes together there's no way we can ship the fish. It's a very important job. Walter, do you think you can do that job?"

Walter looked upward and felt his face glow with excitement. "Yes, I can."

Leifi put his hand on Walter's shoulder. "I am sure you can. Would you like a job this summer? You go tell your mother that if it's okay with her, you have a job working for Leifi on the station starting right away. The fishing is very heavy, and without boxes, this outfit will shut down. I will be counting on you to work with Willie. After you check with your mom, come see me." Leifi smiled.

Walter ran in a turmoil of arms and legs. He flew headlong into his mother. She was emerging from the tent on her way to cook breakfast on the open fire. He shouted in Saulteaux, "Mom, Mom, Mina-Skan needs me. I am starting work in the morning nailing boxes. If I don't get them done, how will the fish get sent south? That's what he said, Mom. I need to get right back there."

His mom looked where Leifi stood beside the berry bushes. In a few weeks the berries would ripen, and Leifi would often wander from the store for a few minutes to pick berries. It was his favorite place to stand quietly, lost in thoughts. That's why Leifi was known as Mina-Skan: the man who stands beside the berry bushes.

Through his frenzied excitement, Walter heard his mom saying, "Walter, Walter, slow down. Mina-Skan is a good man, always so good to you kids on the station. You are a lucky boy. Having that job will be good for you, but first you must eat your breakfast."

Walter knew now was not the time to argue. He wolfed down his mother's eggs and fresh bannock. Then he ran like the wind.

Scene 3 – Big Black River Station, 1936

This was Leifi's world. Here, at the mouth of Big Black River, where the river meets Lake Winnipeg and the north end of the lake is twenty miles away. He established his fish station ten years ago.

Leifi glanced toward the tent. Walter was in animated conversation with his mother. Leifi chuckled to himself. He turned to walk toward the little camp, which served as his office, bedroom and store and was home for the next two months. He walked past the berry bushes, thinking about the lush berries that would adorn the bushes in a month.

His mind wandered to his boyhood growing up at Mikley and Hecla and the journey his life had taken to bring him to this place with these people. Born in Western Iceland in 1886, he was christened Thorleifur Hallgrimson. His mother Thuridur was 39-years-old, daughter of Thorleifur Thorleifsson and Malafridur Jonsdottir from Mjoabol in Dalasysla. When Leifi was two, his mother left Iceland for Hecla, where they settled. Thuridur was a courageous lady, determined to provide a better life for her son. She left Iceland alone, saying goodbye to her parents and Leifi's father, Hallgrimur Gislason.

As he grew from a boy to a man, Leifi would, like all the men in Hecla, become a fisherman. Like Walter, his first job had been nailing boxes for Johannes Grimolfson. In 1916, he married his neice, Elingborg "Borga" Jonsdottir Hoffman whose grandparents Grimolfur Olafsson and Steinun had come to Hecla from Iceland in 1893. Their daughter, Solveig Grimolfsdottir, (born in 1894 at Mafahlid in the Snaesfellness Peninsula) and her husband Jon Jonsson Hoffman of Selvellir, followed her parents to Hecla in 1900 with their three infant daughters, Borga, Steinunn Sigridir (known as Sigga) and Vilborg (known as Villa) and a son Petur, who died shortly after World war I as a result of tuberculosis contracted during his time of service in the Royal Canadian Navy.

Together Leifi and Borga were a powerful team and built a successful life together. Leifi was an ambitious man. He moved to the mainland establishing his home in Riverton where they soon became prominent citizens active in the life of the growing community. Leifi made the transition from fishing to the business of fishing, operating as a middleman between the fishermen and the big companies who were in the business of buying and selling the Lake Winnipeg freshwater fish prized in the markets of Chicago and New York.

Leifi walked toward the camp and passed a building called the icehouse. The paint had started to peel. He made a mental note to get the men working with paintbrushes in the next few days. Leifi ran a shipshape operation and nothing was too small or too big to be kept up all the time, especially given the long periods these building sat alone and unmaintained in harsh weather conditions.

The icehouse was the heart of a fishing operation. In the summer heat, to maintain quality, fish had to be kept on ice from the moment they were taken out of water to when they were packed, held in boxes and ultimately shipped to Selkirk. Each winter, crews were dispatched after Christmas to go north on ice five-feet thick to the stations. The crews penetrated the ice with chisels and picks, then cut blocks with huge saws. They hauled these blocks along a wooden slide to the top of the icehouse – using a pulley system once powered by horses and now by tractors – and dropped the huge chunks into the building. Up to 800-tonnes of ice could be held in the icehouse, insulated by walls that were two-feet thick and filled with sawdust. When the ice reached the top of the building, it was covered with hay to protect it until summer.

Before he could dwell in thought any further, Leifi sensed Walter running fast behind him. Walter yelled, "Mom says I can have the job."

"When can you start, Walter?"

"This morning. Now!"

Leifi's heart smiled. He put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Let's walk over to Willie. I will tell him you guys will be partners this summer. The pay is five cents for every box you nail. At the end of every day, you come to the store to tell me how many boxes you put together, and I will pay you. Have we got a deal?"

Walter beamed. They walked across the station's rocky outcropping to where Willie was busy nailing.

"Do you see how Willie is cutting the wire around that bundle. Each bundle is all the parts you need for one box. We call the bundle "knock downs". It takes too much room on the boats to send empty boxes, so it is better to ship the box parts up to be nailed here. That's why this is such an important job." Walter listened intently.

"Willie, you've been so busy that I thought it was time to get you a partner," said Leifi. "You're an old hand now from working last summer, so I hope you can show Walter the ropes. How does that sound?"

"He will be a good partner," Willie smiled and looked at Walter. "I'll teach him as long as he promises not to get faster than me and nail more boxes."

Leifi thanked Willie, then turned to Walter. "Every man on my box crew gets to pick his own hammer. When I finish breakfast, we will walk to the office together."

A few minutes later, Leifi and Walter stood at the store counter. Leifi put three hammers in front of Walter. The boy picked up each hammer, checked it over, then chose one with black tape wrapped around the handle.

"This one," he said.

Walter had picked the biggest and heaviest one. Leifi chuckled. He probably would have done the same thing.

"That's a good hammer. My best one. You will do a good job with this. Now, here is a bag of nails to get started. Willie has lots over there in a pail."

"Do you think this hammer will help me become as fast as Willie?"

Leifi said, "This is my best hammer, and I am sure you'll get as fast or faster than Willie in no time."

As Walter turned, Leifi called after him. "Walter, every man starting gets an advance. Here is an O'Henry Bar and a coin to buy more chocolate bars in the store."

Walter was out the door like a flash, waving his hammer and calling excitedly to Willie.

As Walter ran off, Leifi chuckled. It was good to have young boys around. In the next few days, he decided he would get Walter and Willie to pick fish livers at the dressing tables for Maria to cook up one night as a real delicacy.

Leifi turned his mind back to the busy day ahead. A big order of supplies and groceries had arrived last night. Leifi had to go into the warehouse to check the shipment against the bills of lading. Several timbers on the roughhewn deck of the dock had sprung loose. The dock had not weathered well over winter. Leifi would have to work with the crew to fix that soon. It had not been a good situation last night when they were loading the boat with the deck in such rough shape. The shelves of the store had to be stocked. And fish had to be received, sorted, weighed and packed on ice. The fish would be placed in a big holding shed that was kept cool by the 45-gallon drums in each corner filled with ice and a chemical called "dry ice".

The station would be buzzing with activity for the next few days. Several Indian fishermen from Poplar River to the south had moved to the station for the season. Quite a few tents were already set up. The activity would pick up every day with the approaching summer and long hours of daylight. The station would soon be alive with people and action most of the day, including young kids with their

parents coming for jawbreaker candies and chocolate bars.

Most of the fishermen had been with him for years and were from Helca. When school finished, their families would come to spend two months at the station. Leifi's son Peter would be on the first boat north after his exams ended, and his wife Borga and younger son Leifur would follow. When they arrived, he moved into a small bunkhouse reserved for the family's annual visit.

Leifi walked out and saw the cash register sitting on a fish box. He picked up the register and positioned it at the end of the counter. He lifted a heavy metal box and put it beside the register. He opened the box, pulled out a handful of coins –

and carefully placed Hallgrimson Fisheries currency in the separate trays for 10, 50 and 100 cents in the till. The coins were good for in trade only. After a few more handfuls, he put the lock in the clasp of the metal box and secured it on the shelf below.

The coins were the local currency and a product of Leifi's always shrewd eye to keep every buck made at Big Black River circulating back into the local economy - and particularly back to this till.

Leifi opened the door and took another look at the barometer. The dial had not dropped anymore. He detected a small patch of white on the horizon emerging under the grey blanket. Perhaps the wind would stay steady at twenty knots and clearer weather would move in.

