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ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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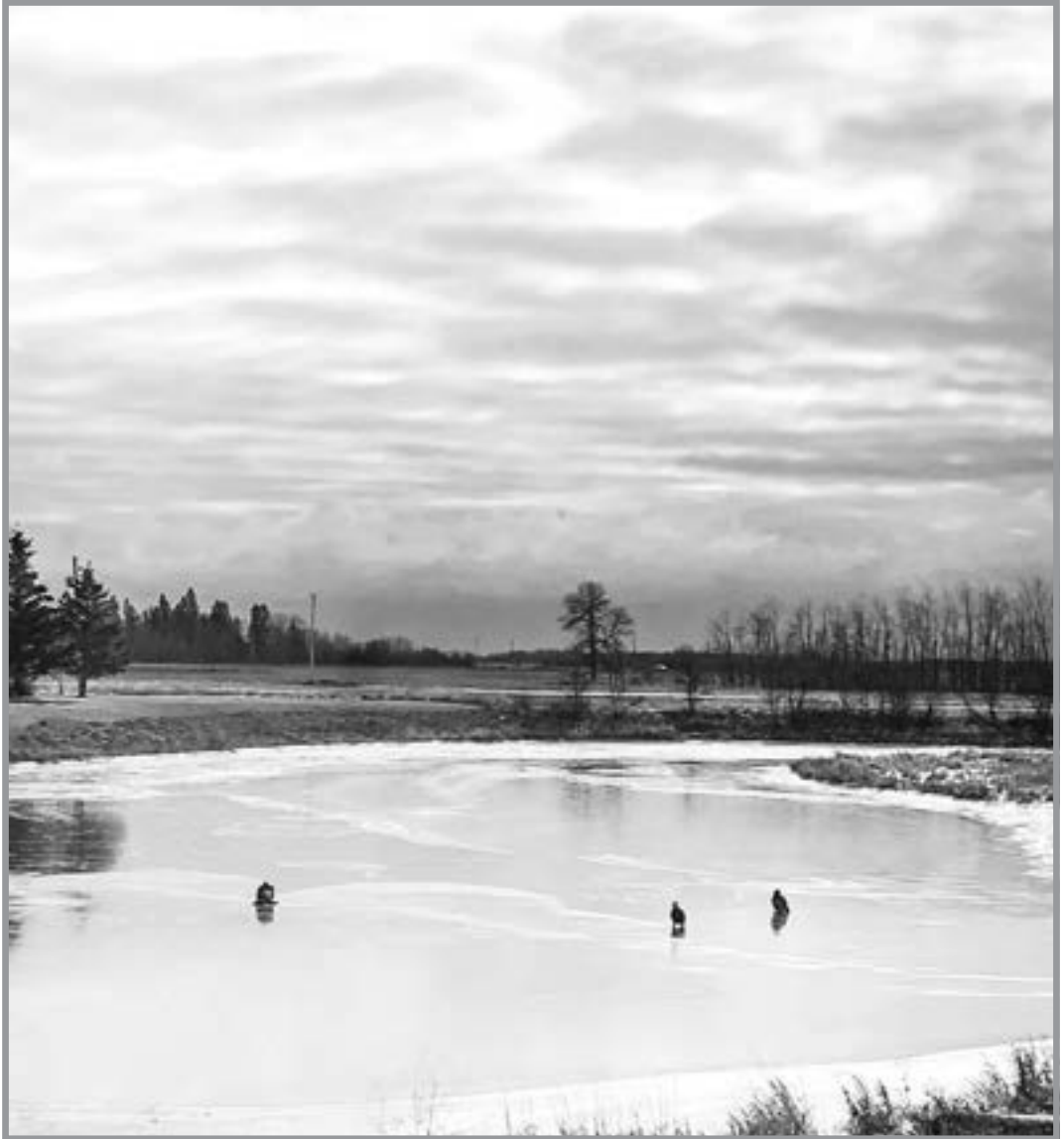


PHOTO COURTESY OF GLENN SIGURDSON

The Icelandic River ice melting in spring

Editorial

Waiting in the Dark Magic of Writing

by Elin Thordarson

In a letter written to The Poet of New Iceland, Guttormur J. Guttormsson, dated February 15, 1928, Jakobína Johnson writes:

... but “the point” is that I cannot accomplish anything for the first time. Makes no difference. I will perhaps add the occasional small poem – while I wait for the children to become full grown. Sometimes I feel like I’m waiting in chains – but I wait patiently – and certain – of what I don’t know.”

Jakobína (1883-1977) was a writer and translator, who emigrated from Iceland as a small child and grew up in Manitoba where she became a public school teacher. Eventually she moved west to British Columbia with her husband and then to Seattle where she spent the rest of her life. She is considered to be one of the best known female writers from that first generation of Icelandic immigrants. She published three works of poetry as well as a collection of translations. She was awarded the Icelandic Order of the Falcon, twice, for her lifetime contributions to Icelandic literary culture and heritage.

But at the time that she writes to

Guttormur about her thoughts on waiting and writing, she is 40 years old, raising seven children in Washington State. It would not be until 15 years later when she would be 55 years old that her first book *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð* (Candlelight: Selected Poems) is published in 1938. And she would be 59 when her collection of poems for children *Sá Ég Svani: Barnabók* (I Saw a Swan: A Children’s Book) is published in 1942. And later she is 72 years old when she publishes *Kertaljós: Ljóðasafn* (Candlelight: A Collection of Poetry) in 1955. She also publishes a book of Icelandic poems translated to English called *Northern Lights*, in 1959, at the age of 76. And she would go on to live to 94 years old.

This all speaks volumes to me because I am a writer, and I am a mother, and I feel like I am waiting. Other than in the biological sense, my creativity has all but ground to a halt. What once was something I sat down to in a very ritual sense every morning, now appears to be in a state of hibernation. I tell myself and the people around me that I am in a note taking stage. Or in a reading phase. And while it is those things, Jakobína is right, it is a season of waiting. Waiting to return to the writing that, at one time, defined

our days and our inner lives. I have left a character standing on the sidewalk looking up at their room's window from below, I have left a mother sitting in a cemetery, a fountain of Pan in a forest flowing at night, and a ghost waiting under a cairn. Those worlds in me have all gone silent, for now at least. And it's because of my two small children, and the bond we require of each other every day.

The day's work of being a mother is long and the world of being a mother can be very very small. Repetitive. Routine. And for mothers of the newly born, it can feel like you're stuck in a one hour and fifteen minutes cycle of time that runs through the days and through the nights and you don't know when a pain medication dosing begins or ends anymore. It's a creative time-sink.

And it is not just a lack of time, it is a lack of energy that keeps me from turning on the desktop computer I purchased for the purpose of writing, or from opening the various beautiful notebooks I have on hand to inspire my storytelling. In November of 1922, Jakobina writes, again

to Guttormur, "I think that I had more to say, but I am tired." And in fact she often signs off her letters to him in this fashion. She has ended her day with some correspondence, very often discussing literature or a translation she is currently working on, but then very suddenly she will quickly jot off her farewell as fatigue and poor penmanship (not really, these are her thoughts) creep in.

Pete Townshend of The Who has somewhat famously written that "Waiting is the black art of creativity, not inspiration. Be ready. Be alert. Always." It's an understatement to say that I connect with this phrase. And in all honesty take a lot of comfort in it. As I'm sure it does to any writer struggling to do their work. Like Jakobína, nearly one hundred years ago. I don't know where exactly I discovered this next phrase but it is a beautiful sentiment on art, and in this case writing, which I wrote down on a scrap piece of paper. What is art? What is writing? It is showing the truth by allowing it to be seen hiding. And for this we wait at the ready.

Guardian

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Jakobína Johnson

by Kristen Wolf

Jakobína Sigurbjörnsdóttir (later Johnson) (1883-1977) was born at Hólmavað in Aðaldalur, Suður-Pingeyjarsýsla, the daughter of the poet Sigurbjörn Jóhannesson (1839-1903) and María Jónsdóttir (1860-1916). She emigrated to Canada with her family in 1889, settling in the Argyle district in Manitoba, where she grew up. After graduating from the Collegiate Institute in Winnipeg, she was for some years a public-school teacher in Manitoba. Soon after her marriage, in 1904, to Ísak Jónsson (Johnson), a builder by profession and the brother of the poets Gísli Jónsson (1876-1974) and Einar Páll Jónsson (1880-1959), the couple moved first to Victoria, British Columbia, and, in 1908, to Seattle, Washington. There they raised seven children: Kári, Ingólfur, Konráð Ari, Haraldur Björn, María Guðrún, Jóhann Ísak, and Stephan Jón.

Both in Victoria and Seattle, Jakobína Johnson was active in cultural and literary societies and lectured extensively on Iceland and Icelandic literature and culture. Her community work and her contributions to Icelandic literature were recognized on her fiftieth birthday in 1933, when she was awarded the Icelandic Order of the Falcon, and again in 1935, when she visited Iceland as the special guest of the Young People's League (Ungmennafélag Íslands) and the Women's Society (Kvenfélagasamband Íslands). Apart from the English-writing Laura Goodman Salverson (1890-1970), Jakobína Johnson is undoubtedly the

North American-Icelandic woman writer who has received most attention both in the West and the East.

Inspired no doubt by her father, and encouraged by the minister Rögnvaldur Pétursson (1877-1940), editor of *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* (1919-1939), and her brother- and sister-in-law Gísli Jónsson and Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir (1884-1946), both talented writers, Jakobína Johnson published her first poems in 1913, and from then on her poetry appeared regularly in Icelandic and North American Icelandic newspapers, notably *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga*, but also *Lögberg*, *Heimskringla*, *Eimreifin*, *Dvöl*, and *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*. It was not until 1938 that a selection of her poetry appeared under the title *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð*, which in 1942 was followed by *Sá ég svani*, containing poems for children, and in 1956 by the collection *Kertaljós: Ljóðasafn* (1956). In addition, she translated into English a large number of poems by leading Icelandic poets. These have appeared in various North American literary magazines including *The Icelandic Canadian*, *American-Scandinavian Review*, and *The Literary Digest*; a considerable number of them are contained in the collections *Icelandic Lyrics* (Reykjavík: Þórhallur Bjarnarson, 1930) and *Icelandic Poems and Stories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press for the American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1943), both edited by Richard Beck (1897-1980), in Thorstína Jackson Walter's (1891-1959)

Modern Sagas (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1953), and in her own *Northern Lights* (1959). She also translated into English a number of children's stories, which appeared in the children's section of *Freyja*, a women's magazine edited by Margrjet J. Benedictsson (1866-1956), as well as the dramas *Lénharfur fögeti* by Einar H. Kvaran (1859-1938), *Galdra-Loftur* by Jóhann Sigurjónsson (1880-1919), and *Njársnóttin* by Indriði Einarsson (1851-1939), and a number of short stories by Elínborg Lárusdóttir (1891>), Svanhildur Þorsteinsdóttir (1905-1966), and Ólafur Jóhann Sigurðsson (1918>).

Jakobína Johnson's collections testify to her versatility as a poet; she wrote personal poems, nature descriptions, historical poems, patriotic poems, and children's verses with equal facility. Yet, critics have often drawn attention especially to those poems that, light and mellow in mood, portray the role of the mother, such as "Gestur í vöggu" (A Guest in the Cradle; *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð f*, 52-53), "Jú, ég hef áður unnað" (Yes, I Have Loved Before; *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð*, 54-55), and to her nature poems, many of which are rich in pictorial quality and reveal her deep attachment to her home, such as "Hugsað á heimleið" (Thoughts when Homeward Bound; *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð*, 60-62). All her poems speak of contentment and



PHOTO COURTESY OF NELSON GERRARD

Jakobína Sigurbjörnsdóttir (later Johnson)

happiness in her adopted country; she is American (cf. her use of "amerísk" [American] in her description of her daughter in "Hún elskaða Sylvia" (Beloved Sylvia; *Sá ég svani*, 9-10) and does not ponder the immigrant's lot as did Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir. Yet, her collections also contain a number of poems, including her longest, in which she expresses her deep-rooted love of Iceland and the Icelandic cultural heritage. In addition to the poems composed during her visit to Iceland in 1935 can be mentioned "Íslenzk örnefni" (Icelandic Place Names; *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð*, 15-18), in which the

names of places and natural phenomena are skillfully interwoven to create a charming metrical picture of Iceland. Her indebtedness to her literary heritage, the sagas and the poets (although her poetic talents are also inspired by other sources), is expressed in poems such as "Fornmenn" (Men of Old; *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð*, 19-22), "Leifur heppni" (Leif the Lucky; *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð*, 23-25), "Íslendingur sögufróði" (The Learned Icelander; *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð*, 26-28), and not least "Harpan" (The Harp; *Kertaljós: Úrvalsljóð*, 92-93), for in Old Icelandic literature and in other Icelandic lore she found themes for many of her most powerful and original poems.

