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Vigdis 1986 by Jeffrey Vallance
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THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

Volume LII, No. 1

Winnipeg, Canada

Autumn, 1993

Editorial — by Kristine Perlmutter.....3

Feature Article:

Iceland House — by Kristiana Magnusson.....5



Do You Remember S.K. Hall? Can You Help? — by Robert Rahn.....11

Women, Fish and Folklore: The Art of Jeffrey Vallance
— by Kristine Perlmutter.....13

A Boy in the Wilderness — by Guðmundur Danielsson
— Translated by Hallberg Hallmundsson18

Icelandic Canadian Exhibitors Society: Our First Year
— by Steven Black.....32

In the Red River Valley — by Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason
— Translated by Thelma Guðrún Whale35

Poet's Corner: In Memory of Amma
— by Jay Anthony Willis43

Reviews: Aurora: English Translations of Icelandic Poems
— by Guttormur J. Guttormsson
— Reviewed by Roy St. George Stubbs.....44

Icelandic Canadian Memory Lore — by Magnús Einarsson
— Reviewed by Kirsten Wolf46

Profile: Rhian Brynjolson — by Phyllis Webster49

Notes on Contributors.....56

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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EDITORIAL

THE Creative Spirit

by *Kristine Perlmutter,*
Managing Editor

What are the effects on the citizens of a country with a total population equivalent to that of a small city? They must develop, support and maintain all elements of the society — roads, education, cultural life, public health and welfare, transportation, trade and commerce, and so on. This demands a collaborative effort and a creative spirit.

It has been suggested that places where people seem especially creative have "been spurred by an abundance of differing viewpoints, a welcome environment for change and a driving necessity to solve problems." Iceland is such a milieu and the creative spirit flourishes there. Visitors to that country are surprised to see paintings and other works of art rendered by members of the family having pride of place in almost every home. They also marvel at the number of bookstores in the country, the amount of writing that is done and the diversity of genre that is employed. The theatre scene is surprisingly vibrant for a country of its size and the former director of the Reykjavik Theatre is currently President of the republic. The same creativity is evident in music, interior design and other aspects of life.

A characteristic such as the creative spirit which has developed of necessity over hundreds of years becomes woven tightly into the

fabric of the lives of the people and takes on the status of a cultural value. When the forebears of many of the readers of this publication emigrated, the cultural values that they took with them were their most valuable possessions. These habits of mind were carefully nurtured and passed along through families to today's Canadians and Americans of Icelandic descent.

This issue of *The Icelandic Canadian* pays homage to this creative spirit, exhibited in a variety of areas. Our feature article on Iceland House acknowledges the creative efforts involved in the original vision, the fund-raising, the cataloguing of books and artifacts, the hosting and innkeeping, the cooking and catering, the art work, the needlework, the repairing, refinishing and painting, the cleaning, the collection of donations, the accounting, the maintenance and the teaching of the members of the Icelandic Canadian Club of British Columbia.

Several articles in this issue feature artists of Icelandic descent. Phyllis Webster profiles Rhian Brynjolson, an illustrator whose work for Pemmican Press, among other projects, has assured her a following.

Steven Black chronicles the first year of the Icelandic Canadian Exhibitors' Society. This group is dedicated to fostering interest in the

cultural activities of Icelandic Canadians, with special interest given to the visual arts. There are undoubtedly many Icelandic Canadians with artistic ability among our readers who wish to show and sell their art. These are the only criteria for membership in the Icelandic Canadian Exhibitors' Society. We are pleased to introduce you to them.

To remain creative, an individual needs to integrate new information and new experiences all along the way and to make new connections among them. Also, it is helpful to have someone outside the cultural group to prod us to look at our own cultural background differently from time to time. One individual who has done this for our group is American artist Jeffrey Vallance. Our cover, showing President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir flanked by a cod and a herring, is an example of his creative juxtapositions of aspects of Icelandic culture. He lives an open, creative lifestyle and operates under the premise that cultural understanding and art exchange among countries can promote peace.

In the literary area, we are pleased to continue presenting Thelma Whale's translation of Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason's *In The Red River Valley*. Many readers have indicated that they look forward to their quarterly instalment of the story. We are also pleased to make Guðmundur Daniélsson's story *A Boy In The Wilderness* accessible to our readers in a translation by Hallberg Hallmundsson. This story provides us with an appreciation of some aspects of rural life in Iceland.