Scene 4 – Big Black River Station, 1936

The next morning Walter awoke to the breakfast bell. His dad was up and walking toward the cookhouse. Walter ran to catch up.

"Walter, how was your first day on the job?" asked his dad.

"Good. Mina-Skan let me pick my own hammer. He told me I picked the best one, but I am not as fast as Willie. I will be soon."

It was 5:45 a.m. Several other men were also headed to the long rectangular building that looked like a community hall. His dad opened the door and turned to Walter.

"You run back to the tent with your mother and sister. Your mother's cooking your breakfast now. She will be waiting for you."

Walter dawdled and peered through the big screen door where men sat on benches in front of long tables. Several women brought out trays, and the room was alive with food passing between hands and talking. Walter could hardly wait until he got to sit with the men. He turned and started running toward the tent.

"Walter, where are you going?" Walter recognized Leifi's voice. Before he could respond, Leifi said, "You are a shore hand now at the station. You've got a lot of boxes to nail today. You go tell your mom and sister that you are eating in the cookhouse with the fishermen and other shore hands. We need you well fed. Willie is in there now. That's part of our deal."

Walter's eyes lit up. A smile exploded on his face. Without a word, he turned and started running to the tent, blurting out, "Mom, Mom, Leifi tells me he expects me eating with the fishermen and other shore hands in the cookhouse."

With that he darted back, not waiting for a "Yes" or a "No".

Leifi stood quietly waiting for him to return. With his characteristic chuckle and thin smile, he said, "You are going to be a good man, like all the Nanowins. You will eat with me this morning."

He put his arm around the boy, and they walked into the cookhouse. Leifi gave a quick smile in the direction of Maria Baldwinson.

"Walter, this is Maria," said Leifi. "She is the boss in the cookhouse. I told her that you were joining the crew. She will have chores for you from time to time, so you help her with anything she asks, okay?"

"Yes," said Walter. His eyes riveted on the beautiful, tall, young lady bending toward him.

With a warm smile, and in a soft but deep voice, Maria said, "Walter, Leifi tells me you are the new man on the station. My name is Maria. You sit down beside Leifi and help yourself to bacon and eggs. And some toast. I will bring you fresh tea. Coffee time is at nine-thirty in the morning, dinner at twelve, another coffee at three and supper at six. Last coffee is at nine in the evening. You need to be on time every day."

After Walter finished his breakfast, still dazed at the turn of events, Maria walked back to him.

"Did you have a good day nailing boxes yesterday, Walter?" she asked.

He replied, "I didn't nail as many as Willie, but I will soon be as fast as him."

Maria called him to the counter. "You pick a nice, hot donut now."

Walter's eyes bulged. He saw an entire tin tub filled with donuts. On the counter, he saw two rows of pie shells, more than he had ever seen in his life.

"That's a lot of pies," he said.

"I make them every day, Walter, and each boat takes a fresh pie with them. Fishing is hard work, and the fishermen need to have full stomachs."

She added: "You and Willie have two jobs for me. Today we are going to have fresh whitefish livers. I will take you to the shed to show you how to pick them from the guts of the fish. You can bring them to me in a pail for supper. And you guys will take turns hitting the old propeller hanging out front that serves as the bell. Walter, you have breakfast, dinner, and supper duty. I will tell Willie he has coffee duty. I need you to strike the propeller with that steel rod five minutes before the meal."

Scene 5 – Selkirk, 1979

A tall, distinguished man in a light brown suit walked through the front door of the Betel Icelandic senior citizens home. He went into the main lobby, turned right and walked down the hall. The sign on the door of the second room read: "Leifi Hallgrimson".

The door was slightly ajar. The man knocked, opened the door and announced, "Dad, it's Leifur."

An elderly gentleman was resting on the bed. He moved, lifted himself and put his feet on the side of the bed.

Leifur pulled up a chair and said, "How are you today, Dad?"

Sitting up, the old man responded, "Fine. The same as yesterday."

"I see the ladies are still putting away the dishes and tidying up from lunch," said Leifur. "Sunday is usually a special lunch. Did you enjoy it?"

"Yes. The ladies do a good job," said Leifi. "It was pretty much the same as last Sunday."

"Dad, why don't you sit on the chair so we can have a good conversation," said Leifur. "I left right after church to visit. Irene and Elin had an event this afternoon after the service. I said I'd pick them up around three, so it will have to be a shorter visit this time. We will all come down together next week. But I got an interesting call that I wanted to tell you about."

The room was small but comfortable, with a window looking onto the front garden. The bed was along one wall, a small desk and drawers with a closet was on the other wall and two armchairs were in front

Leifi, on the occasion of his 70th birthday, Glenn Sigurdson, his great nephew, (and son of Sylvia and Stefan Sigurdson, not in photo), Nancy Thordarson, wife of Roy Thordarson, his nephew, Vilborg (Villa) his sister in law, Leifur Hallgrimson, his son, and his wife Irene, and on the sofa, Laura Thordarson, his niece, and Elaine and Eric Sigurdson, younger sister and brother to Glenn.

of the window. Leifur was over six feet tall, with a thin and angular face. His father Leifi was 5 foot 10, with a stocky build, square face and firmly set jaw. Little connected father and son physically, but like his son, Leifi was nicely dressed in slacks, white shirt, tie and sweater. The suspenders he always wore showed around his shoulders.

"I got a call from Walter Nanowin this week," said Leifur. "He said he wasn't sure when he'd be getting to Winnipeg next but told me he was doing some writing these days about his life on Lake Winnipeg and especially Big Black River and his friendship with you. He wanted to know if we had some pictures to share of the Big Black River Station. I told him I was sure there were some we could send, and we could meet the next time he was in the city."

"Walter. How is he doing?" An energy suddenly came into the old man's voice. "Did you tell him where I am? You know he was with me since he was a boy nailing boxes. When he came to visit Winnipeg – he used to come quite often a few years ago – he told me that job helped him get his start as a carpenter. We had some good visits and often took the streetcar to the Leland Hotel for a few beers, where we met some of the old guys from Lake Winnipeg. Whenever we passed the CIBC branch on Main and Bannatyne, he laughed and said, 'There's Leifi's Bank.' He's quite a guy. He's done a lot of different things. He worked on boats for years as an engineer. I think he got his papers and worked in the mills, but I believe it was the years spent fishing on the lake he loved most. He and his wife have a

Another classic scene of a Lake Winnipeg fish station. Although not taken at Black River, it almost surely could have been as this captures the endless activities of the shore crew receiving, loading , and shipping fish, equipment, and supplies up and down the Lake.

big family now. All are doing really well."

"I remember Walter well, Dad," said Leifur. ""I think I was a couple of years older but we got along well. It was good to hear from him. We had a long conversation. He has done a lot of different things. His family is all doing well. He's working on becoming a writer. He does a lot of travelling in the communities all over the prairies it seems as well as an elder and storyteller."

"He was a good man Walter," said Leifi. "I remember one time when he was about 15 years old. There was just him and my longtime friend, caretaker and handyman Stjani Olafson at the station. We were getting things ready before the season started. After supper, I noticed a hell of a dark-looking cloud forming in the west and moving quickly across the lake. I did not like the look of it. I was worried if we got a really heavy squall pounding on the dock, we would lose it. That would put us in a mess at the beginning of the season. A lot of repairs had to be done. Several of the big poles that framed the dock had been damaged and twisted by the ice during the breakup. A pile driver was scheduled to come on the *Grand Rapids* on the next trip north that would be used to drop a big weight on them to pound them into the mud below. But that would not do us any good if we lost the dock. I knew we had to do something."

"I remember you telling me about this a long time ago," said Leifur. "Something about filling the empty gas drums. The ones that had not made it on the last tug out in the fall - to hold down the dock in a big storm."

"Yeah, that's the time," said Leifi. "We had a bunch of empties, about fifteen or twenty, on the shore. Walter and I rolled them to the end of the dock. We got a pump going, even though it was starting to blow really hard and the waves would soon come onto the shore. Walter got every one of them

filled to the brim. That put a lot of ballast on the end to hold the dock down. Stjani and I pulled out every second plank so that when the full force waves came they would move through and not build pressure underneath the planks and lift the dock. By the time Walter was finished, he was soaking. The waves were pounding. It was about nine o'clock when we finished: pitch black and wind blowing like hell. It was a dirty night, but I knew we did everything we could. We went into the bunkhouses to wait. It was too dangerous to stay in front of the station or on dock.

Taken at Black River around 1936 - 37. Back row right to left: Borga Hallgrimson, (Leifi's wife) her sister, Villa (Brynjolfson) and her daughter, Sylvia (later Sigurdson) a local boy working at the station. Front left to right: young boy, likely Leifur, their son, Villa's young daughter Solveig, and Helen Sigurdson (Sylvia's friend, later Ekberg).