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Candlelight

(from *Kertaljós: Ljóðasafn*, pp. 3-4)

Everything I loved passionately
in the morning of my youth
is precious to me
in my memories:
the crimson of the dawn,
the rainbow in the sky,
the first flowers of spring,
violets in the hollow.

Autumn-colored forests,
ice-ferns,
lamplight in the evening
and the reading of stories.
– Christmas is coming,
the most welcome joy!
On the tables
candles are burning!

And though electric lights
pierce the darkness
of a whole continent
on the holy night,
dearest to me
is the candlelight
of good memories.
– Merry Christmas!

Leif the Lucky

(from *Kertaljós: Ljóðasafn*, pp. 17-19)

I'm allured by the times of the past
with dark or bright pictures and more.
In the twilight the mind quenches its thirst
at the holy well of ancient lore.
– I'm allured by the times of the past
with living pictures of a life of yore.

Tonight there is a storm in the north,
I enjoy the power of your tale.
When the ocean thunders ashore
I brave the dangers of sea and sail.

– Tonight there is a storm in the north
and a shower of hail;
from the fires of song and fame
– for around me now are burning
the fires of a bygone era.
See, the awesome waves churning
which Leif the Lucky dares
his need to explore so yearning.

From the niggardly sea god Ægir
he gained a boon one fateful hour
to explore the land of his dreams,
though waves and cliffs did tower.
A sailor's need to travel beyond
proves again its eternal power.

Leif could hardly dream that Vinland
would so mighty and famous be –
or that his voyage would be renowned
above all of his era's history –

and that Iceland's name and repute
would bear his name over many a sea.
But here there was a free spirit,
which trusted the call when it came,
and found, that a sublime premonition
was a heaven-sent flame
from the fire of immortality
and released his will for fame.

Which knows of even greater tasks
beyond the high oceans we know
and looks for new horizons
far from the graves of long ago,
and finds sweet balm for the soul
in the stars in the night sky aglow.

Lullaby

(from *Kertaljós: Ljóðasafn*, p. 48)

I hold your small hands, because the road here is rough,
and because I need to know if you are warm enough.
I know it's my duty to your ruler and guide to be
– but it's really you, who are leading me.

Oh, did you touch a thorn, which the pretty flower did hide?
and your beautiful tears the light of your eyes so chide.
I feel the pang in my heart, as I try to bring back your glee
– but it's really you, who are consoling me.

You ask about the dark cloud hiding the sun it follows,
and the dead maple leaves, which fly over hills and hollows.
I try to answer your questions truthfully
– but it's really you, who are educating me.

Now your small feet are tired, so I offer you my arms.
I hold you close to my heart, a moment full of charm.
You breathe quietly and peacefully, as your worries cease
– so it's really you, who is bringing me peace.

Júlíana Jónsdóttir

by Kristen Wolf

Júlíana Jónsdóttir (1837-1918) was born at Búrfell in Hálsasveit in Borgarfjörður, the daughter of Jón Sigurðsson and Guðrún Samsonardóttir. She was raised by her paternal grandfather, Samson Jónsson, and his wife, Þorbjörg Þorsteinsdóttir, at Rauðsgil in Reykholtssdalur in the same district. Þorbjörg was the mother of the poet Eyjólfur Jóhannsson (1824-1911), and Magnús Gíslason (1946: 2) believes that it was he who taught Júlíana not only to read and write but also to compose verses. Soon after her grandfather's death in 1850, Júlíana went to live with her mother, who was married to Brynjólfur Konradsson and lived at Sólvellir in Helgafellssveit. Because of the couple's poverty, however, Júlíana was forced to leave home early and take employment at various farms in the district and later at Kollsá in Hrutafjörður, where she stayed for four years. In 1860, she moved to Akureyjar in Breiðafjörður to work as a maid in the home of the minister Friðrik Eggerts. It seems to have been at Akureyjar that she decided to emigrate to North America;¹ the reasons for her decision remain unclear, although it has been suggested that an unhappy love

affair may have been the cause. However, for financial reasons her plans were temporarily disrupted, and instead she moved to Stykkishólmur, where she lived for six years.²

It was during this time, in 1876, that Júlíana published the first of her two collections of poetry, *Stúlka* (Girl),³ which occupies a special place in Icelandic literature in that it was the first book of poetry by a woman to be printed in Iceland. Among the many personal poems, the opening one, addressed to her prospective readers, is significant, not least because it may be said to be symbolic of women and women's literature at the time:⁴

A little maid greets
her countrymen,
young and unlearned, but not shy;
she seeks acceptance
of kind men,
a fatherless child
of a poor mother.

Considering Júlíana's financial situation, the publication of *Stúlka* is quite surprising; however, it is generally believed that Árni Thorlacius (1802-1891), a well-

1 It was then that she wrote the poem "Kveðja til Íslands" (Farewell to Iceland; *Stúlka*, 7-8).

2 Cf. her poem "Jeg sit kyr" (I Remain; *Stúlka*, 7-8).

3 The title of the collection obviously refers to Jón Thoroddsen's novel *Piltur og stúlka* (Boy and Girl), which was published in Copenhagen in 1850.

4 As Helga Kress (1997: 13) notes, the poem can, of course, be interpreted as an autobiographical description (Júlíana was the daughter of a single and poor mother). But it can also be viewed as a personification of the book itself, the book being a daughter of a single mother, the woman poet with no tradition behind her.

to-do merchant in Stykkishólmur, assisted her. Júlíana was a close friend of the Thorlacius family. Together with Árni's son, Ólafur, she was involved in the theater in Stykkishólmur, for which she wrote *Víg Kjartans Ólafssonar* (The Killing of Kjartan Ólafsson), based on *Laxdæla saga*. The play was performed in the winter of 1879, and Júlíana herself played the role of the enigmatic saga character Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir. The play, which is preserved in a manuscript (Lbs. 1784 4to) in the hand of Ólafur Thorlacius, was the first play written by a woman to be performed in Iceland.

In 1880, she was finally able to emigrate to North America. She lived first with her half-brother, Jón Hrutþjofur, near Gardar in North Dakota; later, she moved to Winnipeg and from there to the village Manchester near Seattle, Washington, where she made her home in a little log cabin, which she called Skálavík. Due to financial difficulties and ill health, however, she was moved to a poorhouse, then to the home of Anna and Árni Magnússon in Blaine, Washington where she spent the last years of her life.

It was during her years on the West Coast of North America that her second collection of poems, *Hagalagðar* (Tufts of Wool; 1916), appeared. Its publication was sponsored by the printer Ólafur S. Thorgeirsson (1864-1937), who was,



Júlíana Jónsdóttir

among other things, editor of *Almanak* (1895-1937) and *Syrpa* (1911-1920, 1922). Like *Stúlka*, this volume seems to have attracted little attention, if any at all. Except for the first two poems, all the poetry contained in *Hagalagðar* was composed in North America and gives a fairly clear picture of the harsh fate that awaited Júlíana in the West. Some of her poems, such as "Andvöku nætur" (Wakeful Nights; 6-7), "Heilræði til hjartans" (Counsel for the Heart; 8-9), "Dauf jól" (Sad Christmas; 10-11), and "Eintal mitt fyrir jólin 1914" (My Monologue before Christmas 1914; 30-32), reveal an immense sadness and loneliness with undertones of vehement bitterness bordering at times on misanthropy. Her only friend is her "little goddess of poetry" ("Litla ljóðadísín mín"; 12-13), who "brought out laughter when in secret the heart was crying." Yet, Júlíana was not longing to return to Iceland; characteristic of both *Stúlka* and *Hagalagðar* is the unusually small number of patriotic poems and the

at times unfavorable picture she paints of Iceland. A case in point is her poem "Ísland" (Iceland; *Stúlka*, 8-9), which begins: "You ancient land of ice, / infertile is your soil, / windblown and barren." As Helga Kress ("Women Writers") notes, the opening of the poem is, in fact, a parody of Bjarni Thorarensen's (1786-1841) "Íslands minni" (Toast to Iceland), which was for a long time a cherished national song of Iceland; in this poem, he sings of his homesickness, contrasting the flat Danish landscape with the magnificent mountains at home.

Like most of her fellow Icelandic writers, Júlíana rests firmly in the tradition of the unschooled poet. Her *Hagalagðar* in particular is characteristically Icelandic in containing many rhymed letters, occasional poems and quatrains, in which she is often at her best. Among these, her "Staka" (Epigram; 73) on her verse-making abilities is noteworthy, because in it is crystallized her sense of cultural and social inferiority, which pervades many of her poems:

My poetry and writing alone are mine,

Though to create new roses I cannot
aspire,
For in my youth I had no time
To learn ought but to muck out the byre.

To be sure, Júlíana is no great artist, yet some of her poems, such as "Sléttubönd" (literally "level verse"; 39), an Icelandic term for a quatrain that can be read backwards as well as forwards, reveal fine craftwork.

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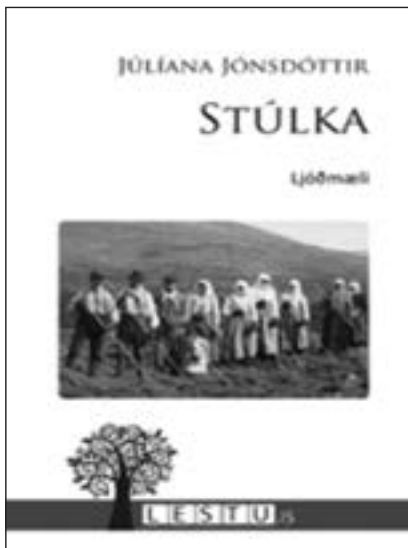
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Hay Harvesting Poem

(from *Stúlka*, pp. 34-35)

Thoughtful, I must wonder
at the grass all around;
sinless, I cut asunder;
there is no mercy to be found.

How grim I'm forced to be
with the scythe in my hand;
the leaves of grass do not flee
but fall where they stand.

We are like any grassy leaf
when ended are our days to be;
when death comes, and grief
from which we cannot flee.

My mind then starts to writhe
with thoughts and with a frown;
when will the man with the scythe
come to cut my leaf down.

Dejection

(from *Stúlka*, pp. 79-80)

My dear sister!
Sorrow seizes me,
I miss bygone times;
I am sad here
for long is life
when tinged with anxiety.

There is one consolation:
the mild father above
heals my hurt;
I see evidence of that,
which is certainly good,
though the world can still cause us pain.

Although much may go well
I see a hailstorm of sorrows
which conceal the eyes' sunlight with shadows,
for the heart beats oh so heavily,
while it is so young
and its strength fails, if no one can console it.

When the Spirit Wants to Fly

(from *Hagalagðar*, pp. 7-8)

When my spirit wants to feverishly roam,
it must sadly look at hearth and home,
and is chained in thralldom to this poor land
though it finds its wealth from the creator's hand.

But in front of the world, it's foolish to cry,
and laughingly I turn my back with a sigh,
and am cold as death and hard as steel,
though my heart be sensitive and my soul can feel.

Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir

by Kristen Wolf

Guðrún Helga Finnsdóttir (1884-1946) was born at Geirólfsstaðir in Skriðdalur, Suður-Múlasýsla, the daughter of Finnur Björnsson and Bergþóra Helgadóttir. In 1900, she entered the Women's Academy (Kvennaskólinn) in Akureyri. There, in the home of her aunt, Helga Helgadóttir, and uncle, Björn Jónsson (who was the editor of *Stefnir*), she met the poet Gísli Jónsson (1876-1974), a printer by trade, and married him in 1902. A year later, the couple emigrated to Canada and settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where they raised five children: Helgi, Bergþóra, Gyða, Ragnar, and Unnur.

Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir was – like other Icelandic immigrant women in Canada – extraordinarily active in community life. She was a member of the Winnipeg Unitarian Church's Ladies Aid and served as its president in 1927-1928. She was also the first editor of the women's section of *Brautin*, the publication of the United Conference of Icelandic Unitarian and Liberal Christian Churches of North America, in which she published the articles "Clara Barton" (*Brautin* 1 [1944]: 95-103) and "Erasmus frá Rotterdam" (*Brautin* 3 [1946]: 96-103). She was one of the founders of the Jón Sigurðsson Chapter, Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, the purpose of which was to supply comforts to the soldiers of Icelandic origin overseas and to aid soldiers' families in a time of need, and she provided many contributions to the Chapter's *Minningarrit Íslenzkra hermanna* (Winnipeg, 1923), a memorial book of the

men and women of Icelandic descent who served in the Canadian and the United States forces in World War I. Finally, she was an active member of The Icelandic National League, in whose journal, *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* (of which her husband was editor, 1940-1958, and co-editor, 1959-1968), she published most of her short stories.

Despite her involvement in community work, Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir is remembered primarily for her literary work, and she is commonly regarded as the foremost Icelandic-Canadian woman writer. Both as a young girl and during her first years in Canada, she wrote stories, but her duties as a mother and a wife made her abandon her literary activities, and it was not until the 1920s that these activities were resumed. Encouraged by the minister Rögnvaldur Pétursson (1877-1940), editor of *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* (1919-1939), she began publishing her short stories in newspapers and magazines, and, indeed, her first published short story was "Landskuld" (Duty to One's Country) which appeared in *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 2 (1920): 114-119. It is generally believed, however, that the first story she wrote was "Utangarðs," which appeared in print in 1938. Many other stories followed in succeeding issues of *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* as well as in *Heimskringla*, *Lögberg*, and *Saga*. Most of these were later reprinted in *Hillingalönd* (1938) and *Dagsbríðar spor* (1946). A number of her lectures were printed in a book entitled

Ferðalok: Fyrirlestrar, ræður, æviminningar, erfljóð (1950), a memorial volume published by her husband after her death.

More than other Icelandic-Canadian writers of her generation, Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir writes from the point of view of the immigrant still rooted in the old country. This does not mean, however, that she is unjustly critical of the new land. On the contrary, she is loyal to her new home, and this sense of loyalty informs her first published short story, "Landskuld," in which she describes how bitterly divided her compatriots were in the face of World War I. Yet, she cannot help seeing the uneven bargain of the immigrant; as she says in "Fýkur í sporin I" (Lost Tracks I; *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 3 [1921]: 89-93): "The wages of the immigrant are often meagre and always the same. To be sure, he is given land, but in return he gives his life, his health, and all his abilities. Yes, the land absorbs him, body and soul, and his children for a thousand generations" (93). This inexorable fate of the immigrant is always on her mind, and the conflicts of his torn soul are the main theme of, for example, "Jólagjöfin" (The Christmas Gift; *Heimskringla* 17 December 1924, 4-5) and, not least, "Utangarðs" (Beyond the Palé *Hillingalönd*, 9-36). Although published late in Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir's career, the latter story probably records her earliest impressions of the new land and may thus be partly autobiographical in nature. It is also one of the stories in which the immigrant duality between the



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Guðrún Helga Finnsdóttir

old and the new, between loss and gain, is most clearly and sincerely expressed – here through old Una in her response to whether she has disliked it in the West:

"Disliked it," Una repeated, "I wouldn't say that, but so much of me stayed behind which I always wish I could have assembled into one piece instead of dividing. Our entire past is in Iceland, and the roots run deep in the country where our race has developed for more than a thousand years. Here we cannot

teach our children their ancestors' history in place names or show them any physical traces except in words. ... Then there's the other side, which pertains to life here. The American dream was an incentive to make us work our fingers to the bone. Sveinn's back was bent and his hands were rough when he died, but he paved the way for our children's future and gained confidence in his own abilities. I'm not ashamed and I'm not being ostentatious when I say that I've often felt proud of being able to manage on my own, of owning my own home, and of knowing that my children and I will never be treated as paupers." (22-23)

Unlike many other Icelandic-Canadian writers, especially the earlier ones, Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir is optimistic, for she firmly believes in the reunion of the polarized selves through love and understanding and through faith in the future. This positive outlook is clearly expressed in "Fýkur í sporin II (Lost Tracks II; *Dagsbríðar spor*, 207-230). Ragnhildur, a second-generation Icelandic-Canadian, has married into an Anglo-Canadian family against her father's wishes, but her in-laws treat her with contempt, and in their home she finds snobbery, materialism, and spiritual poverty, those aspects of North American society that many of the older Icelandic immigrants feared and despised. Ragnhildur is torn between her loyalties to her husband and to her father, between the Canadian and the Icelander in herself, and after a confrontation with her father-in-law, who reproaches her for raising her daughter bilingually and biculturally, she returns to her father and to the Icelandic community, where she finds the rich spiritual values and the human sympathy her new life is lacking. In these surroundings, she contemplates her dilemma and eventually manages to come to terms with her situation and herself through her belief in love and the future:

Ragnhildur still loved her Icelandic heritage and the Icelandic language,

but she had acquired the broadness of mind and tolerance only years and experience can provide. And she admitted to herself that the course of events had completely changed her outlook. The young, upcoming Canada was on its way to absorb her nationality, herself, and her child, but she and her husband had managed in time to save from shipwrecking what was most precious to them – their love and their marriage. Like so many others, they had been stranded on the skerries of different temperaments and different backgrounds, but their good fortune had carried them on the highest wave up onto the beach. (229)

Yet, Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir firmly believes in the heritage of the race and the survival of its values, a belief that is voiced in stories such as "Rödd hrópandans" (The Voice of the Caller; *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 17 [1935]: 65-72), "Dyr hjartans" (The Door of the Heart; *Heimskringla* 16 December 1942, 1-3), and "Frá kynslóð til kynslóðar" (From Generation to Generation; *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 26 [1944]: 99-112). In her two last stories, "Ekki er allt sem sýnist" (Not Everything Is As It Seems; *Heimskringla* 19 December 1945, 4) and "Sárfættir menn" (Footsore People *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 27 [1945]: 85-98), she gives examples of how the Icelandic-Nordic heritage can still assert itself in people who would not have regretted abandoning it long before.

Although these themes overshadow all others in Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir's short stories, secondary issues are not lacking. Her contempt for the hypocrisy of public opinion as well as her admiration of self-sacrifice are expressed in "Kveðjur" (Greetings; *Saga* 6 [1930]: 21-30) and "Enginn lifir sjálfum sér" (No One Lives for Himself Alone *Hillingalönd*, 55-84), both about a

divorced woman. In "Stríðsskuldur" (War Debts; *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 13 [1931]: 43-47), she describes the sad lot of a returning veteran, and in "Úr þokunni" (Out of the Fog; *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 22 [1940]: 75-84), she shows her antipathy towards Hitler's totalitarianism during World War II. Other stories, like "Traustir máttarviðir" (Sturdy Timbers; *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 20 [1938]: 85-91) and "Salt jarðar" (Salt of the Earth; *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 21 [1939]: 40-52), depict everyday heroes, weathering difficult years and exasperating companionship with courage and kind hearts. In these two stories, as indeed in many others, tribute is paid to the strong, independent and loyal women upon whose unfailing support the settlers were wholly dependent. "Traustir máttarviðir," for example, describes an old couple watching a thunderstorm destroying their hard-earned crop, which was supposed to pay off their debts and give them financial security for the year to come. On the verge of giving up, the farmer grabs his wife's hand and says: "You've a strong hand, Þórhildur; there's a life force in it, I have known that for a long time. Once I almost passed away, but your warm hand would not let me go. ... I grabbed that straw which was your hand, and the strength which called me back to life was you." (90-91)

The character of Þórhildur is interesting in the context of women's literature. Þórhildur is described as an elderly woman who had a long time before "dreamt childish dreams of composing poetry" (87). However, she had emigrated and married, and her duties as a mother and wife had demanded all her energy, time, and attention. "But sometimes when she was alone, the young Icelandic girl appeared in her mind; she looked at Þórhildur with reproachful eyes which said: 'You have deceived me, buried me at the bottom of the chest with yellowed

scraps of paper'" (87). In times of distress, the young girl appears more frequently, but eventually Þórhildur manages to arrive at a kind of compromise between the hopes of the past and the reality of the present, between the Icelander and the Canadian in her:

As she sat there looking over the land, she understood that it was with the bright eyes of the little girl, who tried to compose a long time ago, that she saw the beauty around her. ... She saw lands and seas, towns and farms, parishes and provinces seething with life and activity: she saw her children disappear into the crowds and make their contributions to life and continuity. They were her poems, equipped with life and soul. (87-88)

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The Christmas Gift

Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir

The blue evening twilight enveloped the prairie. The clouds rose in multicolored, thick masses and looked like mountains from a distance. Free-flowing small clouds were like dark islands, and the sky around them was bluish green like the sea. But the clouds were constantly changing. Suddenly, they were no longer mountains, but castles – fortresses, with white, tall towers and dome-shaped arcades.

The north wind breathed on the towers, and they dissolved and turned into all sorts of pictures – beautiful women with their hair streaming behind them, who passed by, became unclear, and disappeared behind thicker banks of clouds. Then an unclear profile of a dignified young man appeared, who in a second became an old man with tousled hair and a long beard.

Then the sky again became the sea, and the clouds a fleet of ships which sailed at full sail towards the south and disappeared from sight.

"Winnipeg – Winnipeg – Winnipeg," called the conductor in a high and piercing voice. An elderly Icelandic man by the name of Egill Arason, who had forgotten himself like a child at play while looking at the cloud formations out of the window of the train, gave an uncomfortable start. The train was approaching the C.P.R. station

in Winnipeg.

People quickly put on their coats and jackets, hastened to grab their luggage, and tried as best they could to be the first to get out of the train, into the station, out into the crowds, and on their various ways to their destinations.

As in any other place, it is possible to see the difference in people's temperaments in a railway carriage. Some are ready long before the train stops and prepared to use the opportunity to be the first ones out. Others are slow and late. The elderly man belonged to the latter category. His hair and beard were white, and he looked thin, worn, and poor; yet, his appearance showed that he was a gentleman, and that he had seen better days, although he had now become almost a wreck. He got up and put on his old, threadbare coat. His long, thin fingers were struggling with the buttons. His hands were shaky and his fingers fumbling as is often the case with old people. He reached for his hat and his small case in the overhead compartment, but the latter had disappeared. One of his less than honorable fellow travellers had taken everything he owned.

"Damned thieves," he mumbled to himself. "I'll never see it again, if the police here is what it used to be." He looked around as people often do when they can't believe their eyes and then staggered out of the carriage.

He now went his way like the others, through the railway station and into the street along Hotel Alexandra. An ice-cold wind blew in gusts at the corner of the building and stirred up the dirty snow, which was hurled in his face. He shivered, and soon he felt frozen to the bone. He stopped for a moment to get his bearings. Everything had changed, and he hardly recognized the place. Main Street was a flood of glittering light. Tall concrete buildings – banks, stores, and hotels – had

taken the places of poor timber houses and small shops. It gradually became clear to him that he was in a strange city. And yet he still knew his way around. He slowly went down Main Street and looked carefully at everything, like people do when they have returned home after a long absence.

This was just before Christmas, and therefore the streets were crowded, and there was much traffic. The stream of people was like a living river; everyone was busy. No one looked at him, greeted him, or recognized him – they were all strangers. Everybody was carrying Christmas parcels – out of one shop and into another. Some were looking for "practical and inexpensive" Christmas gifts, as the advertisements said, others for costly and rare gifts – everything according to the circumstances of the giver and the receiver. And there were enough things to choose from. The stores were illuminated both on the outside and the inside with multicolored electrical lights. The windows were full of jewelry, finery, and glitter, which was all arranged with great skill, so as to catch people's eyes and demonstrate the beauty and quality of the products.

There was an exceptionally beautifully decorated window, in front of which many people stopped. Egill followed the stream of people and stopped as well. The window was large and shining bright; in the middle was a young, fresh-green spruce, one of the thousands that had been cut by the root and sold for Christmas decorations. But in the forest the old trees remain, silent and sorrowful, staring at the empty spaces, until the snow comes and conceals everything with its soft, thick cover. Yes, there the little, young tree now stood in the middle of the window, decorated with innumerable Christmas lights and with a shiny, silvery tin star on top – a symbol of the star of Bethlehem. Threads of tinsel hung on its branches, which sparkled and glowed in the

flood of light, as if they were made out of sunbeams and moonlight. The background was a painting of a dark, starry sky and a winter landscape covered in snow. Spruce trees appeared here and there, casting shadows on the snow. In the far distance a little village with a church could be seen with people on their way to evensong.

Underneath the Christmas tree in the fabricated snow, which sparkled like frozen crust on a winter evening, Saint Nicholas stood with his reindeer and sledge, loaded with expensive Christmas presents, and decorative items, for which there was no room on the sledge, were scattered everywhere around him in the window.