Poetry and the oral tradition have always been associated with the Icelandic culture. This quarter the magazine includes a review of a collection of poetry translated from the work of the late Guttormur J.

Guttormsson. Also included in the issue is a contemporary poem by a young man, written in memory of his Amma, and a review of Magnús Einarsson's *Icelandic Canadian Memory Lore*, a body of work collected by the author in the form of oral stories told him from memory by immigrants of Icelandic descent.

We are aware that the creative spirit is alive and well among our readers. *The Icelandic Canadian* welcomes submissions of art work and typed contributions on topics of interest to Canadians and Americans of Icelandic descent. If you have an opinion piece, feature article, poem or piece of fiction that you feel is particularly relevant to our readership, please keep us in mind. Let's keep the creative spirit alive!

¹ Daniel Goleman, Paul Kaufman and Michael Ray. *The Creative Spirit*. New York: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 171.

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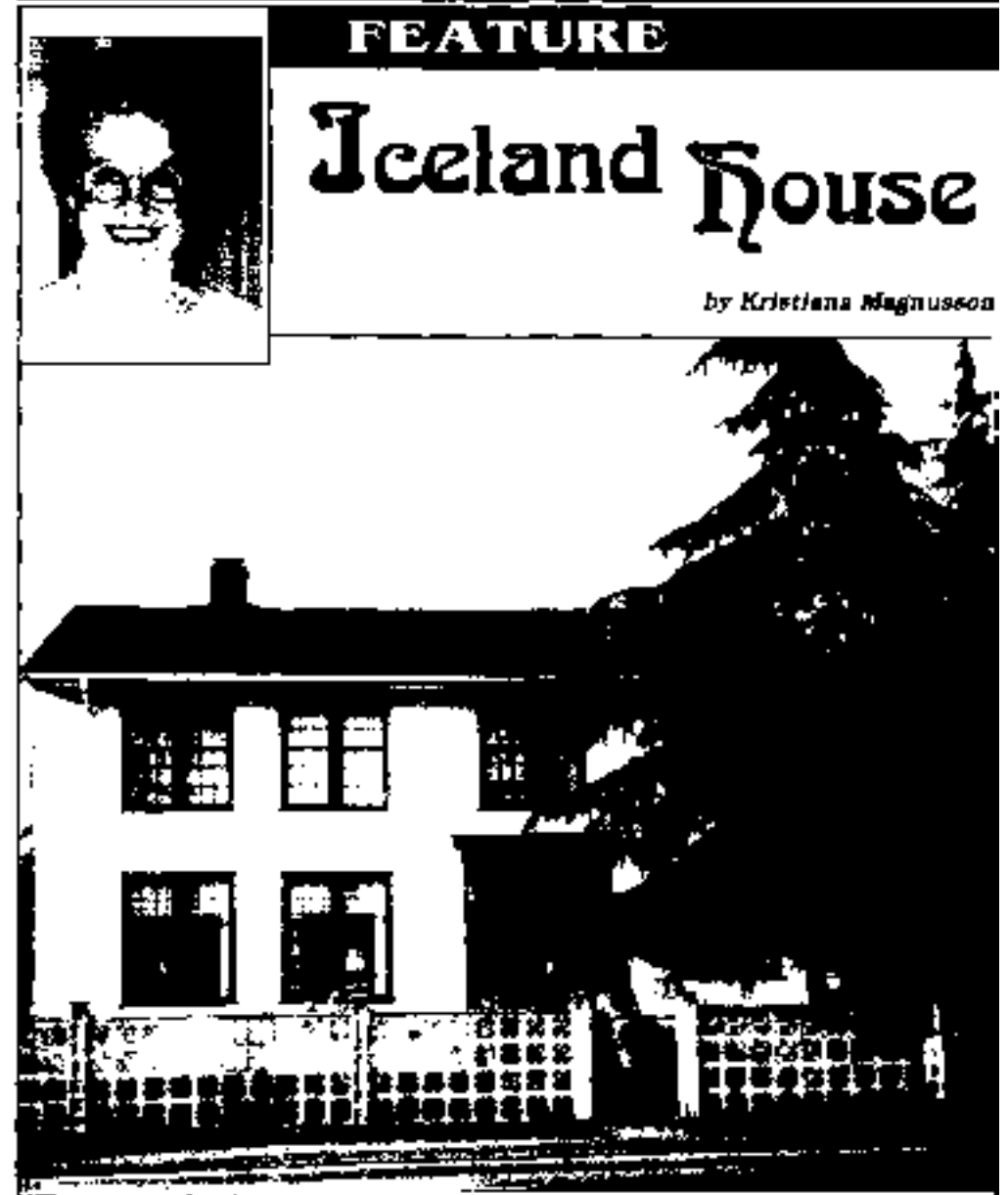
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Iceland House 1993