"I thought everything would be gone the next morning, but when I woke up and walked outside, it was a bright, sunny day. Lake Winnipeg is always like that. The weather can change in a moment. Walter was already walking toward the dock, and he yelled, 'Leifi, everything is fine.'

"Leifur, we have lots of pictures of the station and people in the community. Those were good years. The best years. I think of them often. When you next speak to Walter, tell him where I am. Maybe he could visit, and I could get Jimmy Page, who is here from Canadian Fish Producers, and we could go to Merchant's Hotel and have a few beers."

"Don't worry, Dad. I will," said Leifur, but the look on his face suggested he was uneasy at the prospect of visiting Merchant's, the legendary hotel in Selkirk that was a second home to many fishermen over the years. His dad, like many businessmen of his day, almost always wore a suit, white shirt and tie, no matter the setting, and having donned his Fedora, Leifur could imagine the scene when Walter, Jimmy and him entered Merchant's for a "get-together" to revisit the old days.

"Dad, I'm afraid I have to go. It's already after two, and I told the girls I would be there by three. I want to leave you with a picture for us to talk about next time. You remember the time Mom, Villa, Sylvia and her friend Helen, Solveig and Grimsi were staying at the station that summer. The cooks had to leave just before the season ended, and they took over! I found this picture. I think that's me, and maybe that's Walter behind me. Anyway, lots to talk about next time."

Leifi looked intensely at the picture. His son knew this would give him lots to think about over the week, and they would have a good visit next weekend. The best visits were when the conversation found its way to fish and the lake. That's where his dad's heart remained. Leifur often regretted that his Dad had perhaps retired too early.

"Okay, Dad. I've got to go now. I'll see you next week."

Elin and her afi Leifi. Always a suit, white shirt and tie.

Scene 6 – Winnipeg, 1991

Elin knew her Afi Leifi well. For the first five years of her life, he lived with the family. After he moved to the Betel Icelandic senior citizens home, the family was in close and continuous touch with regular visits and spent all significant holidays and events together. He died in 1980 at the age of 94.

She knew him as a very loving grandfather, gentle and kind, but she did not have any real understanding of the story wrapped inside him. Yes, she knew the basics. He was born in Iceland and came to Canada with his mother at age two. The family moved to Riverton in 1916. A highly respected man in the fishing business, he had fish stations on Lake Winnipeg, but she had no real appreciation what that meant. She understood there was a deep bond between her Afi and Dad. Her dad had endless patience engaging with him as they relived the past through Afi's stories of the lake. Her Afi always drew the humour out of situations and people with a chuckle. Her dad responded with a heartier laugh. As she grew older she came to understand that for all his successes in life, forces beyond his control had left a trail of heartbreak for him and her Amma Borga. Of their four children, two died in infancy: a young son Jon and a daughter Sylvia.

She also learned of that her Dad's older brother, Peter an extraordinarily dynamic and handsome man with a charismatic personality, had been killed tragically by a booby-trapped rifle two days after the end of the Second World War. The impact of his death on the family was profound. After the war, with her Dad entering the University of Manitoba, the decision was made to relocate to Winnipeg. In 1952 her Afi sold the business to Booth Fisheries in 1952, although he continued as manager of their stations until 1956 when he fully retired.

By then her dad was well on his way to becoming a very successful lawyer. working for several years in the Finance Department in Ottawa, then returned to Manitoba where he became the Director of Civil Litigation ,then Associate Deputy Attorney General. He was subsequently appointed CEO of Manitoba Forest Resources Ltd. (Manor), a position he held for many years. He would conclude his career as Chairman of the Manitoba Municipal Board. Thankfully, Leifi did not live long enough to see his only surviving son Leifur die unexpectedly and prematurely at age 63 of a cruel neurological disease in 1991.

With the passing of her father, Elin became increasingly interested in

uncovering more of the past – a past of which she only had a surface understanding. Going through her dad's belongings, she came upon a letter Walter had written to her dad that year. The letter read:

Dear Leifur,

Your father was a renowned champion of Indian Rights. I will write about him and honour him in my second book coming out called Indian Chiefs of Treaty 5. *That there is my own personal story as grandpappy signed Treaty 5. Your father was instrumental in leading a way for the future of Indians, both for my people and the Cree of Fisher River. May God bless you all.*

Love,

Walter

Elin's curiosity was piqued. She tried to locate the books that Walter mentioned in his letter but could not find them.

She was very surprised to receive another letter from Walter in 2000 – this time addressed to her.

Dear Elin,

Your dad, Leifur, gave me black and white photos, which I have reproduced for my third book, Big Lake Waters. *It is still in manuscript form, and it is quite possible that I may publish it. There are a couple of pictures of Leifi in my book. Leifi was my very best friend. So all the Icelanders that came north to Big Black River every summer for as long as I can remember were best friends also. Old Sigurdson from Riverton remembers my grandfather Cubby Nanowin. He used to call me Cubby's Boy. But he was mixed up. My grandfather was Charlie Nanowin, Cubby's brother.*

Elin kept reading with great interest. The letter explained the slow process of publishing. Then it read:

Leifi Hallgrimson became my Indian best friend. They called him Mina-Skan, the man who stands by the berry bushes. Leifi loved his Indian folk and talked and laughed with them. They truly loved him. I mean love. He was one of their own. In my short story called "Return to Witches Island", I featured another Indian lover, Captain Billy Simpson. So was Helgi Jones. I have never met an Icelander who hated Indians. They were truly friends. I remember Leifi when I was little. He gave us boys hammers to nail fish boxes together. What a nice job at first, but it was also basic training to become a carpenter. This was when chocolate bars were five cents.

Leifi at right with some of the men with whom he's working

Elin recalled trying to locate the books featuring her Afi mentioned in in his letter. Unsuccessful in her efforts, she wrote to Walter Nanowin at some point. She was surprised to receive some time later a detailed response from Walter addressed to her. With it were several pages of background material including a letter of reference from his son-in-law, Walter Hudson of Fisher River written to support his father-in-law's application to join Writers Guilds in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, as well as the Canadian Authors Association. He explained that his father-in-law was from the Black River-Poplar River area and the great grandson of Chief Pewanowinin, one

of the signatories to Treaty 5 on behalf of the Cree and Saulteaux people of Northern Manitoba. Also included with the letter was a diverse assortment of other materials, including this remarkable poem, which told so much in a few stanzas.

1. Fisherman Sam left Gimli in '32,
   Went for the Booth on the Lake Winnipeg sea,
   Left with Ted and other son Hannes too,
   Sam was a mighty man in 1933.

2. Chorus:
   Where the big waves are rollin'
   Where it's scary and no fooli'
   Sam Kristjanson was a mighty man in 1933!

3. With Sam, Barney Doll was there,
   And Mully and Joe and Beggi we see.
   The fish winds blowin' an' the weathers fair.
   Oh look, there's that boat: "Follow Me."

4. The tugs have left Selkirk at two,
   They should be at Georges tamorra at three!
   We hope to reach Big Black River by half past two.
   When Sam was a mighty man in 1943!

5. We've been fishing an' Mully caught three fish,
   He brought ashore two and ate one at sea.
   We are using cotton and linen against our wish,
   But it's time for nylon nets its 1953!

6. Now Ted thought it's wise to stay on shore,
   And have a museum for artifacts to see.
   Day dreams of past fishing adventures from before.
   The sons of Sam were mighty men in 1963!

   The old timers are never forgotten there,
   When Collin Murray's ghost walks Eagle Island shores.
   And Manny Thorsteinson's ghost appears Birch Island there.
   Their spirits will sail Lake Winnipeg, FOREVER MORE!

The other materials were equally rich with information on the life and times of Leifi Hallgrimson and the Icelandic and indigenous men who lived and fished together on Lake Winnipeg. As she read them, she realized they were giving her a deeper insight into her Afi's life than she had ever had before.

She learned that even though Leifi had passed away many years ago, Walter was on a mission to bring him and those times on Lake Winnipeg back to life. His son-in-law explained that Walter was widely travelled amongst the Saulteaux people of the prairies and was known as a passionate storyteller and writer. She sent him more pictures, as he had requested, but never heard back from him.

One item she found, prepared for the purpose of an aboriginal writer's group that Walter was applying to for membership, included this description: "They came in

hundreds, gallant men who dared the sea to fish for the great Selkirk White."

Walter described that seeing the tugs coming north "set a boy's heart on fire… to be her master."

Walter continued: "But we settled for adventure the size of a fishing boat, with an outboard behind her. One of my buddies became captain. He worked in the Hay River area. I met several native skippers who became famous: Captain Ed Nelson, Captain J. Chas. Mason, Capt. Billy Flett, Capt. David Shares, and others."

Of all the materials she found, it was the end of Walter's letter to her that resonated with Elin the most.