As he was standing there looking at all this finery, it occurred to Egill how everything is subject to change in this world, even saints, because they too change and are influenced by the spirit of the times. Instead of the dignified episcopal cope, which Saint Nicholas used to wear, he is now dressed in a red coat, trimmed with white sheepskin, and with a belt around his waist; and instead of the three purses, from which he kindly and generously used to distribute money to those in need, he has now lost his saintly nature to such an extent that he has become almost a "delivery-vessel" of the commercial spirit, which brings the biggest and best presents to those who need them the least.

Egill smiled sadly and said to himself as he left the window: "What are you going to give me for Christmas, old friend?"

In these thoughts he continued. However, he was in a scrape from losing his case like this, for in it he had kept all his money except for a bit of change, which he had in his pocket. He had filed a complaint with the railway company before he left the station, but knew it would be of no avail.

It was probably better to speak with the police. He was just about to pass a Jewish shop, where a lot of merchandise was

hanging in rows outside the store window as is the custom with Jews. He came to a halt and involuntarily looked back and noticed a little boy, dressed in rags, cold, and filthy. The boy stopped for a second, quickly looked around, and then snatched a pair of little red children's shoes, which he hid under his arms. It touched Egill deeply to see how need and poverty had turned the child into a criminal, and it occurred to him that he probably intended the shoes as Christmas gifts, for they were clearly too small for him. When the boy was about to run off, Egill grabbed him and said in a low and kind voice:

"Shouldn't we rather go in and buy the shoes?"

The boy turned pale with fear and was all confused, and throwing away the shoes in a panic, he disappeared into the crowd.

Egill stood behind somewhat annoyed, and without thinking he bent down, picked up the shoes, and examined them. Right at that moment, the Jew came out of the shop and did not hesitate, when he saw Egill at a distance with the shoes in his hand, to shout angrily: "Thief! Thief!" He was convinced that this old man had pilfered the shoes and was trying to get away with them. A nearby policeman now appeared on the scene. Egill told him how this had all come about, and the policeman let it be known that he felt he was speaking the truth, but the Jew was incensed, gesticulated violently, and screamed: "He stole the shoes! I swear I saw him take them." A fat and untidy Jewess now came out and supported her husband, as good wives normally do. Old Egill's temper quickly rose, and he felt like flying at the Jew, but he controlled himself and realized that he couldn't deny the fact that he had been standing there with the shoes in his hand.

He chuckled oddly as people sometimes do when they feel hurt and angry, turned to the policeman, and said: "There's no point

in arguing with such people. I'm ready to come with you. I wanted to pay a visit to the police station anyway on a different matter."

This was right at dusk the night before Christmas Eve. The Western sky glowed like a burning sea of fire – dark red with purple borders and by the horizon a rose-red, which extended far up into the heavens. The evening light reached old Ingibjörg Ólafsson, who was sitting by the window at the kitchen table. It was as if she and the room were enveloped in the peace and quiet of the sunset. And indeed, it was warm and cozy in the old woman's kitchen. The fire crackled pleasantly in the open fireplace, and the low, soothing sounds of the simmering kettle were in harmony with the purr of the fat cat, which lay curled up in front of the fireplace.

Ingibjörg put down Jónas Hallgrímsson's book of poetry, which she had been reading, and as she was fondling it in her lap, she recited in her mind these simple and beautiful lines of verse from Oehlenschläger's poem:

Hushaby, hushaby baby!

Sleep long and sleep tight.

Though rough and unready
your cradle's still steady.

Dream sweetly all through the night.

She stared ahead with the look and expression people get, when they see only with their inner eyes. It was little Einar's birthday today – her little boy who died at a young age a long, long time ago. This day had turned into evening, and she had not made somebody happy or done something charitable, as she had always made a habit of doing on his birthday. That was the only birthday present she could give him now, to share with others some of the warmth and brightness his short life had brought her.

Her thoughts were interrupted when the evening newspaper was delivered, and she went to the entrance hall to get it. It

was the Christmas issue – a large and nice publication and illustrated. On the front page were pictures of angels wishing a Merry Christmas, peace on earth, and goodwill to all men. Ingibjörg took that part of the paper, folded it, and put it in a drawer. She wanted to look at it later, and besides the pictures of the angels were too pretty to be lying around the house. Then she took the ordinary part of the paper and skimmed the local news. In this section, she noticed a little article in very small print, which astounded her. She quickly put the paper down, took off her glasses, and polished them intensely, not noticing what she was doing. Egill Arason! An uncommon name! She didn't recall having heard of any man except one by that name. But that he should have come to the city and was stealing shoes – that was impossible. Had lived here in the city a long time ago! –All by himself and unknown – without money and poorly dressed. Had everything he owned in a small case, which has been lost on the train. Could it be Egill, who had returned after all these years? Was it possible that he had become – become this unfortunate wretch? No, I don't believe it until I see it with my own eyes. She sat silent as the grave for a long time and pondered the matter. Then she got up, went to the phone, called her old friend Ingimar Sveinsson, and asked him to come over as soon as possible.

Ingimar was surprised and came right away. The old woman received him with open arms, took him into the living room, and asked him to sit down; she fetched a bottle of port and two glasses, and put them on the table. Ingimar watched her closely, because he saw that she was brooding over something that bothered her. She moved a chair over to the table, sat down, filled Ingimar's glass, and said:

"You've gotten used to my calling you when I need advice and action."

"Yes, that's true but until now, you've

always provided the advice," Ingimar answered with a smile.

"Isn't it possible to get people out of jail on bail if they're only charged with some minor offence?"

"Yes, that's common."

"Do you remember an Icelander by the name of Egill Arason, who lived here in Winnipeg many years ago and did a lot of construction work and speculating?"

"No, it must have been before I arrived."

"You're probably right."

She handed him the paper, showed him the article, and said: "I strongly suspect that this man is an old friend of mine and my late husband's, and that this is some kind of misunderstanding. What I would like to ask you is to go to the police station and find out who this man is, and, if my suspicions are correct, to bail him out and bring him back here. Here's some money."

Ingimar was silent for a moment before he answered: "If this is your old acquaintance, it is noble of you to want to assist him, bail him out, and help him on his way, but I see no reason for you to invite him home, because by the look of things the man has changed since you knew him. It might be unpleasant for you and perhaps for him too. Besides, you are hardly in a position to use your home as a poorhouse."

Ingibjörg leaned over the table and rested her chin on her hand. She had a serious expression and stared straight ahead as if her mind was far away. Ingimar looked at her sitting there, white-haired, bold, and with an open face engraved with experience – an old, poor Icelandic peasant woman with the mind and heart of a queen. After a while, she looked straight at Ingimar and said:

"Because I sense that you don't particularly want to do this, I'm thinking of telling you how it happened that I owe Egill more than I can ever pay him back. More than forty years have passed since I

arrived here. At that time, Winnipeg was a relatively small village, and there were few Icelanders here, but they quickly grew in number as larger and larger groups arrived from home. We Icelanders, who were here before, and who had settled here and knew the area, worked hard to help these people, find them accommodation and get them started by getting them jobs and offering them advice, while they were still unacquainted with the place. Sometimes, it was ungrateful work.

One spring, an unusually large group was expected from home. Difficult times and pack ice at sea had meant hard times in Iceland. On the morning these people arrived, many Icelanders went to the railway station to welcome family members and friends, or to hear news from home, or because of that strange tendency which we Icelanders here have to expect and

hope that something of the country itself accompanies those who arrive. But we are usually disappointed – Iceland remains in one piece in the northern part of the sea.

I looked around in the crowds, but saw no one I knew. But next to the group I noticed a young couple whom nobody seemed to know. I went over to them and spoke with them and asked news from Iceland, and it became clear to me that they knew nobody here. I invited them home, and they gratefully accepted my offer. These people were Egill and his wife Álfheiður. In a peculiar way I took to them immediately, and indeed, when I later got to know them better, I saw that they were both upright people, as was said about Bergþóra in Njáls saga.

In any case, they ended up staying with us. We rented out to them a part of the house, and we all got along very well. Egill

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was a smart man and extremely intense and enthusiastic about everything, but he did not have much stamina. He had great dreams for the future and realized before most people that Winnipeg would become the capital of the West. And Álfheiður—she is probably the nicest woman I have ever known. She was a delightful person, generous and magnanimous, sensitive and with a talent for music and poetry. She also dreamed all sorts of dreams and spoke with rocks and stones as if they were living creatures. She had a keen aesthetic sense and mastered the art of reading aloud exceptionally well; she could manage many different nuances and tones in her voice when she read, so that we both laughed and cried. Except perhaps for one or two actresses, her voice is the most beautiful voice I have ever heard. We often had fun, and our home was a jolly place in those days. I still smile when I think of many of the things we laughed at, because the older one gets, the more often one thinks of one's youth and one's friends back then.

But then the shadows started to fall over our house and home. I had managed to find a single young woman, who knew nobody here and had few opportunities, a job as a maid. After that, she often visited us and kind of regarded our home as a place of refuge. We had not seen her for some days, and because I knew that she could hardly get by in English, I went to ask about her. The lady of the house told me that she seemed to be coming down with a bad cold; she said she hadn't hired her in order to nurse her and would rather be rid of her. The girl was lying in a cold room in the attic and was becoming very ill, and because I didn't like the way she was being treated, I took her home. She quickly got worse, and it turned out that she had scarlet fever. Lack of space was among other things a problem in our home, and although we tried to take all precautions,

we were evidently not careful enough, because Álfheiður contracted the disease. She was tired and ill-prepared to become so sick, and indeed she died. You can imagine, how terrible I felt about having brought her cause of death into our home. But Egill was so noble-minded that he never mentioned it or accused anybody.

After Álfheiður's death, Egill became taciturn and restless. Around this time, the city was booming. The value of everything was increasing, and everyone was trying to reap a fortune on land sales and house construction. Houses and lots purchased one day were sold at a higher price the next day. Egill threw himself into this and worked like a maniac. He carried on house-building on a large scale and employed many men. Some people considered him wealthy, others said that he was up to his ears in debt. I knew nothing about that, but what we did know was that his buildings were better and more solid than was common then.

But one day everything crumbled, and he became a man of no means. Those who were "craftier and greater liars" than he was claimed everything he owned. And his friends – because they were many while things were going well – disappeared unbelievably fast. In my mind, nothing is more characteristic of a slavish mind than to turn one's back on one's friends when they are out of luck.

Egill left, and we heard nothing of him after that. I was certain that he had died. But often, when I have walked past the houses which he built, it has occurred to me that soon it will be forgotten how large a part Icelanders played in laying the cornerstones of Winnipeg.

I have said a lot more about this than I intended, but I wanted you to understand that this is not a question of charitable work, but rather a matter of conscience. And if you don't do me this favor, then all I can say is that there's nothing more in the

world for me to rely on."

Ingimar smiled gently as he got up and said: "I'll do what I can since this is so important to you."

Ingibjörg waited impatiently for news until Ingimar called her. She hurried to the phone and asked: "It's him, isn't it? – What, not seen him? – Where is he then? – Heavens, yes!--Pneumonia! Is he very sick? When was he brought to the hospital? Can we get to see him tonight? – Well, all right, but first thing tomorrow morning. – Good night, and thank you so much for all your trouble."

The next morning, Ingibjörg went to the hospital and stayed there on and off all day. Egill recognized her for a second, but then his head started to swim. As Ingibjörg was sitting by his bed looking at him, she found that she hardly recognized him: he had changed so much. Ingibjörg's presence seemed to calm him and especially the fact that she spoke Icelandic to him. Sometimes he thought she was *Álfheiður*, and Ingibjörg did not try to correct him or deny him that pleasure. She listened to him and answered him now and then. And as he lay there at death's door, he was talking about and reviving past events. He was building, and the same interest and passion was burning inside him. Sometimes, he was talking to *Álfheiður*, or she was reading to him. Common to hallucinations and dreams, that which is hidden in the mind, thought about more than spoken of, often appears real, and people think they are doing, seeing, and hearing things that are not actually taking place.