When you enter the wide spacious hallway of Iceland House, located at 939-6th Street, New Westminster, British Columbia, you are immediately aware of the old-world charm of this Icelandic cultural centre. Glass doors in the entrance hall lead to the large dining room on one side and the stately living room, with its

rich wood beams and fireplace, on the other side. Most of the floors in Iceland House are hardwood with inlaid strips. The spacious wood staircase adds a graceful feature to the entrance hall.

The main floor of Iceland House also contains the Solskin Heritage Library where a large collection of Icelandic books are now being

FEATURE

Iceland House

by Kristiana Magnússon



The Solskin Heritage Library workers:

(l-r) Anne Penway, Kristiana Magnusson, Bob Asgeirsson, Helga Howardson, Thordis Wilson, Sylvia Isfeld. Seated: Stefania Morris, Geraldine Thorlakson

catalogued. A small den, with a fireplace, will later serve as an archives room for valuable books and artifacts. The large sunny kitchen serves as the focal point for preparing meals for bed and breakfast guests, as well as for catering to club functions throughout the year.

Everywhere at Iceland House there is evidence of Icelandic culture and memorabilia; the large collection of books lining the living room and library bookcases; a beautiful picture of President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in the main entrance hall, as well as a map of Iceland; pictures of Icelandic sites in the living room; a painting done by local Icelandic artist Pat Peacock in the dining room; a beautifully worked petit point panel and picture made and donated by Kristjana Helgason; prints of Icelandic folklore along the wide staircase leading up to the six bedrooms and

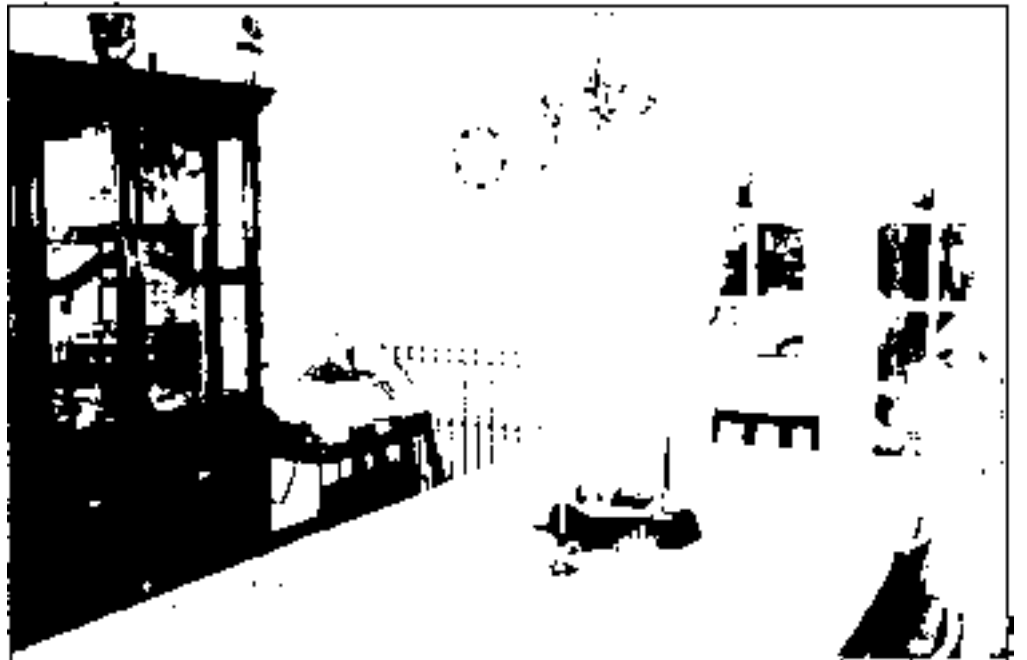
sitting room on the second floor. In the bedrooms upstairs there are pictures of some of the Norse Gods, framed by Oli Leifson and Kris Isfeld.