There will never be another Leifi Hallgrimson or someone to take his place. There will never be another "incredible fishing days of Big Black River" of which I write. I have to publish these stories at all costs. Leifi has to live again. My Indians have to live again. Never will there be fish stations or tugs on Lake Winnipeg again.... It was incredible. So were the old-time square dances. I thank the Good Lord for keeping me alive all these years to write of these happenings. So, in closing this letter, God bless you, my dear Elin. I'll send you more information. Please write again.

Love,

Walter

At some point, Elin tried to track down more information on Walter. A Google search rewarded her with a reference in the *Winnipeg Free Press* advising that he had received an award in Aboriginal literature. He was described as a "walking encyclopedia of the oral traditions of the Cree and Ojibwe people of Northern Manitoba" and that "his talent is now emerging in writing and television performance".

Some years later, Elin learned of my efforts to bring back the life, times and people of Lake Winnipeg I had known since my boyhood on the lake. My efforts would ultimately result in the book *Vikings on a Prairie Ocean.* Elin thought I might find these materials helpful and sent them to me.

Postscript

The Hallgrimson's were a close family. My grandmother Amma Villa had two older sisters, Borga and Sigga. I knew Leifi all my life and understood the respect he enjoyed as a man and a businessman on Lake Winnipeg. After my Aunt Borga's premature death in 1958, at the age of 64, Leifi and Leifur spent many Christmases with us. After Leifur's marriage to Irene Morris, our families remained closely intertwined over the years. From the moment I first reviewed the materials from Elin, I knew that this was a story I must one day write.

This is a fictionalized account, but I am confident it closely tracks historical fact. When I read Walter's words, I could see the soul of the story. Like Walter, as a boy at the Sigurdson Fisheries at Berens River Station, my first job was nailing boxes. My partner was Peter Boushie. We were paid five cents a box. My dad was paid the same wage 25 years earlier, and I expect Walter was paid the same amount as well. I was born in a time warp. Not much changed on Lake Winnipeg from the 1920s to the mid-1950s. With each word I wrote, the story took shape, in the same way that each nail helps form a new fish box.

As I wrote this piece, it turned into a personal journey. I realized the history of the lake and its people are part of my DNA. I always knew Leifi had a close relationship with the Indian people on the lake, but when I read Walter's heartfelt and authentic words, I knew it was a very special story that I needed to capture. All these years later, when "reconciliation" has become the watchword of trying to build a better future between indigenous and nonindigenous Canadians, there are deep lessons to be learned in the story of Leifi and Walter's friendship.

Leifi was a remarkable man. But

A fish box

as remarkable, if not more so, was the courage it must have taken for his mother to strike out alone on a dangerous voyage to make a better life for her two-year-old child. When she died in 1933, she almost certainly looked back at that decision – and what Leifi had made of his life as well as the quality of her own life – with enormous satisfaction, almost disbelief. She lived with Leifi and Borga at their Riverton home until she passed away.

Leifi was in the fullest sense of the term a self-made man. He worked hard. He was determined. He had a knack for numbers. With his watchful eye, he turned pennies into more pennies. He was described as "shrewd" but always in a respectful way. He was ambitious. Above all he was personable. He was inclined to a constant chuckle rather than a hearty laugh. He saw the humour and the foibles of human nature – not in a critical way, but in a way that reflected his deep love for people. Not surprisingly, he had many friends in life, one of the closest being Gutti Guttormsson, a farmer and poet from Riverton who was born in Canada and honoured as a distinguished man of letters in Iceland as early as 1930. Gutti was a great raconteur and humorist, and together Leifi and he would regale each other in long energetic conversations.

Leifi built a remarkable career as a leader and entrepreneur, and many people were greatly loyal to him. Something about Leifi gave him gravitas as a man to be respected. Clearly, he watched some of the leading figures in the fishing industry as he grew from a boy to a man. He knew that was the path he wanted to follow. He would have watched men like the Sigurdson brothers, the Hannessons, the Kristjansons, the Stefansons, the Magnussons and many other family units who played a vital role building the economy of New Iceland. He built a long and strong partnership with Booth Fisheries out of Chicago, as some others had done, securing both financing and markets for his intermediary role carrying out the production operations on the lake to supply their ever-expanding markets for freshwater fish in Chicago and New York.

But while many of the other leaders and entrepreneurs worked as family units, Leifi was a one-man show. By the 1920s he had a fish station at the very north end of Lake Winnipeg at Big Black River, which he ran in the summer season. He had another station on the west shore of the lake on Kenowa Bay. Many of the men who fished with Hallgrimson Fisheries at Leifi's stations were from Hecla, including my Afi Marus (Malli) Brynjolfson and his nephews Helgi and Beggi Jones. In the winter, he operated Booth Fisheries in Riverton, buying frozen and fresh fish from small camps around Lake Winnipeg, storing them in a large warehouse and readying them for shipment by rail to the United States.

I made many efforts to track more fully Walter Nanowin's life and story. I recently learned he died a few years ago at a senior citizens home in Poplar River. When he was working on his manuscripts, I believe he was in touch with others from his days on the lake, including Ted Kristjanson, Helgi Jones, Geiri Johnson and more. In

his writing, he mentions many well-known names from those years. My efforts to learn more about Walter's life will continue, and hopefully at some point I can add a short sequel to this piece.

Leifi's story is a deep probe into the history of Icelanders in Canada. When the Icelanders first arrived in 1875, escaping desperate circumstances in their homeland, they had a vision to build a new Iceland in their new land. Here, on the Icelandic Reserve, along the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, north of Selkirk, they began the business of nation building. They faced overwhelming challenges in realizing their vision, the greatest of which was achieving self-sufficiency. Thank God for fish, first to ward off starvation, then by the early 1880s to build the foundation of their economy. Without fish and the business of fishing, this small immigrant population would have surely dwindled and folded into the population at large. The New Iceland heritage, which would ultimately flourish on Lake Winnipeg and in Canada, would have been lost. Fishing gave these settlers self-sufficiency, an identity and a sense of place that has continued to build over many decades while maintaining strong and continuing relationships to the homeland. Leifi was an important player in building that future, and I am proud to have known Leifi in my lifetime and honoured to capture his story here.

Note: Pictures of the Black River station have been misplaced over the years and are unavailable for publication.

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Wooden Fish Boat Building; a Family Tradition

by Lisa Sigurgeirson Maxx

Back in 1990 ,two feature-length articles were printed in the March and August issues of *the Westcoast Fisherman* magazine, (printed and published in British Columbia), detailing the construction of what would become the last wooden hulled commercial fishing vessel to be built on the shores of the Pacific, in the era when the west coast of this great North American continent still supported a booming commercial fishing industry.

I received the rights to reprint the articles here, as I have come to see the significance of the fact that this boat that my father, Vilhjalmur (Bill) Jakob Sigurgeirson (b Gimli, Man. 1931) and his life partner, Doreen Jolliff, undertook to build in the old style in which his father had built boats before him, would be the last wooden-hulled fish-boat to be built for the commercial fishing fleet.

There is further significance in the fact that the boat building and fishing industry is the reason this branch of the Sigurgeirson family emigrated west from Hecla, in 1943. Further still, that my afi is known to have irrevocably altered the design of the entire commercial fishing fleet built on this coast after the family's arrival here, is something worth writing about, and of interest to the Icelandic North American population at large, one might hasten to suggest.

But that is another story for another time. This is the story of the building of *Mikley*. Let her story begin:

Building In Wood; The Art of Wooden Boat Building Is Alive In Steveston

by David Rahn

Reprinted with permission from the original printing in the Westcoast Fisherman, March 1990.

An exciting new boatbuilding project is underway in Steveston. Exciting for anyone who associates new boats with the smell of fresh cut fir and yellow cedar and the gentle rhythm of the caulker's mallet. When construction started last fall, it was the fulfillment of a long-time dream for Bill Sigurgeirson and Doreen Jolliff. "We're building it together," says Bill. "We've put everything we have into the boat."

Bill has worked on, and around, fish boats all his life and when he and Doreen met, it didn't take long for her to catch the bug. "I took Doreen out on a little gillnetter I had, four years ago," he says. "She had an office job them, but I haven't been able to get her back on shore since."

Construction of their 44' by 16'8" troller

is taking place in a temporary shop, in back of the industrial park on Trites Road. The workshop is just long enough to house the finished boat with some extra room to one side for the steam box. Adjoining the main shed is a woodworking shop equipped with a long bench, band saw, jointer and thickness planer. This area, (which also serves as the lunch room) is the only heated space on the site and here cold hands are warmed over a home made wood stove built from a stainless steel beer barrel. Outside, there's a small shelter for welding and metal work, where the fuel and hydraulic tanks are being built.

In the best tradition of wooden boat building, the shape of the hull came right out of Bill's head. He designed the boat himself and worked out the finished lines by carving a three-foot long half-model. With help from John Roeloff, they took lines off the half-model and lofted the boat full-size on the shop floor. Asked if he had any particular boat in mind, Bill says, "I just tried to follow what my dad used to build. He built quite a few gillnetters here on the river. Most of them in temporary shops just like this one."