In this way the day passed and turned into evening. A festive atmosphere was coming over the hospital. The nurses did their utmost to bring Christmas to the patients. They were lighter on their feet, kinder and more pleasant in appearance, gentler and more sincere in their treatment

of the patients, and smilingly they brought them flowers and presents from friends and family members who could not come themselves. One of these now came to Egill's bed, examined him, and tried to make him more comfortable. While she was doing this, Ingibjörg went to the window and stared out into the night – the holy night. At first she saw nothing, because her mind was elsewhere. But all of a sudden, it was as if her eyes were opened. Was this Winnipeg – this beautiful city in the mirage – veiled in the distant blue glow of the nightfall? – It was as if the city was hanging in the air – was closer to the clouds than to the ground – had thrown off all its filth and covered itself with the holiness of the Christmas night. And it crossed her mind that Egill's old dreams of the future had become realized there in an amazing way – Egill who was now lying there with his eyes closed and with his life hanging by a thread – the dreams of the poor immigrant, who had arrived full of hopes and ideas, but who had been given less than his due share – the dreams of an old Iclander, who had spent most of his life roaming the wilderness and only seen the future land as a mirage, just like Winnipeg appeared to her now.

But while Ingibjörg was standing by the window absorbed in her own thoughts, marvellous events were taking place in the room. Saint Nicholas, in all his episcopal splendor, came to Egill's bed, and peace and gentleness shone from his face. He smiled to Egill as if he wanted to say: Here is your Christmas present. At his side stood *Álfheiður*, as enchantingly beautiful as the grief and longing had painted her in his mind. Her eyes shone with affection and joy, and she bent down over him and took his hand. His soul was filled with unspeakable bliss, and hand in hand they glided out of the hospital room, up over the city, and into the dawn of eternity.

Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer: Those Guy Never Skated on No River Ice

Just About Goners in the Icy Water near Bakka

by Glenn Sigurdson © 2019

This story is dedicated to the memory of my dear friend Dr. Martin Neville, a quiet and thoughtful man of many talents. He went on from this icy boyhood drama to become a wonderful husband to Maryann and father to Ben, Jill and Roey. He was a very prominent and respected pediatric dentist. His life was tragically cut short abruptly by pancreatic cancer in 1991.

Marty spent several years in Riverton where we became close friends. His dad had been posted to the community as the manager of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. Lister and Jean became important members of the community. They remained in close touch with their Riverton friends throughout life. Subsequently the family would be relocated to Gimli with his dad's move to the Gimli branch.

January 15, 1959

Dear Thor and Bobby,

Thanks for coming to visit us this Christmas. Mom was so happy to see Aunt Thora and Uncle William. We hope you had a good trip home.

We are planning on coming to St. Louis next year to see you for Christmas.

I hope you can show me the Mississippi River where those guys Huck and Tom were floating on that raft and having those adventures. I promise not to get mad about that again.

Mom told me to send my own letter explaining how I will not do that.

Your cousin,

Glenn

Mom dictated that letter. She sent me down to the post office right away to mail it.

I pretended to lick the envelope, but didn't, so I could put my own letter in my own envelope inside hers.

You city kids are all the same. It really

pisses me off. We're not some country bozos. All that stuff you kept talking about Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer and their big adventures on the Mississippi River. You never wanted to listen to anything I told you, so I'm writing it to you. Us kids in Riverton are real river men. And our adventures are real – not some made up stuff.

Yes, that's right. So maybe my river



Dr. Martin Neville

is not as big as the Mississippi. But the Icelandic River is one mighty river. I know lots of you city kids won't believe me, but it's gospel true. If any word here is not true, I will kiss a fish. You guys are too big sissies and would never do that. I know my mom would back me up, but you probably wouldn't trust her either. So ask your mom. She was a Riverton kid too. But you would probably be too scared to ask her, because you know she would say that every word I'm saying here is the truth and nothing but the truth.

Huck and Tom never saw no ice – just muddy, yucky water. On my river, you go to bed one night, and it's all water. The next morning, it's all ice. Magic. Huck and Tom never saw no water turn to ice. Soon after it turns to ice you can walk on it. Play on it. My Afi (grandfather in Icelandic) can go on his tractor to drill holes and set his nets on it. You can ski on it when it gets covered with snow. You can downhill ski on the steeper banks up the river. And best of all you can skate on it, but only when it

freezes clean and clear and snow stays away for days. Those are the best days because you could skate for miles. Then the river is like a long skating rink with its banks on each side, not walls in every direction. Every turn of the river there was something different. You feel like you are flying.

Those Mississippi boys never got to do any of that stuff. They just had rafts and currents and swamps. Funny things going on there – well, not funny. Funny like strange. But all made up stuff by that guy Mark Twain. He never got up north to see a real river. Like our mighty Icelandic River.

Ice is tricky, let me tell you. You can drown if you fall through it. I will tell you about that later. In the spring, when the ice melts and breaks up, you can trap muskrats who come out of their houses in the riverbank through tunnels to nibble on fresh shoots of marsh grass. You can hope to catch a mink, and if you do there is big money. My buddies and I caught one once up the river toward the lake along the dyke. We brought it home. We thought it was an otter. When Dad saw us in action trying to skin it, he, Dad gave us proper hell for wrecking the pelt of a mink. Another time we caught a skunk. We only brought the smell home. Mom sniffed us out a hundred yards from the house, made us strip down in the field and leave our clothes. She poured tomato juice, yes, tomato juice, over us to clean us out. She did it at the creek that drained into the river beside us, which is where I also built dams like a beaver. If I was like Mark Twain, I could spin some story about how I built a beaver house to stay in and how I lived off gnarled wood. But I only tell true stuff, not made up things.

Okay, I am getting to the drowning part. I didn't have Huck and Tom to share a raft and talk philosophy, and stuff about coloured folks having to hide when all they were trying to do was live like white folks. But I had Brian and Marty, and we talked



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KIM ERICKSON / GLENN SIGURDSON

about lots of stuff. While we may not have hidden in swamps and rode deadly currents, we were busy. We did things like building huts in the bushes up river by the rapids, past the bridge, and catching crayfish that turned red like pictures of lobsters when we boiled them. We snuck menthol cigarettes while our hotdogs cooked on our fire. We even tried cooking pigs in a blanket, but you wouldn't even know what we mean when we say that. Next time you come, I will cook some for you. In the summer, we water skied. In the spring, we tried to catch rats. In the winter, we skated and played hockey.

Okay. Okay. Yeah, I was telling you about the ice. Sometimes the big ice jams would come, and a big backhoe had to sit on the two bridges to pound the ice and break it up so it could feed down the swollen rivers. In the spring, the air had a special smell - don't really know how to describe it other than it was nature coming back to life after hibernating for the winter. You could see the marsh grass along the water starting to grow, and you could smell the river. It was the "Smell of Spring".

Now, about that time when Brian, Marty and I faced off with death. Mark Twain could never have imagined that because, if he could, he would have put it in the book. Yeah, Huck and Tom had close calls on the Mississippi with big paddle wheelers, treacherous currents, hiding out from guys trying to catch Huck, but remember their story was imaginary and mine is real. I'm talking the real deal.

But I was telling you about ice. The damn thing about ice is it hides water, most of

the time. I know you're getting frustrated with how long this is taking. But now you know how I felt, and Mom kept telling me I couldn't be rude to my cousins who had come so far to visit us. Not this time...

There's nothing as exciting as waking up and seeing the river frozen over and hoping it will reach two inches before the snow covers it. This was one of those years. We stepped on the ice in front of the house, and it was perfect. Clear, crisp blue and smooth. It was made for skating. We set off right after school. Tying on our skates at my house, we walked across the field, down to the river and onto the ice.

Our skates were like wings. We turned south and flew down the river past Gunnar and Loa's house on one side, and



The Icelandic River

the graveyard on the other. Everybody in Riverton got put in that graveyard. I went there often to look around the gravestones. It was right along the river, with big shady trees. It was a peaceful place. A good place to be buried. Maybe I'll be buried there one day.

We shot by Axel Eyolfson's house in a blur. He was an old bachelor, that's what people said, but his claim to fame was that he was also Doc Thompson's brother-in-law. As we rounded the corner, we passed Steinni Erickson's place with all his big construction tractors in the yard, rounding the big corner like race car drivers, and then onward past Bakka. That was the name of the farm. The Bakka farm. The old blacksmith who lived there was called Helgi Stefansson, also known as Helgi o Bakka, which I guess is like Lord Helgi of Bakka. He lived with his sister Gusta. Probably the Vikings got those lords and ladies over in England into this thing about naming their estates. We had names for every farm in New Iceland.

Soon we were at the mink ranch that Sam Gislason ran in partnership with Sigurdson Fisheries, the family company. They ground fish heads to feed the minks, which were damn miserable animals that would chew your mitt off if you touched a crate.

And then it happened, just before Laxdal's.

Dad put two and two together quickly. He knew all about rivers and lots of other stuff, like me he had lived all his life beside the those guys river. A sewer pipe ran directly from the Laxdal's toilet to the river. (Everybody had a pipe like that in those days, so I am not blaming the Laxdal's.) The warmer water flowing from the pipe had weakened the ice and turned it into a hidden death trap.

Marty and I were out front. Brian was a short distance behind. I heard the crack. I peeled around. As the ice broke away, I leaped ahead, beyond the cavity of water

and ice that was opening. I was wet below the knees, but I was safe. Marty was not as good a skater. As I crawled onto the ice, I saw in terror Marty fully engulfed in the water. I lay flat on the ice reaching for him. Brian came up from behind. That Brian was awfully good in school. He had sized up the situation and lay flat behind me, grabbing onto my skates so we formed a human chain. My hands stretched over the ice into the water. Huck and Tom never felt no cold like that. Marty was thrashing around, trying to scramble out in any direction. With each movement, the darn ice kept breaking. And each time it did we came closer to being pulled in with Marty. We had to wiggle backward and keep hanging onto Marty to try to pull him out. The big parka Marty wore was getting waterlogged. He was sinking. It was one desperate situation.

Suddenly, the ice around the hole quit yielding. Now, flat on our bellies, arms outstretched, we reached with a firm grasp and pulled Marty back onto the ice.

A bigger terror now was before us. Marty was starting to freeze solid, and I was starting to freeze from the knees down. We had to make it to warmth, to safety, quickly. We had to make it to the Bakka farm and Gusta's warm kitchen.

Bakka was just down the road. Mom and Dad made a visit to Bakka once a year to get money for the Lutheran church. They were church people, well sort of, but not like the big holy types on the Mississippi, hooting and hollering and that stuff. Most years they also collected for the Red Cross. Dad didn't like asking people for money. Last year he got into trouble with Mom. When they went to Bakka, Dad figured he'd be practical and also ask Gusta for money for the Red Cross at the same time, two birds with one stone kind of thing. Dad's opening line was: "We are here for blood and money." Dad meant nothing by it, just to get the conversation flowing as

part of a job he didn't have an appetite to do. Mom said this made Gusta turn white as a ghost, as she bustled about the kitchen getting coffee and vinarterta for them.

Back to Marty and the rescue. He was really a drowned rat. Soon to be a frozen rat. He was carrying a barrel of water around him. It was about 30 degrees below. It was approaching dusk, which comes early that time of year. It was blowing, not much but enough as it moved down the frozen river as if it was a wind tunnel. We had at least a quarter mile to go. My legs were getting cold. Brian was the only one intact. We had to get to Gusta's – that's all I could think about.

The banks at Bakka slope to the river. When we got there, we scrambled up the bank. Brian and I dragged Marty. He wasn't dripping any longer. We pulled the door of the back porch open, went up the stairs and banged on the door. There was Gusta, with her square frame on short legs, bustling to the door with her apron and her warm, broad face. She knew me and my shenanigans all too well. These included previous visits of salvation when I got too cold on my trap line in the bush and went to her place for some cookies and hot milk to warm up and get ready to complete the walk down the road. Whether Mom and Dad had come away with either blood or money after Dad's abrupt opening in his visit with Gusta, I do not know. Mom had not been happy with Dad, but soon she realized how funny it was and started to giggle when she told me the story. Now a couple of weeks later I was at her door with my buddies, near drowned and frozen.

"Elskan," Gusta exclaimed, using the term for *my dear* in Icelandic. She was clearly alarmed at the sight of us, and her round, warm face turned white as she brought us into her kitchen. Her hands went into action, pulling Marty's clothes off him. Phone calls were made to our parents.

It gets blurry around then in my memory. No doubt she fortified us with cookies and something hot. We were safe. We had survived. Huck and that other guy, Tom Sawyer, would have been frozen stiff beside the hole in the ice. None of us even got sick.

Safely at home that night, Mom reminded me of my first near encounter with death on the water. I was three and had wandered to the river, where I tumbled off a small dock behind Afi's shed. A neighbor, a young Eyolfson girl, saw this scene unfolding and leaped into action, hauling me from the water. In a flash the magnetism of the river cast its spell on me, that I could not resist whatever the season and the weather.