Iceland House began as a dream of the Icelandic Canadian Club of British Columbia; a dream to purchase a home suitable for use as an Icelandic cultural centre. The realization of any dream or project always involves people with ideas and vision; an aggressive and active committee who are willing to give of their time and talent; finally, the co-operation of a cohesive group of people. All these facets were part of the planning process in the club's dream of establishing an Icelandic cultural centre in British Columbia. This dream began in the late 1980's, when a committee was formed to look into possible sites and funding sources for such a major project.

At a meeting held on November 1st,



Shown above is the living room at Iceland House and, below, the dining room.



1989, Icelandic Club members were given an illustrated pamphlet of a manor house located in New Westminster. The committee members felt that this particular place had good potential as an Icelandic cultural centre. The executive committee had made a tentative offer on the proper-

ty, located at 939-6th Street, New Westminster. This offer had been accepted by the owner, subject to several clauses.

This manor house was originally located on the present site of a large department store and was known as the "Dashwood Jones Manor." It had

a colourful history as a nursing home, detox centre and group home.

Because of its size and numerous bedrooms, as well as large areas on the bottom level, Icelandic Canadian Club members felt that this home could become a viable undertaking. They envisioned the main floor serving as a reception area for club functions and cultural events. With the several bedrooms upstairs, they realized that they could operate a bed and breakfast place during the summer months and have student rentals over the winter months. However, renovations would have to be done before the house would be ready for occupancy as such.

This was the property presented to club members over several meetings. The Icelandic Canadian Club applied for funding through the "Go B.C." Community Centre Development Plan. They hoped that their funding would approximate one third of the cost of purchasing the building which they planned to designate "Iceland House."

The purchase price of the manor was to be \$285,000. Another \$105,000 would be required for the necessary renovations. This, along with various fees, legal and otherwise, would bring the total purchase price to \$390,000. Of this amount, the Icelandic Canadian Club of British Columbia hoped to receive \$130,000 from the "Go B.C." program, \$80,000 would be raised by donations and voluntary labour, with the balance of \$180,000 to be mortgaged.

At this November meeting, a motion was made by Ib Thorsteinson, seconded by Asthildur Gunnarson, that the Icelandic Canadian Club of British Columbia proceed with the purchase of this property. The motion was unanimously accepted and carried. At a special meeting on January 30, 1990 special resolutions

authorizing the purchase of the house and the borrowing of the necessary funds were adopted unanimously. Numerous donations, from \$25 to \$1,000 were received that evening. The name "Iceland House" was then designated as the name for the cultural centre. The library at Iceland House was designated as the "Solskin Heritage Library." Donations were received from near and far. By January 30, 1990 donations amounted to \$21,283, including Solskin's donation of \$10,916.

Possession of Iceland House took place on January 31, 1990. Funding from "Go B.C." was approved for \$86,666 but this would not be made available until the necessary renovations to the house had been completed.

Four Icelandic Canadian Club members, Irene Finnson Daniels, Gus Tryggvason, Oli Leifson and Grant Carlson deserve special mention in regards to the purchase of Iceland House. These dedicated club members co-signed a loan to finance the purchase of the house. In addition to that they made sizeable individual monetary donations, as well as donating hours of labour in the renovation process.

As soon as the house was purchased the mammoth task of renovating Iceland House began so that it could be ready for bed and breakfast guests as soon as possible. Volunteers came out in full force, willing to tackle anything that needed repairing or painting. All labour was voluntary with the exception of the exterior painting, floor refinishing and mouldings around the bathtubs. The six bedrooms upstairs and the large room on the main floor (which now serves as the Solskin Heritage Library) were painted and freshened up. Herman Eyford and Kris Isfeld pulled out old window casings and



Having fun along with work at Iceland House (Spring 1990) are l. to r.: Irene Finnson Daniels, Bjorn Hjorleifson, Carol Foster, Sylvia Szabo, Gus Tryggvason, Linda Birch. Centre front below: Ben Foster.

Happy faces of volunteers Linda Birch and Margaret Amireault lightens the work of painting at Iceland House. (Spring 1990)



repaired them. Odinn Helgason volunteered his services as an electrician during the renovation process.

So enthusiastic were the volunteers in their renovation tasks that it was reported that in their enthusiasm to get going the staircase jammed, some rushing up, others rushing down, each one carrying mops, pails, paint brushes and paint, even the occasional squirt gun. In the large sunny kitchen, cupboards were removed and repaired, painted and re-installed. On the lower level a suite was fixed up for the use of the managers of Iceland House. During this busy time of renovating, the

coffee-pot, kleinur and pönnukökkur were always on hand to tempt the volunteers' taste buds.