Bill Sigurgeirson at work

Bill worked along with his father for a number of years and helped him with his last boat, *Noble Savage,* in 1961. "I started hanging around and doing things there when I was about seven or so," he says. The new boat is combination of all those early experiences and when she's done, Bill expects her to be sea kindly. He and Doreen plan to troll, longline and jig tuna, in comfort.

Kris Frostad is in charge of building and Bill considers himself lucky to have got him for the job. Kris built his last wooden boat in the mid-1980s, a tri-cabin pleasure cruiser. His last fish boat was the *Ocean Splendor,* built over the winter of '79-'80. With over 45 wooden boats to his credit, many of them well known to B.C. fishermen, Kris brings a wealth of experience and refined construction techniques to this job.

Working along with him are John Roeloff and Sucha Boonia plus several members of Bill and Doreen's family. Two of Bill's sons, Steve and Aaron, and daughter, Lisa, are helping with the construction. Also helping out is his son-in-law, Pat Mack. Bill refers to him good-naturedly as the, "numbers man, accountant and gopher." A third son, Caleb, is in his first year a university and is the official photographer. "This job is really a family affair," says Bill.

John Roeloff has worked with Bill since the project got started. "John did the drawings from the lines we pulled off the half-model," says Bill. He also supplied the architectural expertise and calculated

The steam box in use. Wood-fired steam created to heat planks of oak for bending to create shape of hull. This was the last boat to be built on the coast using this old method of wooden boat building.

the carrying capacity, centre of gravity and initial stability, before construction began. In spite of the relatively wide beam, Bill's design has a fine entry at waterline which continues right through to the transom. He was trying to stay away from a full round bottom and sharp dead rise and has been aiming instead for a shape that will give a smooth ride and good handling characteristics in heavy weather.

The stem, keep and deadwood are constructed of fir. Gumwood was used for the forefoot, sternpost, and a two inch shoe running the fully length of the keel. The ribs are steam bent oak. "We bought up all the oak in Vancouver," says Bill. "We cleaned Fife Smith right out." The majority of the fir and yellow cedar was supplied by Cowichan Lumber. "They cut some themselves and bought a lot of it from small independent mills around Vancouver Island. We stickered and air dried all the material, just out back, for nine months before we began," says Bill.

The hull, decks and transom are planked in fir and when the hull planking was finished, Raymond Bardnes came by and did the caulking, using one strand of cotton and one of oakum. Raymond is head shipwright at the Queensboro Shipyard and has been a master shipwright for 35 years. On this job he brought along his son Melvin, who has been learning the art of caulking from his father, and Bill says that, "Melvin is already a fine caulker in his own right."

Below the waterline, the planking nails will be covered with red lead putty and up above, will come the time consuming job of setting and planing thousands of plugs. Bill intends to finish off the seams the traditional way, with a coating of pitch. "Kris got all excited when I asked him about it," says Bill. "He says there is a way to get pitch up into the seams. You take a sheepskin, load it with hot pitch, and twist it to push the pitch up there. A fellow on Salt Spring Island is working on the sheepskin now."

One look at the framing inside the hull and up on the deck takes an onlooker right back to the heyday of wooden boatbuilding in B.C. All the deck beams, coamings, and cabin and bulkhead frames are sawn from clear yellow cedar. Yellow cedar has also been used for the outside edges of the transom, as well as, the sheer strake along the inside of the bulwarks continue to the stern in fir.

Around the perimeter of the deck, Kris has run an un-notched yellow cedar covering board along the inside of the ribs. The spaces between the bulwark planks and the covering boards are fitted with small blocks of yellow cedar. Each block

is chamfered and set between the ribs, above deck-level, so it will guide water away from the ribs and planking and out on deck.

A row of scuppers starts a few feet behind the step up to the foredeck and runs back to the checkers. Kris has closed in this area with a slim notched piece of deck planking which covers the shear plank and fills the spaces between the ribs. This piece is let in from the outside of the hull and fastened right through the ribs and main covering board. This will make it possible to do future repairs on damaged bulwarks or broken stanchions without lifting any planks from the main deck. Also, says Kris, the continuous ribs will resist the pressure from the deck caulking as it tries to push the covering board off the boat.

You can really see here the oak board that have been bent to shape the hull. They call it "bending oak."

The coamings for the back half of the cabin are set directly on the deck beams and through-bolted to each one. Between the beams, tie rods will really just anchour the cabin to the coaming" says Kris. "With so many through-bolts to the deck beams, nothing will shift it."

With an eye to future maintenance and repairs, he has installed a full set of blocking around the outside of the main cabin coaming. "Eventually as the wood ages and shrinks and the boat works, you have to re-caulk these seams," he says, indicating the first plank edge beside the coaming. "Without some backing along the coaming, it will become impossible to keep the caulking tight."

Up on the fore deck, the wheelhouse coamings are set on top of the finished planking. Kris says this arrangement has never given him any trouble. "We've always done it this way on our boats, without any problem."

Bill and Doreen are planning to put a bright finish on the deck inside the

wheelhouse. "We'll cover it with an old piece of carpet while we're fishing and then take it off when we're living on board in the winter time," says Bill. "This is going to be our home."

They'll be fitting out the whole interior with year-round comfort in mind. When she's launched, she'll be one of the only trollers on the coast with a full size bathtub on board.

Word of the project is already spreading around the coast and the crew sees a steady stream of visitors, almost every day. So many, that they might need a full time 'tour guide' so they can get on with the work. It's not surprising that this boat is generating a lot of interest, she's the first new wood troller to be built in a long while. "This is an exciting job to work on," Bill says. "Nobody on the crew is showing up just to put in their time. Everybody is happy to be here, and they really get into it."

* * *

The second article was published in August 1990, after the June 26th launch:

Summer Launch
Mikley – A New Boat in the Family Tradition

by David Rahn

Reprinted with permission from the original printing in the Westcoast Fisherman, August 1990.

On June 26, eight months after the fir keel began to take shape on the shop floor, the troller *Mikley,* was lowered into the Fraser River at the Paramount gillnet pond in Steveston. Her design and building has been a family affair all the way for owners Bill Sigurgeirson and Doreen Jolliff, and most of the family was there to witness her launching. "It almost felt like we were giving birth," exclaimed Bill's daughter, Lisa. To celebrate the occasion, Lisa baked a seven-layer vínarterta (a traditional Icelandic cake that's usually served at Christmas time and on special occasions), and she wrote and sang a new song dedicated to the Mikley (see page 180).

For Bill and Doreen the launch day was the fulfillment of a dream to build their own wooden troller from scratch. Although Doreen is a relative newcomer to the fishing industry, she's taken to trolling with a vengeance, and she's also acquired a stong affinity for wooden boats. Last year, she and Bill completely rebuilt their troller *Jan Michelle.* She's a 40 footer built at Oona River in 1965 by Axel Hansen and Fred Letts.

Bill's attachment to wooden boats took shape during his childhood. His [grandparents emigrated from Iceland to Lake Winnipeg in the late 1800's. Bill's father, Sigurgeir H Sigurgeirson, was born on Hecla Island, 1893. He married Victoria Johanna (Joa) Anderson]* and the family lived in Gimli and then settled on Hecla, where "Geiri," as he was known to the family, built boats and fished. (*edits to the original article text have been added by the current writer for accuracy of emigration information and family names)

When Bill was 12 years old the family moved west to Steveston. Geiri continued to build boats in various shops along the Steveston dike, and as Bill grew up, he absorbed his father's time-tested skill and appreciation for wood. He also took his traditional Icelandic name from his father – Sigurgeirson, "son of Sigurgeir."

Last fall, when Bill and Doreen began building the *Mikley,* interest in the project ran high, right from the start. "We

The crew - and supporters - that helped create this incredible feat! Including Bill's partner, Doreen, two of his three sons, a son-in-law, a daughter-in-law, a brother and a grandchild (and a daughter who is behind the camera), Lisa.

The day amma came to see her in the water – Bill Sigurgeirson, his granddaughter Jessica Mack; partner Doreen Jolliff, and Bill's mom Victoria Johanna (Joa) Sigurgeirson.

felt like we were a living museum," says Doreen. "Especially on weekends when so many people would come by." Bill says a lot of people gave generously of their time to help the project along. "Ed Wahl helped me out a lot at the start, ordering lumber and parts. We also had an excellent caulker, Raymond Bardnes." Many other, from all over the coast, contributed. Bill even had Alice and Jim Carlson come down from Ucluelet to install the radar and help with the wiring.

A family affair – here is Bill's eldest son, Stephen, and his grand-daughter Jessica, helping with the project.