I have told you guys enough for now. Mom will be looking for me, so I've got to slip this letter in with the other letter and get it to the post office. There's a lot more to tell you, like the muskrats killing in the spring. The smell of fresh green marsh lures them out of their dens, and I trap them along the river bank. Every step is dangerous, since the ice is breaking. No way Huck and Tom ever did that. On my river, there's new adventures and dangers every day.



In the winter immediately north of Bakka and the scene of the accident. Depending on the time of the year, the water conditions of the river vary quite considerably.

1920 Hockey News

Interesting clippings from the
Winnipeg newspapers in the Spring of 1920

by Brian Johannesson



For the full story of the Falcons team, the Olympic Games,
pictures and clippings go to: www.winnipegfalcons.com

Falcons Break Tie by Defeating Selkirk Speed Merchants in Heartbreaking Game

Frank Fredrickson Leads Icelanders to Brilliant 3 to 2 Victory in Crucial League Struggle by Scoring Winning Goal on Dazzling Solo Rush

(January 12) Dodging through the entire Selkirk defence in a superb piece of individual brilliancy, and steering the rubber past Bobby Morrison for the deciding goal of a heart-breaking contest, Frank Fredrickson broke a two-all tie, in the last period, landed the Falcon platoon on the top of the Manitoba league standings, himself on the pinnacle reserved for hockey immortals and incidentally drew a red herring across the trail of the aspirants from the Fish Town.

Sensational Last Period Spurt Enables Falcons to Defeat Selkirks 6 to 5 After Two Extra Periods in the Most Brilliant Hockey Struggle Seen Here This Season

Falcons Fight Brilliant Uphill Battle to Defeat Selkirk Squad in Heartbreaking Overtime Struggle and Cinch Manitoba Senior Hockey Championship

(January 27) Icelandic Puck-Chasers Pull Down 5-1 Lead and Nose Out 6-5 Victory Over Champions in Deciding Game of the Manitoba Senior League –

Halderson Scores Winning Goal After 17 Minutes' Overtime Play.

The headlines tell it all, these were certainly the 2 closest games the Falcons ever played that season. They never again faced opponents of the calibre of the Selkirk Fishermen, not even the American Olympic team in Antwerp. No

wonder Winnipeg hockey fans were getting so excited, the Falcons were apparently unstoppable. Winning these 2 games put the Falcons into contention for the Western Canada Championship, against Fort William.

Fort William Hockeyists Badly Outclassed

Falcons Take Firm Grip on Western Hockey Title; Beat Fort William 7 to 2

Splendid Net Guarding by Byron and McTigue Features Lively Game

(February March ?) The Winnipeg Falcons are almost sure to represent the West in Allan Cup finals at Toronto. The local clan took a firm grip on the western title Monday night at the Amphitheatre rink when they administered a 7-2 beating to Fort William. It is true that these teams must play again Wednesday night, but there doesn't appear to be a chance of the Forts winning the second game, let alone overcoming a 5 goal handicap.

Falcons Capture Western Hockey Championship, Again Trounce Fort William 9-1

Local Team shows Real Class In Final Game – Wins Series 16-3

(February / March ?) Completely outplaying their opponents in all three periods, and showing much better form than they did in the previous encounter, Falcons put the finishing touches on to the western hockey title at the Amphitheatre rink Wednesday night when they handed the Fort William team a 9-1 beating, making the total score for the 2 games 16-3.

The first and last periods were productive

of some brilliant hockey in which the Icelanders demonstrated to the fans that they are a real team. Despite the fact that the ice was in a soft and sticky condition, they journeyed up and down the rink, in a fast manner and held their opponents spellbound during these 2 frames. Both teams slowed up to some extent in the middle frame, neither aggregation showing their real ability.

Well, that takes care of Fort William and everyone now knows what kind of a team the Falcons really are.

University of Toronto Unable to Stop The Falcons' Flight

**Western Wonders Win First of Allan Cup
Finals 8 to 3 in Game Remarkably Fast
and Devoid of Body-Checking – Speed of
Goodman and Benson Not Matched by
Blue and White**

TORONTO March 29 – Demonstrating that fast hockey can be played and championships won without resorting to body-checking, the Winnipeg Falcons on Saturday night inflicted an 8 to 3 defeat on the University of Toronto team, and thus will carry a five-goal lead into tonight's final Allan Cup game. The

Rev. Stefan Jonasson

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Westerners travelled at a lightning pace throughout the first fifty minutes, and led by 8 to 1, but they tired on end, and the eager collegians, coming strong, ran in two goals. On the night's play the Falcons were by long odds the better team, and few local fans begrudge them their victory.

Here they go again, starting with flattening Fort William and rolling on into Toronto. With every game the Falcons' confidence must have risen and their play improved accordingly

I wonder how they felt at this time, all of the reports quote them as being perfectly quiet, respectable and clean-living young men, and yet they must have been human.

Hockey Fans Delighted With Free Press Service

March 29 – Another large and enthusiastic crowd of hockey fans gathered outside the *Free Press* building on Carlton street last evening when the special Allan Cup bulletin service, which took the local sporting world by storm on Saturday night, was repeated with even more success than before. Despite the unpleasant weather, the fans turned out by their thousands and the enthusiasm which was manifest on every occasion that the Falcons took the jump on their clever opponents fully equalled the display of the initial game.

Chief honors of the local service last night were carried by W. O. Graham, the popular Winnipeg sportsman, who, in the role of chief megaphone artist, had the crowd fairly in fits. Ossie was in his happiest vein and pulled off such a variety of humorous side-chatter that even the Toronto fans in the crowd could not restrain a general chortle every time he raised his trumpet.

That's how, in 1920, avid hockey fans got

their "live" coverage of the Allan Cup games in Toronto. They went to the newspaper office and waited outside to hear the bulletins coming in on the telegraph lines from Toronto. Since there were no radios and very few telephones, what else could a keen fan do? To keep the crowd warmed up, Ossie Graham, the man with the megaphone, apparently supplied plenty of entertainment between bulletins

Varsity Layed Great Game Going into the Final Fray Five Goals Down; They Died Hard

Students Did Not Let Up During Any Minute of the Battle

TORONTO March 30, 1920 – The Falcons will leave here Wednesday to sail on the steam ship Melita, from St. John, for the Olympic games.

TORONTO March 30 – Falcons, of Winnipeg, are winners of the Allan Cup, and the champion hockey team in Canada. They defeated University of Toronto here again last night in the wind-up contest for the Allan Cup and the right to go to Antwerp, Belgium, to take part in the Olympic Games as Canada's hockey champions. Tonight's victory was won by 3 to 2, and the round was won by 11 to 5.

Falcons have established their right to the title by decisively defeating University of Toronto on the round and few if any, will begrudge them the cup. The members of the team are good sportsmen, and grand players. Those who have seen them in action are confident that they will defeat all entrants at the Olympic games, and bring the world's championship to Canada.

The locals went into last night's game determined to win, and also to win the round. That they failed is no fault of theirs, for they gave everything they had

and lost simply because the Falcons are the better team.

The University of Toronto had a very good hockey team, but not good enough to beat the Falcons. The Falcons were a real team whose players had grown up together, gone to school together and played hockey together for several years. Even the best team of university students couldn't overcome the Falcons esprit-de-corps.

Public Subscription List is Opened to Help Finance Falcons' Trip to Antwerp

March 30 – With the victory of the Falcons in the Allan cup series, hockey



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enthusiasm has permeated into all ranks and conditions, into all classes and masses in the community. Popular imagination has been further fired, by the new quest undertaken by the team, involving a trip across the Atlantic (an expensive trip) to Antwerp and the Olympic games, where the world's series and world honors are at stake. The City Council first felt the stimulus, and without haggling, voted \$500 toward the expenses of the team. The Legislature, not to be outdone, yesterday made a grant of \$2,000 toward the trip. But even with these generous gifts much yet remains to be acquired before the boys who have brought such honor to the city and province can accomplish the journey, without themselves undergoing financial embarrassment (to put it mildly).

Bare hotel and travelling expenses are furnished by the Canadian Olympic committee, or the committee handling the hockey end for the Olympic body. This amount, these days of heavy tariff, while considerable in itself, is scarcely calculated to inspire members of the team with confidence, or the Belgian people, and the many visitors likely to throng Antwerp during the series, with any additional conception of the honor of the Dominion. It is not the desire of local hockey enthusiasts that the Falcons, individually, should suffer privation, or be out of pocket on the trip, and it is likely that Mayor Gray will be approached to open a public subscription locally, on their behalf.

With the \$2,500 already raised, a like sum is desired by the local hockey officials. Pending further arrangements, Tom Boyd, member of the Parks Board, and local representative of the Canadian Olympic committee, will receive and acknowledge, through the press, any contributions made by local adherents of the game, and team. Mr. Boyd's address is 636 McDermott avenue, Phone G.4228.

Looking back with the hindsight of 100 years full of sports scandal, paid amateurs, drugs and astronomical athletes' salaries, this article from a Winnipeg paper shows how unprepared for success the team, the city and the province were. Obviously no one expected such a stunning series of victories from the Falcons. In those days perhaps all the "gentlemen amateurs" of sport were expected to pay their own way to the Olympics.

Falcons Leave Toronto Tonight on First Stage of Long Trip to Antwerp

Eight Players to Make Trip in Quest of World's Hockey Honors

TORONTO April 1, 1920 – The Canadian Olympic hockey team, Falcons, of Winnipeg, will leave Toronto tonight for St. John. N.B. whence they will sail on Saturday on the Melita for Liverpool, on their way to Antwerp, Belgium to play for the world's hockey championship, April 20-30. They are scheduled to reach Antwerp about April 14th. The party will include the following:

W.A. Hewitt, Canadian Olympic representative; H. Axford, manager; W. Fridfinnson, W. Byron, H. Halderson, F. Frederickson, A. Woodman, G. Sigurson, trainer; K. Johannesson, I. J. Benson, C. Fridfinnson, M. C. Goodman.

The players of the Canadian team are in good condition and they will not play any more hockey until they arrive in Antwerp.

The city of Winnipeg has voted the sum of \$500 to help finance the players on their trip, and a message was received Wednesday from Winnipeg that the Manitoba Government had voted \$2,000 for the same purpose. The O.H.A. has also made a handsome contribution to the fund. The trip otherwise will be financed by the receipts from the Allan Cup matches,

which will be turned over by the trustees to the Canadian Olympic Committee.

All of a sudden the Falcons, the team that nobody wanted to play against, are now the "Canadian Olympic hockey team"! Quite a change in about 6 months. W. A. Hewitt was the father of Foster Hewitt of 'Hockey Night in Canada' radio fame.

After the Falcons overwhelmed Toronto Varsity 11 goals to 5 in 2 games, the steamship schedules did not allow them time to return to Winnipeg before going to Europe. So, off they went from Toronto in the new clothes which they bought with some of the money donated by the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba. After all, none of the players were wealthy and couldn't afford to buy a complete new set of clothes. They certainly weren't NHL superstars, but amateur players in the true sense of those words. Some of the team members had even taken unpaid time off from work to go to Antwerp and their families would have had to cope while they were away. Perhaps in the first week in April the St. Lawrence at Montreal might still be frozen, or at least ice-clogged. That could be why they had to go by train as far as St. John, New Brunswick to get to an ice-free port.

Falcons Spent Two Happy Days in Dear Old Blighty Winnipeg Boys and Their Hats Created Quite a Stir

Frank Fredrickson Writes About the Joys of the Boys Aboard Ship While on Way to Antwerp.

By Trowsdale

(Free Press Special Correspondent)
London, England April 12 (by mail) – The Winnipeg Falcons, entrusted with the task of guarding the athletic honor of Canada and the British Empire in the preliminary

competition of the Olympic games at Antwerp, were photographed at the Euston railroad station on their arrival in London, England. Every man, with the exception of W.A. Hewitt, Toronto; Hebbie Axford, manager, and Lt.-Col. McDonnell (who is included in the group) appears to be wearing a particular style of hat. This fact led to a Canadian present to suggest that an "issue" must have been donated by a Winnipeg outfitter who was badly bitten by the hockey bug. The Icelanders managed to have quite a pleasant time in "the big smoke" in spite of the rain which featured their two-days' stay in London.

(Sporting Editor's note: The hats referred to by the correspondent were donated to the players by Jack Snidal, the wild-eyed Falcon rooster, just previous to leaving for Toronto).