The Icelandic Canadian Club Newsletter provided a wish list for articles needed at Iceland House. Generous donations poured in: tables, chairs, beds, mattresses, bedding, television sets, chesterfields, dressers, drapes, paint, an organ, plumbing fixtures, pictures, a chandelier, dishes and cutlery.

At the first Club executive meeting held at Iceland House members showed up in work clothes. After the meeting, they all pitched in to paint and clean up the house.

After a hectic period of renovations

by volunteers such as Gus Tryggvason, Irene Finnson Daniels, Linda Birch, Margaret Amireault, Oli Leifson, Carol and Ben Foster, Grant Carlson, Asi Bjornson, Odinn and Kristjana Helgason, Bjorn Hjorleifson and others too numerous to mention, Iceland House was ready for its first bed and breakfast guests.

Bill and Alda Steele and Kris and Sylvia Isfeld deserve special mention as they put in endless volunteer hours at Iceland House, as well as hosting the first bed and breakfast guests. Gwen Gudbjartson also hosted the paying guests at Iceland House for awhile. Wayne Brandson and Robert Asgeirsson worked behind the scenes, Wayne at the accounting work involved in the purchase of Iceland House, and Robert (Bob) in promoting the purchase and realization of Iceland House through his involvement with the monthly newsletter.

At this time special acknowledgement must be made to the late Gus Tryggvason who was a principal figure in the establishment of Iceland House. He was involved in the application for the Club's "Go B.C." grant, as well as being a fund-raiser, volunteer, and caretaker at Iceland House. One member commented after his untimely death, "I don't think Iceland House would have been possible had it not been for Gus."

Solskin Society has also been involved in Iceland House activities. They have donated half of all their casino proceeds each year to the Library and Kitchen Fund. Two Solskin meetings are held at Iceland House yearly. They hosted a luncheon there for convention delegates in 1991. A committee of seven Solskin women meet every Tuesday at Solskin Heritage Library to sort and catalogue the large collection of Icelandic books which have been donated over the

years. The process of cataloguing some of these books had been started by Robert Asgeirsson and Emil Bjarnason, with dedicated help from Gwen Gudbjartson and Lara Thordarson.

Today Iceland House is a stately and cheerful Icelandic cultural centre. The bedrooms upstairs, used for bed and breakfast guests, are appealing and attractively colour coordinated. The main floor is used for Club functions, visiting dignitaries and kaffihús gatherings. Last fall a successful Christmas Craft Fair was held, with several groups and individuals participating. This will probably become an annual event. Icelandic classes, under the tutelage of Sturla Kristjansson are held every Saturday during the fall and winter months. Independence Day festivities are held annually, either in the recreation room downstairs or on the main floor. Monthly meetings are held by the West Coast Viking Society in the recreation room. Cooking classes have also been held at Iceland House from time to time.

Special events such as art exhibitions, poetry readings, receptions for visiting dignitaries from Iceland, group events and luncheon receptions are all part of the agenda at Iceland House. Recently a large group of principals from educational centres in Iceland were entertained there. With managers Rod and Jean Smart (now retired) and new managers John and Gladys Samson, Iceland House has taken on an ambience of warmth and dignity. It began as a dream of dedicated Club members who had the vision, talent and enthusiasm to fulfil that dream. Iceland House has now truly become a cultural centre for the Icelandic community in and around Vancouver, British Columbia. ■

Do You Remember S.K. Hall?

Can you help?

by Robert Rahar



Sigridur Hall



Steingrimur K. Hall

Little did I know when my father and I replaced a living room window in our home on Victor Street in Winnipeg, it would lead me to writing a book. About my experience as a carpenter? Not even close.

It was in the mid-70's that my Dad decided it was time to do some upgrading of our home at 701 Victor, which is located between Wellington and Sargent Avenues. On a cool but sunny fall day, we pulled out an old storm window, and along with it came a flurry of wood shavings. I'm told they were used as insulation many years ago. These shavings were dumped in the attic, and made their way down the hollow walls.

Amongst the shavings were some personnel effects, such as a child's black leather boot from around 1915, shoe polish, a medicine bottle, copies of some old issues of *Literary Digest*, and last (but certainly not least), a copy of some sheet music. It was entitled "We're Away, Hip-Hooray" (*Til Kaiser Bill is Done*), published in Winnipeg in 1918. Lyrics were written by Astor and J.G. Johnstone, while the music was composed by S.K. Hall.