The finished boat is real testament to the shipwright's art. There are freestanding gumwood safety rail caps running around the bow, and wheelhouse doors and windows built of solid two-inch Honduras mahogany. The inside of the cabin is paneled in tongue-and-groove red oak with a dark accent of oiled rosewood running down the interior corners and around the doors and drawers of all the cabinet work. The main galley counter is solid rosewood with a thin strip of yellow cedar let into the front edge. Chamfered yellow cedar beams have been left exposed on the cabin roof and small strips of yellow cedar fill the caulking seams in the fir decking, which will be polished bright inside the main cabin.

There was still lots of work to be done after *Mikley* hit the water. Sons Steve and Aaron (along with his partner, Christine Rush), daughter Lisa, son-in-law Pat Mack, granddaughter Jessica, Bill's brother Paul, plus shipwright's and friends, John Roeloff, Sucha Poonia and Kris Frostad were all pitching in to help Bill and Doreen make the first salmon opening. John Roeloff recently bought the *Jan Michelle* from Bill and Doreen and he's going fishing himself this summer.

Once the *Mikley* is fully rigged she'll be both troller and home for Bill and Doreen so they've fitted her out for live-aboard comfort. Among the additional luxuries they've added are a full shower and a separate bathtub down in the fo'c'sle.

This collection of photos (courtesy of Lisa Sigurgeirson) shows the *Mikley* during her early building stages, plus two recent pictures taken near launching day.

SONG FOR MIKLEY

Words and music written by Lisa K. Sigurgeirson June 25, 1990

Mikley, magnificent island,
you were the home of a young boy who once lived upon your shore
where Lake Winnipeg, that freshwater sea surrounded you,
yes, Mikley, we have heard your name before.

The boy's daddy, he was a boat builder,
he fished the waters of that inland sea
captain of his vessels, he was pabbi to the young boy,
and he was grandfather, afi to me

so we shall remember
as Mikley touches the salt water sea
so we shall remember
as she floats high and proud
we will be reminded
dreams can become reality
yes Mikley, we will sing your name out loud.

Years go by, life carries us along.
The grandfather lives in our memories and the boy
and afi he has become
he and his lady, they have shared a dream
and with the help of some, so shall it be

And we'll call her Mikley, magnificent island,
You'll be the home now for the ones who've made this dream come true
on Pacific waters
where soon you shall be floating proud
oh Mikley, and older boy, his lady and you

And so we shall remember
as Mikley touches the salt water sea
so we shall remember
as she floats high and proud
we will be reminded dreams can become reality
yes, Mikley, we shall sing her name out loud,
oh Mikley, we sing your name out loud,
Mikley

Lisa penned this song the day before the launch, and performed it, strumming her acoustic guitar and singing her praises, after *Mikley* was floating high and steady (and, yes, a certain pride in her buoyancy may have even been detected by the author), and the entire boat-building crew and many family members and visitors were sitting on her solid decks celebrating this great accomplishment, the birth of this dream, the construction of this last-to-be-built, wooden-hulled fish boat, on a dock in the mouth of the Fraser River.

Afi's Boats – *The Tempest* to the *Nobel Savage*

by Lisa Sigurgeirson Maxx

During the Great Depression work was hard to find and many men, including my afi, Sigurgeir H Sigurgeirson, a husband, and father of six young children, had to travel far and wide to find enough work to sustain their families. Geiri, as he was called, went as far east as Ontario on occasion and out west to the coast a number of times, trying to eek together a living.

The travesty that was the Japanese internment during WWII, ended up benefiting a number of Western Icelanders in the early '40s. Japanese men had built a huge portion of the fishing fleet on the coast prior to the war. Many were fishermen and many others, and their women-folk, worked in the canneries that populated the busy, industrious coastal fishing ports. When the Japanese people were taken from their homes on BC's coast and interned inland, men had to be brought in to build the boats, fish the ocean, and fill the employment rosters in the canneries. Many Icelanders from points east of the Pacific coast found their employment needs alleviated by this tumultuous situation; my afi among them.

Afi built himself a small shop behind the modest house they were able to purchase within a few months of their move to Steveston, a bustling fishing village on Lulu Island, in the area that is now commonly known as the city of Richmond, B.C.

In this shop Geiri began building his boats. As even common goods like paper were commodities that not every family had access to plenty of, it is said that afi's designs were sketched, simply, on the backs of old calendar pages. From these rough sketches afi would build a half-model of the hull. And from that three-dimensional model, carved out of some bit of wood he could find, would eventually come his next fish boat to order; the *Tempest*, being the first boat out of that shop, the *Nobel Savage* being his last.

A chapter from *Rather Fish Than Eat*

by R.T. "Bill" Robinson, printed in 1977

Submitted by Jeanne Robinson

Icelanders

It may not be statistically correct, but there is a saying that there are more Icelanders in Manitoba than there are in Iceland. When the huge flood of immigrants poured into the new world during the 1800's, the major inland lakes of Manitoba provided a natural magnet for the hardy salt-water fishermen of Iceland. Within a couple of decades they had settled on the shores of Lake Winnipeg, Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis and had established one of the largest freshwater fishing industries in the world.

The Icelanders have a most happy faculty of becoming assimilated in a new land without losing ties with their homeland. Even the second and third generation Canadians of Icelandic origin retain links with the little North Atlantic island, and every year hundreds of them fly back there to see where father or grandfather was born.

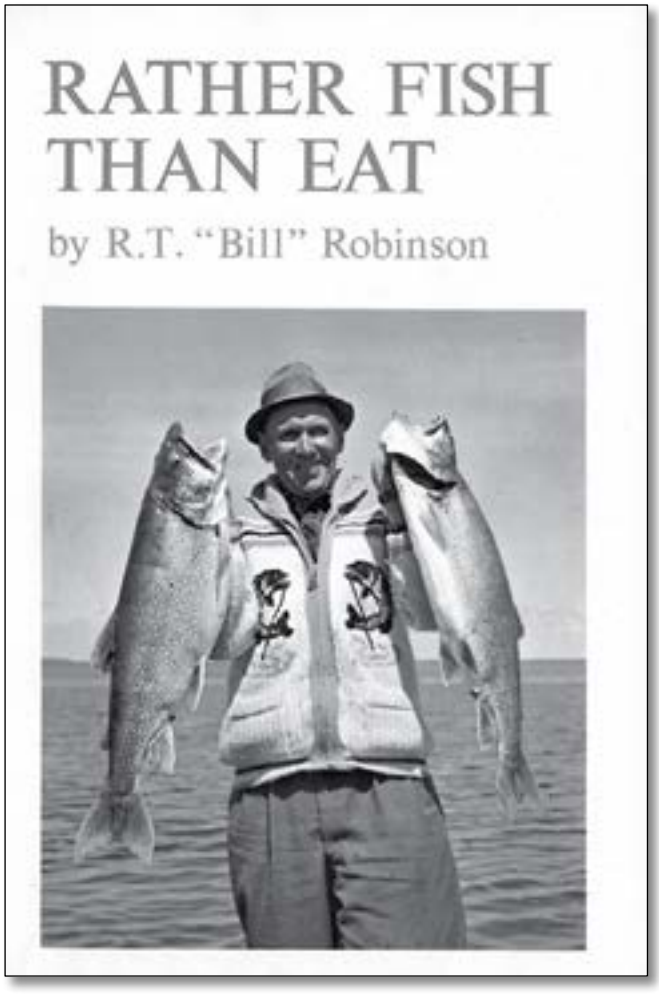
Another predominant trait of these people is their inborn hospitality. Back in the depths of the depression years, a door-to-door salesman trudged three miles across snow-covered roads in mid-January between Westbourne and Lakeland, toting his heavy sample case and a grip containing most of his worldly possessions to catch a train to Langruth, some miles north. He thought he might possibly get a lift along the way, but not a car or sleigh passed in either direction.

Once arrived in Langruth, he lost no time in starting his calls and was pleasantly surprised to find that faces here were not so long, the hard-luck stories not so lengthy, as most of the towns and villages he had worked before. Certainly, things were not exactly booming, but there was some money in circulation. Many of the good people were commercial fishermen and even in those hard times, there was still a fair market for fish. And most residents of the community were of Icelandic descent.

To make things even better, the good ladies of the town had not seen a brush salesman for years and were only too happy to have one call around. Not only did they buy brushes and other wares from the salesman. They insisted on stuffing him with every sort of goodie imaginable, washed down with their incomparable coffee!

That week at Langruth was never erased from Bill's memory – in large part because of a common love: fishing. Icelanders just love to eat fish. They love to cook fish. They don't complain about cleaning fish. And above all they are never happier than when they are catching fish.

Of course, as generation followed generation, they could not all become commercial fishermen, so branched out into lesser fields such as law, medicine and teaching school – a good example being the man who convinced Bill he should kick



the cigarette habit, who takes his annual electrocardiograph and prescribes pills for him now and again. But being a doctor does not necessarily mean he shouldn't do any fishing. Having a pilot friend with a fast private plane living right across the road, it did not take much urging to get Dr. Bjarki Jakobson off on a trip to the northern fishing grounds. The office hours he kept would stagger the strongest constitution, yet just let him get one good night's rest away from that insistent telephone and nobody can keep up to him.