One of the first letters to be received in


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the city from the Falcons arrived at the Free Press yesterday addressed to the sporting editor, and was from that gifted athlete, songster and musician, Frank Fredrickson. He wrote from aboard the steamer Melita, dated April 8, as follows:

Dear Bill – There seems to be a scarcity of paper aboard so I have to use this. Until today the sea has been smooth as glass. Now Huck's got his wish – a little rough weather so that the members of the W.C.T.U. might get a slight insight into the joys of the man that has a thirst stranded in Winnipeg, I mean the man not the thirst, on a raft in mid-ocean. As yet the only sick man in our crowd is Trainer Sigurjonsson. He has never yet been on a sea voyage without being sick and this one, unfortunately for him but to the extreme delight of Mike Goodman, is no exception.

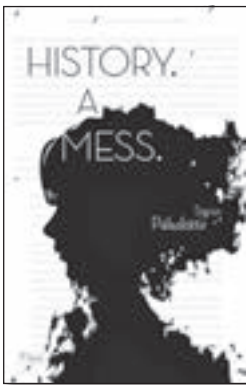
Slim Halderson, Mike, Bobby, Wally, Konnie and myself have been practicing a dash for the rail in anticipation of high seas. They know the various fish calls so the food won't go to waste. Here's hoping that neither Slim nor Mike get sick. You see, they occupy the same cabin as myself, which cabin by the way, is so large that we have to get up one at a time in the morning, and go to bed one at a time at night. Konnie Johannesson also shares one bunk as he is the fourth snoozer in our cabin.

Hebby Axford and Bill Fridfinnson are weathering the voyage remarkably. Axford know the opening hours of the bar off by heart. Only wish we had Steamer Maxwell with us. Slim says if it gets much rougher that he's going to jump off and walk to shore, and I'll bet he can do it. Wally's eye is O.K. again.

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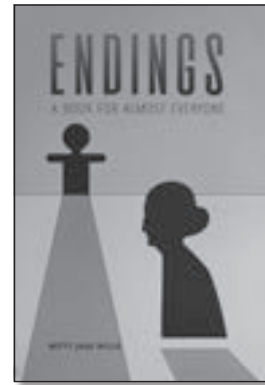
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PHONE ORDERS WELCOME

Well, cheerio Bill . I will write from Antwerp.

Sincerely – Frank

“Fish calls” indeed. Nothing like a bit of vulgar humour to catch the reader’s attention. At the time the letter was written they had been at sea for 5 days, with 4 more to go. Frank, Konnie, Hebbly and several other team members had just come back from England about a year earlier, they probably knew what to expect on this trip. Just imagine trying to sleep in a small cabin with those four keen young lads. Not likely!

Falcons Play Exhibition Game For Antwerp Charity

Antwerp, Belgium, April 18 (Special Cable to the *Free Press* from W.A. Hewitt - Copyright) – The Canadian Olympic Hockey team, the Winnipeg Falcons, played an exhibition game here today as the concluding number of a charity programme, participated in by the champion skaters of all nations gathered here for the Olympic events. The regular Falcon defence, with a forward line composed of the substitutes, played against the regular forwards with a defence picked from the officials, the result being a victory for the former by 9 goals to 6.

The players found the narrow ice a considerable handicap, more suited to five players a side than six, and it is evident that the speed of the Canadians will be considerably hampered with seven-man hockey, which the Olympic series calls for. The spectators thoroughly enjoyed the exhibition. The American contingent, having been delayed en route here, are expected to arrive Tuesday.

Skating Events Open Big Olympic Games

Hockey at Antwerp Tomorrow

By R.H. Sheffield
(*United Press* Staff Correspondent)

Antwerp Belgium, April 22, 1920.— Belgium will become the scene tomorrow of another world wide conflict.

Athletic armies of the world’s greatest powers will compete in the battle of speed, strength and endurance which opens here and runs through the summer to Sept. 12th.

The Olympic games, premier sporting events of the world since the days of the ancient Greeks, come back to the spotlight after a lapse of eight years.

The last Olympic games were held in Stockholm in 1912. Berlin was to have been the scene of the 1916 encounter, but all Europe was wrapped in battle at the time. Germany, Austria and the other nations of the Central powers were denied admission to the games.

The hockey games in the Antwerp Ice palace open the Olympic contests. The surface of artificial ice is 175 by 60 feet. Accomodations will be provided for more than 5,000 spectators. The original plans for holding the games on the Brussels canal were changed recently.

Without attempting to hazard a choice on the selection of a winner, skating critics are almost agreed that no nation will have a cinch, but that the honors seem to rest between teams of the United States and Canada, with the Canadians a slight favourite.

That’s how it all began 100 years ago. When the Falcons left Winnipeg on the train for Toronto little did they suspect that they were travelling into history. They were fully prepared to win the Allan Cup and the Canadian championship, but their dreams of

victory probably didn't extend to the Olympics. The idea of holding a world hockey contest on the "Brussels canal" shows the state of hockey thinking in Europe at that time. Notice that Canada was not yet considered a "hockey superpower". That was about to change.

How Falcons Fared in First Game at Antwerp

Winnipeg Hockeyists Took Things Easy but Put Up Clever Exhibition in Defeating Slovaks Hewitt Writes On Play

By W.A. Hewitt
(Special Correspondence to the *Free Press*)
ANTWERP April 24 – The Canadians made their first appearance in Olympic hockey tonight when they defeated the Czecho-Slovak team by 15 goals to 0 in very easy fashion. Half-time score 7-0. The Canadians at no time exerted themselves but nevertheless gave a very good exhibition of team play.

At first they were inclined to bunch and leave their positions, but when they found that the ice was cluttered up with players with seven men to a side, they drew their opponents towards the Canadian end of the rink and then sent two men down with the puck to the other end.

The Falcons' steamroller just kept on going – the Europeans at this time had no idea how hockey really was played in North America. They apparently fell for the old decoy trick, being allowed to play the puck down to the Falcons' end of the rink, then 2 Falcons' players would play the puck to the other goal and easily score.

How Winnipeg Falcons Beat Yankees in SemiFinal

Details of Game in Which Canada Whitewashed the U.S.

Drury Bottled Up Mike Goodman Attended to the Speed Merchant – A 55 year-old Player.

By W.A. Hewitt
(Special Correspondence to the *Free Press*)
ANTWERP, April 25 – It was quite evident after the first couple of nights of the VII Olympiade hockey that the real competition for the highest honors would narrow down to the teams representing Canada and the United States. The European nations, while fairly well versed in the rudiments of the game, showed a lack of knowledge of the fine points, and were as a result outclassed in actual play by the Canadians and the Americans. By the luck of the draw Canada and the States came together in the semi-final, and the game proved such an attraction that the Palais de Glace tonight was unable to accommodate one-tenth the number of people who sought admission. The streets in the neighbourhood of the rink were crowded from 18 o'clock (6 PM) although the game was not advertised to start until 21 o'clock (9 PM). The doors were finally closed about an hour before the match, and the late-comers, who held the precious tickets, could only obtain admission by subterranean passages known to the elect. Special squads of soldiers were employed to get the players into the rink, and they were accorded very special privileges, naturally, as they were supplying the attraction. Gentlemen in evening clothes on the outside implored the players to allow them to carry their sticks and skates so that they could obtain admission and it would have been a great pleasure to his Winnipeg friends to have seen the entry of Monsier Mike Goodman, escorted by a detachment of soldiers and three men in full evening

dress and top hats, carrying his skates, sticks and grip – and they all got away with it, too, as valets to “Monsieur le Canadien”.

The Falcons won this game 2-0, with goals by Frank Fredrickson and Konnie Johannesson. It was the only game that mattered in this contest, the European teams really didn't have a chance against the North Americans.

Canada Wins Olympic Hockey Honors, Outclassing Sweden

Falcons Place Winnipeg Conspicuously on World Sporting Map, Overwhelming Swedes in Final 12 to 1 – Byron Drops in Surprise and Scandinavian Team Escapes a Whitewash.

ANTWERP, April 26 (Associated Press) – Canada won the Olympic hockey championship tonight, easily defeating Sweden by a score of 12 to 1. Sweden's goal was scored in the first half, after ten minutes of play, and came as an utter surprise to the Canadians. The victors had easily scored five goals, when Sevansson, the Swedish right defence, carried the puck down near to the Canadian goal and drove it into the net, surprising Goalkeeper Byron so much that he fell down. The Canadian line-up was the same as in yesterday's game, with the exception of one position - Fridfinnson replacing Woodman. The score at the end of the first half was: Canada, 5; Sweden, 1.

This was the famous goal, the only one scored against the Falcons in the whole tournament. The Swedish team considered this goal a victory, putting them ahead of all the other European teams in the European hockey world. Did the Falcons momentarily lose their focus? Did Wally Byron accidentally let it in

because the Swedes were such nice guys? We'll never know for sure.

27 April - Excerpt from remarks made in an article by W. A. Hewitt –

“Not a man of the whole team felt any unpleasant effects of the journey. All proved good sailors, said W. A. (Billy) Hewitt, who accompanied the team as representative of the Canadian Olympic Committee.

Not only did they boys establish a reputation for Canada as the premier hockey players of the world, but they also left a fine impression of the upstanding qualities of Canadian sportsmen and citizens. Their sportsmanship was greatly admired by all the European nations.

One of the customs our boys instituted was to coach and assist all our opponents before we played them. We virtually trained the Swedes, Czech-Slovaks, Belgians and French teams for their contests against us.

Whenever the Canadians play, continued Mr. Hewitt, we had a gallery watching us, and the members of the European teams would then take the ice and try to do what they observed in our play.

The European teams, especially the Swedes and Czechs, displayed that they were good skaters, but lacked a knowledge of the finer points of the game.

The Americans were a strong team individually, but they did not have the teamwork of the Canadians. Joe McCormick, formerly of Buckingham, Quebec, a Canadian, was the most dangerous man on their team. Herb Drury, another Canadian, who distinguished himself in most of the Americans' games, was totally ineffective against the Canadians, being bottled up in every attempt he made.”

When the Falcons arrived in Antwerp

they discovered that the American team was going to arrive four days late, due to bad weather somewhere in the Atlantic. When asked, they accepted an invitation to play a demonstration game of Falcons players and management to raise money for a local charity. All the while they were also coaching the European players, trying to bring them up to some kind of challenging level of play. Obviously the Falcons ran out of time, because they easily overwhelmed the Czechs and the Swedes. Even after these very one-sided games, the Falcons were still hailed as sports heroes by the Europeans. How typically Canadian! How very different from today's mercenary Olympic and World Cup games!

Winnipeg Falcons Due Home On Monday Morning, May 17

May 7 – The Winnipeg Falcons, conquerors of the best hockey aggregations in the world, are due to arrive in Winnipeg from their successful trip to Antwerp about Monday morning, May 17th. Word to this effect was received in a special cable from London, England, which stated that the triumphant Winnipeg hockeyists had sailed from Le Havre late on Wednesday night for Montreal. They will return home via Toronto and Chicago, and it is likely that they will stop off a day in Toronto and Chicago. A monster civic reception



The Waltham gold watch presented to each Falcons' player by the City of Winnipeg
The fob inscription reads: "Presented by Jon Sigurdson I.O.D.E.
K. Johannesson, 1920"

awaits the Falcons and Monday would be a splendid day to entertain them.

A joint meeting of civic officials, the Manitoba Hockey association and the Falcon executive will be held at the Fort Garry hotel next Monday night to complete arrangements for the welcome for the Falcons.

Civic Reception and Gold Watches for the Falcons

Banquet and Parade is Planned

May 12 – Winnipeg will recognize the brilliant deeds of its hockey heroes in the way of a banquet and presentation of gold watches to the champion Falcons on their return from Antwerp, which should be around May 15. This was decided yesterday

afternoon at the city hall, when the civic reception committee made elaborate plans for welcoming the victorious Falcons, who have brought so much renown to Canada and Winnipeg by their brilliant exploits on the ice.

The city fathers recognize fully the importance of the advertising that the victory of the Falcons brought to Winnipeg and the committee was not loath to express their appreciation of the honor brought to the city by the boys, and it didn't take them long in deciding that it was only right and proper that the best kind of a civic reception should be tended the lads after their long stay away from home. The Manitoba Hockey association is also planning a mammoth automobile parade, and local admirers of the team will have an opportunity of joining the reception.