I found this music most interesting when I sat down at the piano and started playing it. The words talked about how Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany would be defeated in World War I. The

music reminded me of a vaudeville-style tune. My Dad then told me there was all kinds of "junk" up in the attic and asked if I wanted it. Enthusiastically, I encouraged him to dig through the woodshavings to find it all.

My interest peaked when we discovered business cards, suggesting a teacher of piano once had his studio in our home. S.K. Hall was the name printed on the cards, and the addresses of 701 Victor Street and the Sandison Block on Main Street were listed as the piano studios. Also stated was that Mr. Hall was organist and choirmaster of the First Lutheran Church at the corner of Sherbrook Street and Bannatyne Avenue.

Because I am of Lutheran background, and also a member of a musical family, I was intrigued by this discovery. I quickly placed a call to the church, and the secretary referred me to a woman by the name of Pearl Johnson. She was the soprano soloist at the congregation for many years. Mrs. Johnson told me as much as she could. But, because I was only about fifteen years old, I didn't know how to conduct further research. Not until I reached the age of thirty, did I feel I could successfully pursue more information.

In the last four years, I have been able to locate articles, some photographs and documents, and speak to former students, acquaintances and others, to compile enough material for a book about Steingrimur Kristjan Hall's life and career. I am not Icelandic, but have gained a sincere appreciation for the Icelandic people's artistic ability, dedication, and modesty, and have also managed to learn how to pronounce many of the Icelandic names properly.

S.K. dedicated his life to promoting the knowledge of Icelandic poetry for cultural reasons, and not for profit. For this reason, I am writing to give this devoted musician the recognition he deserved. And again, for absolutely no financial gain. Many agree that neither S.K., nor his wife Sigridur Hordal, who was also well-renowned for her renditions of Icelandic songs, were honoured sufficiently during their lifetime. With the financial assistance of the Manitoba Heritage Federation, I am able to publish a book, but it has to be completed by the end of the year.

I am therefore hoping that anyone who can assist in any way through the provision of information, photographs, or anything remotely connected to the Halls, their daughters Sylvia Lenor (Einarsson) and Norma Eveline (Manning) or the First Lutheran Church, will come forward to help make this project a complete history of a loved, honoured and special family.

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Women, Fish And Folklore:

The Art of Jeffrey Vallance



by Kristina Perlmutter

BJÖRG, 1986
Crayon, pencil on paper
14 x 16 1/2"

Photo courtesy Rosamund Felsen
Gallery, Los Angeles

Not the solitary studio for American artist Jeffrey Vallance. Vallance takes his ideas "on the road," visiting far-flung countries and documenting his travels with pieces of art and text, mixed-media installations

and meetings with Heads of State. His conviction that "through the exchange of art, countries of the world can have a greater understanding of each other that can lead to world peace" has taken him on two trips to Iceland. In 1986, he was invited to have an exhibition at the Living Art Museum of a series of drawings that he had made two years previously about Icelandic mythology and folklore. The show was well received by the Icelanders, many of whom were inspired to look at their own culture differently by his imaginative use of traditional symbols in works of contemporary art.



On his first trip to Iceland, Vallance was dismayed by its barren, treeless landscape, fascinated by its geothermal heat and pools of boiling, grey mud, fatigued by attempting sleep in the midnight sun, surprised by tropical greenhouses and enchanted by Icelandic women with clear complexions and white-blond hair whom he considered to be among the most beautiful women in the world.

On his second trip, he looked out the bus window to see "the steaming, barren, volcanic landscape that in 1984 looked unearthly and hostile to me. Now the same landscape

appeared friendly and welcoming." Although he knew more of what to expect of Iceland the second time around, he was still seeking to answer a question he had posed previously about the Icelandic women: "What factors produce such nymphets?" After doing some enjoyable research, he decided that the answer to his question was quite simple: fish. He suggests that:

In folklore there has always been a peculiar relationship between women and fish (Iceland's two most valuable natural resources). There is a nursery rhyme that all the children sing in school that goes like this: "If I were a long and slippery-slimy eel, I would always curl myself around you." There are folk carvings of the same subject showing an eel curling itself around the head of a beautiful maiden... There is a fisherman's tale that states: "If a man catches an exceptionally long fish, this means he will meet a beautiful girl"...In Iceland there is a folk saying about the relationship between the beauty of a woman and processing fish. "It is good for a woman's complexion to work in a fish factory"...I am not sure if science has proven that processing fish is good for the skin, but certainly the consumption of fish is.