For several years, Bjarki had been insisting that he and Bill take a trip east to visit his cousin, who operated a fishing camp north of Dryden. Once they made a firm date to make the trip, but it was washed out for a logical reason – there was no water and consequently no fshing. More of this later. ...

The time finally arrived when Bjarki could book off from his busy practice, Jack could provide his aircraft for a long weekend and Bill was available. Barney Provost, the sign manufacturer, was literally dragged away from his work at the very last moment to replace another member of the party who could not make the trip. As they were well into September and the days were getting noticeably shorter, McPhedran gave strict orders that they were to be airborne by 5:30 p.m. Right on schedule, the gear was stowed aboard the plane. Even Barney's stuff was properly tucked away, and his big crane truck was parked for the weekend alongside the hangar. Everybody was there except the doctor. Jack had brought his stuff along in his car.

A quick call to his receptionist said that he had left the office at 5 p.m. She was just closing up, recalled the doctor's having said something about having to "look in" at the hospital. This brought a collective groan from the fishermen. They knew what his "look in" might amount to. Nearly an hour late, his wife drove him out to the airport and he proceeded to pour out his alibis. A twisted ankle, a cut finger, a sudden stomach trouble and this, that and the other had kept the poor man from escaping. The doctor just did not have it in his make-up to tell these minor patients that their problems were not serious, and

he had not time to see them.

The sun was dropping alarmingly as they left Neepawa behind and headed eastwards, but at the Beech Bonanza's cruising speed, it was not long before the smoke and haze of industrial Winnipeg loomed up ahead. However, there was also an ominous big black bank of clouds all the way east of the city, so Jack turned the nose of the plane south looking for an opening to get through. Nothing showed up so he called the Winnipeg tower for a weather report. The reply was not very satisfactory, as the tower had no recent report from the Dryden area. Fortunately another private plane had monitored this conversation, and after they switched channels informed Jack that he had just passed through the cloud bank and he would be in the clear in a couple of minutes.

They broke through as forecast, but east of the cloud mass it was considerably darker; and when they passed over the Kenora airport the bright runway lights showed up clearly in the gloom. Dryden was still quite a bit of flying away, and there were no lights on the Dryden strip. Fortunately, their host's son was there with the station wagon waiting for them. As soon as he heard the noise of the plane, the headlights illuminated at least part of the runway for the belated travellers.

Gear loaded in the wagon, the plane locked and tied down and they were on the winding road northwards to Steve Eyolfson's huntinh lodge. As Jack had already visited the lodge previously, it was some sort of an "Old Home Week." Warm greetings were exchanged and Barney and Bill had the pleasure of meeting Steve and his wife, Una.

Steve then outlined the plans he had made for the party. They would spend the night at the home lodge and next morning he would take them to his main fishing camp, approximately one hour's drive north on huge, winding Lac Seul, a man-made lake that had been formed by the Ontario Hydro's dam 30-odd years before, and now provided some of the finest fish-, ing in the area. The only big question mark was the matter of water levels. The power authorities occasionally needed additional flow through their turbines for weeks or months on end, and Steve would find his lodge, boats and docks a mile away from the water that had been dropped ten or fifteen feet. This was what had forced cancellation of the previously-planned trip.

However, Steve said that water conditions were now excellent and that they should have lots of action. Fishing had kept up well through the summer, and was expected to be good until freeze-up.

They did not get away as early as intended, but shortly after lunch the next day, they were out on the lake and Steve was heading the boat over towards a small forest of dead trees sticking up through the water. These were cedars that still stood straight even after their roots had been drowned more than a quarter century earlier. The pine, spruce and other trees had long since disintegrated.

Amongst the dead trees, water weeds were plentiful and although Barney and Bill had never fished in tree tops, they were willing to try. The fishing that afternoon was not spectacular, but they brought in a few scrappy pike. It was fun to have to chase round a tree to get your lure back after a fish had wound it round and round a couple of turns.

After a typically-generous Icelandic spread back at the lodge, Steve took the crew over to the waterfall ten minutes away from camp, where a good-sized stream came tumbling down into an arm of the lake and provided a natural spot for hungry walleye. They fished in the fast water just below the falls, and Steve and Bill in the one boat upheld their reputations as professional fishermen by hopelessly outfishing the three in the other boat.

The next day Steve arranged for a trip into the secret walleye lake that he took his guests into once each week. It involved a long two-hour trip and a bit of manhandling up a connecting creek, but the fishing fully justified the effort. On this occasion, Bill was on the short end of the stick. Everybody was catching walleye, except him. He switched from minnows to spoons and spinners and back to natural bait again with no success. Everybody in the party had at least three fish before Bill finally managed to haul in a baby one. It was at least a fish, though nothing to take home.

Just before they pulled in for a shore lunch, Steve suggested they should work their way along a reed bed paralleling the nearby shoreline. Steve was still using his "pickerel rig," a double-hooked affair for use with two minnows, when he cast into the reeds and had a mighty smash on his line. A great big pike came smashing up through the vegetation and smacked back into the water. But Steve's line was slack and the pike broke off.

"What a monster!" Steve said. "I would sure like to have landed that bruiser and taken it back to show the gang coming in from Ohio tonight. I bet its been raising Cain with my pet walleye spot, too."

Sneaky old Robinson, meanwhile, had quickly unsnapped the pickerel rig he was also using and snapped on a Len Thompson spoon, one of his favorite monster-busting lures. On his second cast into the weedbeds, he was vindicated with a heavy wallop on the end of the line and this time, his line cut a sharp "V" away out into the lake. The fish made a sudden change of direction, but Steve had been too alert and the boat by now was well clear of the weedbeds. Steve and Bjarki watched as Bill finally brought the big fish up to the surface where they could see its ugly head and long splotched body. Another run or so and Steve did the honors with the landing net. Three-and-a-half-feet of pike!

That settled it. Lunch was overdue and they were heading towards Steve's favorite shore lunch spot when Steve reached down to the bottom of the boat and picked up the broken piece off his pickerel rig. It had fallen out of the big pike's mouth.

With his honor vindicated, Bill did somewhat better after lunch and they had a fine catch of walleye to take back with them when it was time to start the long trip back to camp.

As the camp on Lac Seul was now filled up with Steve's guests, they headed

back to the main lodge that evening, and the next morning sampled the fishing in the three lakes that connected together and formed part of the idyllic setting of the camp. Then it was time to head back to civilization and they piled their gear into Steve's station wagon and headed for Dryden and Jack's airplane.

Kidding each other on the return trip about Icelanders and no matter what their jobs might be, they always managed to get out fishing sometime or another. Steve uttered the classic Icelandic gag:

"After all, we have been fishermen since time immemorial!"

* * *

Rather Fish Than Eat is a well-known Manitoba sportsman's tribute to some of the fish and fishermen he has met over the years in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories.

Written in an informal style, the book takes the reader behind the challenging and exciting scenes of freshwater sport fishing. And it includes observations on the effect of industrial growth on traditional "fishing holes."

The message is not restricted to fishermen, be they beginners or old hands. Their womenfolk, through reading the book, should get a better idea of what makes anglers tick.

For those who enjoy fish stories, there are yarns about huge ones that got away ... But lots didn't, and *Rather Fish Than Eat* contains a number of excellent photos to prove it!

POETRY

The Lake Manager's Lament

by Thomas Goodman

The Suzanne-E was a rugged freighter
Plied Lake Winnipeg's stormy waters
She hauled fish for Booth Fisheries
Pickerel, Whitefish, Pike and Saugers

In '65, the Suzy went under
In a wild mid-summer
Mired in sand just off Black Island
Five and forty feet below

Siggi Goodman ran the lake
Forty years with the company
Knew ev'ry fisher on ev'ry boat
Icelanders, Métis and Cree

Nine hands perished that dark night
Only some of them retrieved
Four lay drowned under the wheel house
Awaiting their final leave

Siggi asked two scuba divers
To go down, bring up the crew
But the stairway proved too narrow
No way to wiggle through

Four bodies trapped
Their ship their grave
No funeral for the
Siggi told their folks
I'll get them all, he said
I'll get them all, he said

As winter loomed, Sig hired a tug
Her rusty anchor
She hooked off that damn wheelhouse
Just as the lake was freezing

Siggi waited for the melt in spring
Then followed the current's flow
And there upon a windswept beach
Lay three bodies in a row

Where's my other boy? Siggi wondered
Is the poor lad still adrift
Right then he spied a gleaming
Flashing bright nearby a cliff

In the shallows past beach's end
Two bare feet bobbed in the foam
A shaled-off rock upon his chest
One more sailor going home

Now Siggi did his final duty
He ferried the men across
But then that night, he quit the lake
And evermore he mourned their loss
He always mourned the awful loss