Watch back with case open

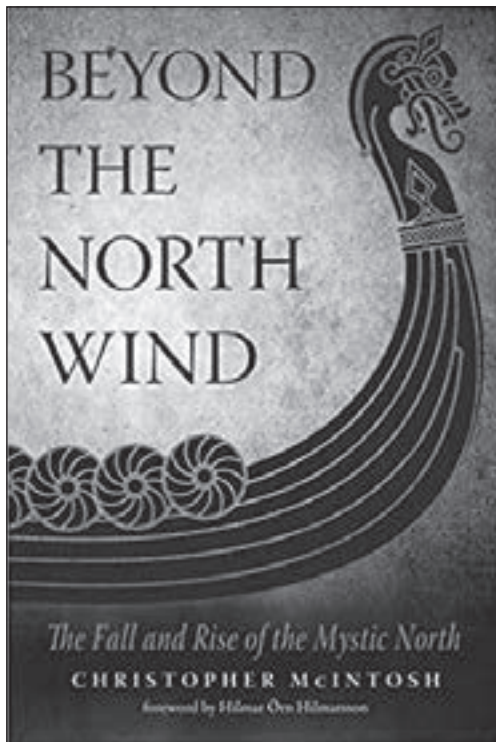
The inscription reads: "Presented by the City of Winnipeg To K. Johannessen, Falcon Hockey Club World's Chanpions Olympic Games,1920"

Book Reviews

Beyond the North Wind: The Fall and Rise of the Mystic North

by Christopher McIntosh

Reviewed by Max Hough



Beyond the North Wind: The Fall and Rise of the Mystic North
By Christopher McIntosh
Weiser Books, May 2019

Beyond the North Wind by Christopher McIntosh is an enthralling and engaging read. As somebody who is not from Icelandic descent, not one drop of my blood is Icelandic, I found this book hard to follow at times, mostly as some of the language used is rather difficult to pronounce. For example, I don't even know where to start with a name like Yggdrasil. Still, for people like me McIntosh has made it ridiculously simple to understand all of the confusing aspects by leaving extensive cliff notes at the end of every chapter, as well as twenty-five pages briefly explaining the names of everybody in Nordic mythology, to give the clueless like me very valuable context. After reading this book, I believe I am very well enamored in the mythology and ancient stories that the Nordic history is surrounded in. This book, however, is far from a collection of tales about mythology, it is rather an infinitely more in-depth myriad of historical tales and theories that have originated from all over the globe on the existence of the Hyperborean race of humans.

Who are the Hyperborean? A highly advanced race of people who once lived, far, far beyond the land of the Nordic north. This book argues that these people were forced to migrate after the ancient changes in climate had rendered their homeland uninhabitable. If this theory is true, it would shatter everything we know about the origins of our westernmost civilizations, making the origins of our people quite far away from the Mediterranean. McIntosh tries to demonstrate clearly that these people have left their mark on the customs, traditions, and myths of all the areas of the globe that they travelled to and gives a litany of evidence to support his theories. McIntosh analyzes every aspect of the cultures that he argues were so heavily influenced by the Hyperborea, from the Greek myths and legends to western fairytales like *Jack and the Beanstalk*, he even goes as far as to analyze archaic historical sites throughout Britain and Scotland, like the Knap of Howar, which dimensions only make sense when using the *Megalithic yard*. Now McIntosh didn't just come to all these conclusions by himself, that would be asinine, but he rather takes dozens of historical findings and theories from countless sources to give reference to these theories. Making arguments worth some time to ponder.

He also writes extensively on the theory that the closest Hyperborean descendants can be found today in Russia. He writes of actual expeditions in Russia that resulted in the discovery of gargantuan rock carvings of human figures, and colossal stones, cut clean and cubed, far too large for any civilization of the past to have built. They also discovered intricate labyrinths and pyramids as well an astoundingly large astrolabe.

Through everything that this book has to offer we are taken on a magical

and mystical ride to the past, exploring tales of a race of people who possessed an intelligence that to us today is unimaginable, whose civilizations are too ancient to fathom, and whose culture has rippled throughout time, to the farthest corners of the globe. This book is a paragon of historical literature, and whether you agree with these theories or scoff at the thought of them, this book is extensively enchanting, nonetheless.



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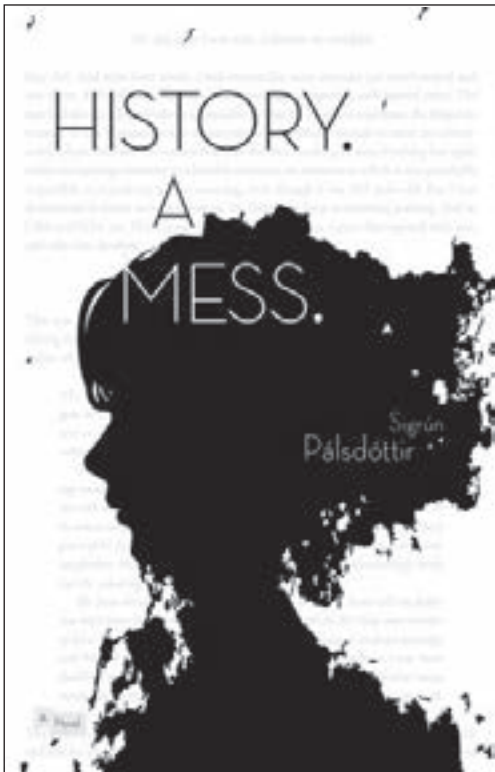
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History. A Mess.

by Sigrún Pálsdóttir

Translation from the Icelandic by Lytton Smith

Reviewed by Nina Lee Colwell



History. A Mess.

By Sigrún Pálsdóttir

Translation from the Icelandic by
Lytton Smith

Published by Open Letter, University
of Rochester, July 2019

I was thrilled when Lorna Tergesen asked me to review this novel. What fun for an academic, even a retired academic, to review the story of a PhD student’s sensational discovery – one that should lead to a ground-breaking thesis.

History. A Mess. begins on a jubilant note. Our unnamed protagonist has unearthed something, the likes of which only the cleverest or the luckiest of graduate students could lay claim to. Her condescending PhD advisor has given her the seventeenth-century diary of an unknown “S.B.” to study, and the journal turns out to be a goldmine. Her careful reading suggests that S.B. was no insignificant person; rather S.B. appears to have been the artist responsible for the famous painting of Viscount Tom Jones. And although all professional artists of the period were assumed to be men, our heroine’s research gives her every reason to believe that the diarist is a woman. She may be holding in her hands the diary of one of Britain’s first professional female artists.

Our heroine’s thesis research had been progressing slowly, painfully, boringly; and her PhD advisor had been treating her shoddily. But now that her life has taken this sudden, exciting turn, she begins to formulate a PhD thesis that should bring

her academic fame:

Frenzied jubilation thrilled through my body, words burst within me freighted with tremendous power, inside my head sentences and then pages formed one after the other so that by the time I stepped out of the building into the outside courtyard, my introduction was well under way.

Out on the street, nothing was the same. I wasn't the same. I could sense it in the slightest gesture, the way my arms swung back and forth, my hips moved rhythmically side to side, my hair billowing in the warm spring breeze...

She surprises herself by dropping a ten-pound note into a busker's guitar case as she strolls home, happily developing her entire thesis as she goes. By the time she has reached home, she has even decided on the dedication: *For my mother.*

By page 11 of *History. A Mess.*, our heroine has written 600 manuscript pages, has left England, and is back in Reykjavík with her uninspired and uninspiring husband, Hans. In the meantime, she has made another discovery, the precise nature of which isn't completely revealed to us until much later. We do know, however, that it has changed her mood from elation to despair.

As she sinks deeper and deeper into despondency, we begin to fear for her sanity. Is she dreaming? Fantasizing? Hallucinating? Or perhaps everything that appears to be happening really is happening. Although her parents, husband, and in-laws all seem on the surface to be devoted to her, and although she belongs to a large group of professional women who have remained her close friends since school days, she becomes more and more secretive and isolated. We no longer read about her unfinished PhD thesis. Her new focus is a door in her living room that she has suddenly noticed for

the first time. It leads...well, we're unsure exactly where it leads. Outside? To another room? To another reality? But sometimes both we and she begin to wonder if it could be "Nothing but a clothes closet, no more than a meter square!"

The title of the original, Icelandic version of Sigrún Pálsdóttir's book is *Kompa*. The word has a double meaning – "small room" and "notebook" – reminiscent of what may be a closet and one or more of the journals featured in this book. Unfortunately there is no English equivalent of the Icelandic word, *Kompa*, but the translator, Lytton Smith, has chosen a clever alternative. The words "*History. A Mess.*" have their own double meaning, as the reader will quickly discover.

Our protagonist's mother figures largely in this book. Although we sometimes have reason to question it, she seems to be her daughter's chief supporter, as she resurfaces in the present and in flashbacks. We come to know her well – better, perhaps, than we know the narrator.

This is a book about the nature of reality. It's a book of sometimes gentle, sometimes dark, sometimes illusive humour. It's a book of parallels: Early Modern feminism and Postmodern feminism, the dismissal of talented women in the mid-1600s and the dismissal of talented women 375 years later, the minutia of S.B.'s life in seventeenth-century England and the minutia of our heroine's twenty-first-century life in Reykjavík. And it's quintessentially Icelandic.

It's no surprise that *Kompa* and *History. A Mess.* have been well received. From Iceland comes such praise as "Absolutely brilliant from beginning to end."¹ and "ingenious construction"². Of the English version, reviewers have added, "The premise

1 Halla Oddný Magnúsdóttir, Icelandic National TV

2 Nomination Committee for the Women's Literature Prize

of this novel is wonderfully intriguing.”³ and “Its ambition is met with resounding success every step of the way.”⁴

I enjoyed *History. A Mess.* immensely. The story is completed in 158 pages, but a great deal of drama, satire, and philosophical thought has been packed into those pages. Each flashback brings us closer to understanding the narrator and the people in her life. The tenses change often, and the author switches from first person singular to first person plural to third person, but these grammatical issues are managed smoothly and effectively. And the book is extremely visual – a filmmaker’s dream.

I loved that Lytton Smith retained all

the Icelandic letters, including Ð and Þ, which most translators shy away from. In fact, I had only one objection: that Smith, who didn’t flinch at retaining such Icelandic names as Bjarnfríður and Guðbjörg, chose to have our heroine calling her mother “Mom”. I found it impossible to imagine an Icelandic woman addressing her mother by that name.

This is the sort of book that compels the reader (at least this reader) to return to the beginning and read it all over again, with the newfound knowledge gained in the last chapter. But I do have a warning: Please don’t read the blurb on the book jacket the first time around. It’s a bit of a spoiler.

3 Janice Weizman, *New York Journal of Books*

4 Will Harris, *Books and Bao*

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Contributors

NINA LEE COLWILL spent her teenage years in Gimli, Manitoba, and returned with her husband, Dennis Anderson, 40 years later to make it her home again. She spent much of her career as a professor at University of Manitoba and a year as a visiting professor at University of Akureyri in Iceland; she currently serves as a language editor to European academics. Nina has been to Iceland 25 times.

MAX HOUGH is a 17 year old student at Arborg Collegiate who self-admittedly enjoys over-eating. He enjoys learning and discussing big ideas and is always willing to take on intellectual challenges.

BRIAN JOHANNESSON Born in Winnipeg, Brian Johannesson grew up with hockey memorabilia all around him but found it only of curiosity value at the time. His father Konnie had played defence for the 223rd Battalion hockey team and for the Winnipeg Falcons for several years, including 1920, the Olympic year. After graduating from the University of Manitoba in 1958 Brian moved to Montreal and then with his family to Waterloo, Ontario in 1967. By 1999 he had enough documents, diaries and artefacts to create his first Winnipeg Falcons website. Then he rewrote it entirely in 2006 after acquiring his mother's scrapbook, a treasure trove of several hundred newspaper clippings about the 223rd Battalion and Falcons teams. Brian now lives in Kitchener, Ontario, culturally a very long way from Icelandic Winnipeg; his Falcons' website is at www.winnipegfalcons.com

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

ELIN THORDARSON, an Icelandic Connection board member, is a writer, translator and mother from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

KRISTEN WOLF is currently the Torger Thompson Chair and the Birgit Baldwin Professor in the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she teaches courses on Old Norse-Icelandic language and literature and Scandinavian linguistics. Prior to her appointment at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she served as Professor and Chair of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba for thirteen years. Although Kirsten was primarily a medievalist, she became fascinated by the amazing literature produced by the Icelanders, who emigrated to North America and especially Canada. As a result, she translated several short stories written by Western Icelanders into English in order to publicize these authors and also wrote a number of articles on Western Icelandic literature.





The cover of *The Icelandic Canadian*, Volume 57 No. 3, 2002, image by Charles “Charlie” Gustav Thorson

The Back Page

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