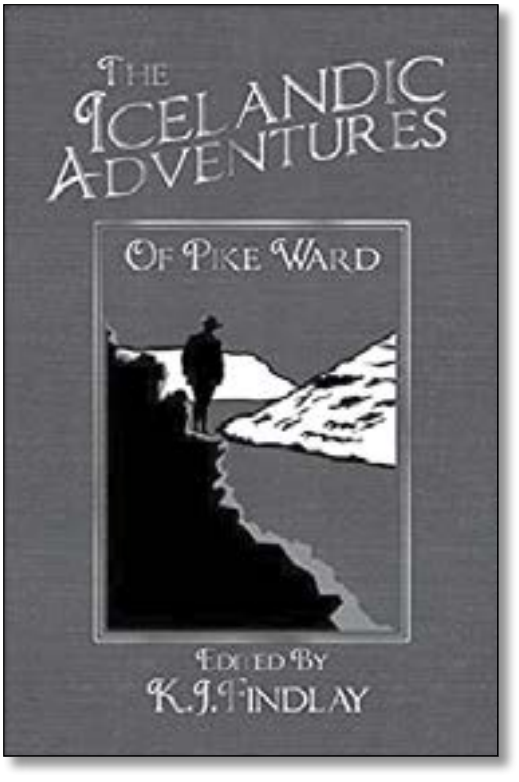
The Suzanne-E was a rugged freighter
Plied Lake Winnipeg's stormy waters
She hauled fish for Booth Fisheries
Pickerel, Whitefish, Pike and Saugers

Book Review

The Icelandic Adventures of Pike Ward

Edited by K.J. Findlay

Reviewed by Betty Jane Wylie



The Icelandic Adventures of Pike Ward
Edited by K. J. Findlay
Amphora Press, October 1, 2018

I couldn't wait to give my cousin *The Icelandic Adventures of Pike Ward,* edited by K.J. Findlay, Amphora Press, 2018. That is, after I read it first. It is "the frank and entertaining diary of a Teignmouth (England) fish merchant who became a hero in Iceland. His account of the harsh conditions, rugged landscape, local characters and customs gives us fascinating insights into an extraordinary way of life ." (From the back cover)

I read a review of the book in the TLS (Times Literary Supplement) and actually ordered it for Lorna as a late Christmas present. Now it is very, very late. I was just going to skim it and send it along to her. Instead, I read – and enjoyed – the whole thing. What the blurb about the contents doesn't tell you is that Pike Ward was a good writer. His descriptions of the Aurora Borealis are dazzling, but anyone can be inspired by that colour show. He also describes the rare sun in the dark time of year, fierce storms (blizzards on the land, on an Icelandic pony, maelstroms on the sea, on a ship), and incredibly bad food. He passes his 50th birthday in the course

of this journal; his stamina is astonishing, as is his tolerance of and ability to digest some very strange Icelandic food. He travels to all the fishing bases and conducts his business with integrity, honesty and demanding standards that earned him the respect and friendship of his associates.

Pike Ward was given the Order of the Falcon in recognition of his work in Iceland. He altered the fishing export business so that by mid 19th century, just over 30 tonnes of Icelandic salt fish was exported to Britain annually. By 1906 Pike alone was buying around 500 tonnes per year. In Hafnarfjörður, Pike was known for his generosity for the innovations he brought, such as the horse-drawn cart he built himself, the first in Iceland. He was a remarkable man who benefited the Icelandic economy greatly.

He loved Iceland. He called the home he built in Teignmouth Valhalla, and mounted Viking gargoyles on the roof line. He collected Icelandic artefacts and left them – around 400 objects – to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter when he died in 1937 at the age of 80. His death was reported in the Icelandic newspapers. Ægir magazine recalled that "he had taught Icelanders new ways to prepare fish, helping them to increase the value of their produce and bringing huge benefits to the country." (From the Epilogue in the book.)

The editor, K.J. Findlay, worked for two years on Ward's diaries, augmented with amazing photographs (early 20th century, remember). It's a good book. My cousin loved it and we decided to share it.

Contributors

TOM GOODMAN is a retired lawyer living in Stonewall, Manitoba. His work of non-fiction, *Her Darling Boy, The letters of a mother, her beloved son and the heartbreaking cost of Vimy Ridge,* was published by Great Plains Publications in 2016.

LISA SIGURGEIRSON MAXX was born in and raised in Steveston, BC where her Icelandic father, Vilhjalmur Jakob (Bill) Sigurgeirson and his family settled in 1943, when Bill was a boy of twelve. They had moved from Hecla Island. Lisa currently keeps busy as an amma, a freelance writer and singer-songwriter-performer.

SÖLMUNDUR KARL PÁLSSON is an Anthropologist and a PhD candidate in the department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba. Sölmundur was born in Höfn í Hornafjörður, Iceland but moved to Akureyri as an infant where he was raised. Sölmundur received his undergraduate degree in Social and Economic Development at the University of Akureyri in 2009. Sölmundur Karl moved to Manitoba, Canada in 2011 and got his MA in 2014 from University of Manitoba.

R. T. ROBINSON A resident of Neepawa, Manitoba, R. T. "Bill" Robinson has long been active in fishing and outdoor writing circles. His colorful fishing "career" began when he was a barefoot boy in a pool of tadpoles. He got his feet wet in the writing field in 1940, as founder and later editor of Devil's Blast, regimental journal of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles.
In 1954, the author showed his enthusiasm for fishing by organizing and directing the Manitoba Provincial Angling Championship; and later he instituted the Manitoba master angler awards, which were first used in connection with the 1958 provincial angling championship. He was appointed executive director of the province's centennial fishing derby in 1970.
As for writing, the Robinson byline is familiar in Manitoba on account of his weekly newspaper column, Rod & Gun. In addition to broadcasting fishing and hunting news on a Winnipeg radio station, the author has been engaged in various freelance writing projects. He is currently writing feature outdoor articles for a number of Canadian, British and U.S. periodicals.
The author is serving his seventh term as chairman of the Western Canadian chapter of Outdoor Writers of Canada, an association of which he is a charter member.

GLENN SIGURDSON is a mediator, teacher, writer, lawyer. His is the Honorary Consul General of Iceland in BC. www.glennsigurdson.com; www.vikingsonaprairieocean.com.

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

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.

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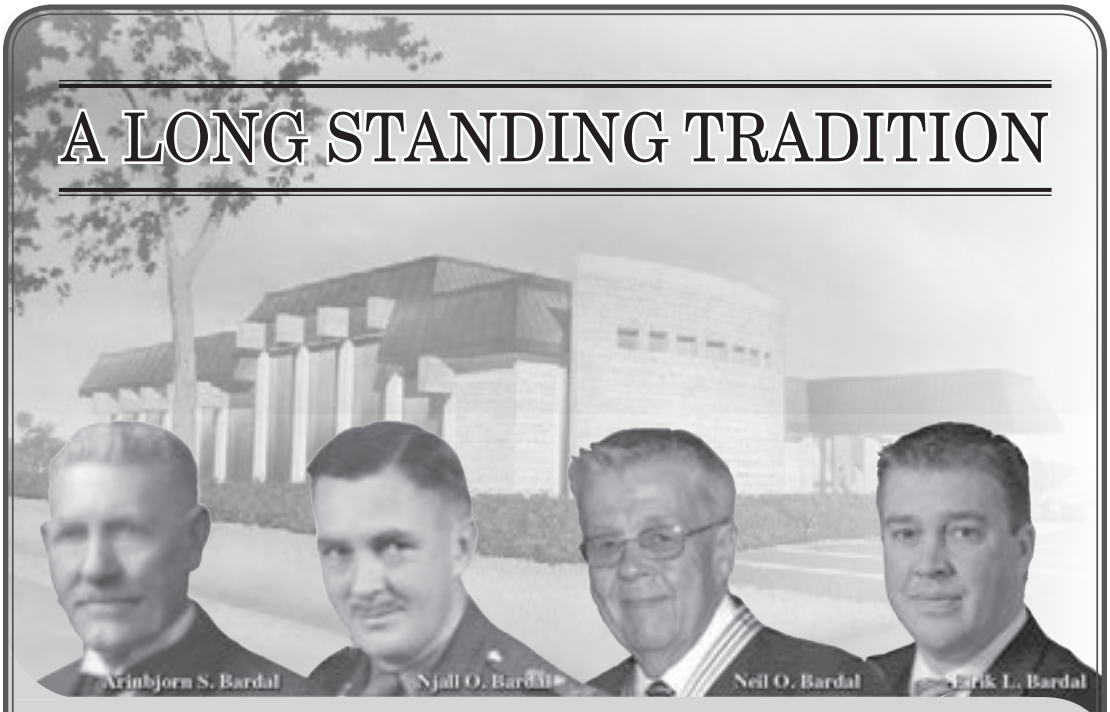

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