Vallance explored the relationship between women and fish in a series of drawings which juxtapose boardwalk portrait style sketches of Icelandic women and scientific drawings of fish. (See "Bjorg," inset) The series includes women spotted in Iceland and drawn from memory, along with "Hofi" (former Miss Iceland) and President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. In the drawing of the President (see "Vigdís", cover), she is flanked by the national fish, the cod and the herring.

Although Vallance had not been able to meet President Vigdís on his first trip to the country, an appointment was arranged for his second visit.

My appointment with President Vigdís was conducted in Forset Holl. I entered her office, introduced myself and handed her an invitation to my exhibition. I showed her an example of an artwork that would be in the show...She commented on illustrations of Icelandic mythology, a milk carton design, the Texas Snack Bar and her office facade. She saw a portrait of herself and said, "I see you have included the Little Lady"...

As a gift I presented her with one of my ceramic cups (Iconophilia ware) with a snarling scraggy dog painted on it... She held it in the palm of her hand, admiring the object. I could see that she was not reacting in the way one would to a token gift, but she genuinely appreciated the cup.

During the visit, Jeffrey Vallance had an opportunity to discuss with the President possibilities for enhanced world understanding through exchanges of art. The President concurred that "art is the best way to have one's culture understood. Also, it is good for industry. We can't just sell fish to a country but if we give them a little art and culture, then they will buy the fish." At the close of the meeting, President Vigdís gave her assurance that she would certainly attend the exhibition.

Vallance is one of a rare breed who have the integrity and courage to go right to the top with their ideas about what would help to bring people and nations together. He brings the same creative flair to his lifestyle as he does to his art and writing. Naturally, Jeffrey Vallance was interested in the Summit in Reykjavik when Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev chose to have their deliberations on the island nation mid-way between New York and Moscow. He wondered if, "during the Summit, either one of them looked over and saw a cup with a snarling dog on it."

THE PRESIDENT OF ICELAND, VIGDÍS..., 1985-88

Collage, framed
17 x 23 1/8"

Photo courtesy Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles



Among other projects, Jeffrey Vallance has presented the huge King of Tonga with the world's largest pair of swim fins and carried out a "Cultural Ties" project in

which he sent letters and neckties to some 200 world leaders, requesting that they reciprocate. For a future project, he has challenged our readers to send him stories about fish. These stories

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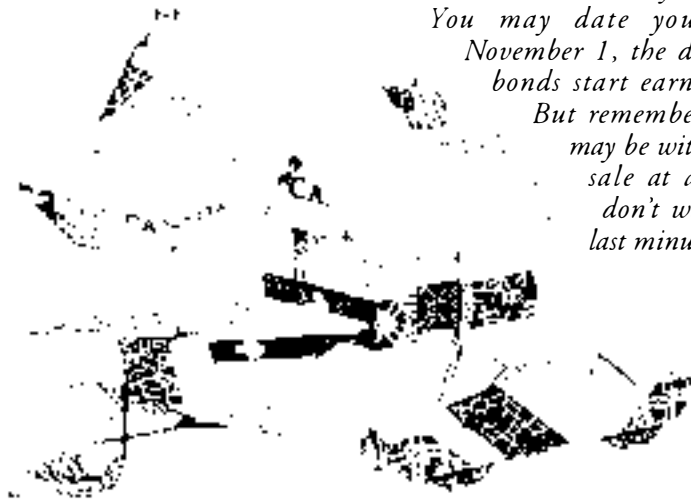
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OVER THREE DECADES OF CARING FOR THE ELDERLY

Guðmundur Danielsson:

A Boy In The Wilderness



Guðmundur Danielsson

Guðmundur Danielsson was born in 1910 at Guttormshagi, in Holtum, Rangárvallasýsla. In addition to a life-long career as an educator, he served as editor of the newspaper, *Suðurlands*, from 1953-1973, and wrote short-stories, plays and poetry. His collected works, *Ritsafn*, were published in seven volumes between 1963 and 1973.

*Translated from the Icelandic
by Hallberg Hallmundsson*

The boy on the hill, the girl in the marshes, the lad by the lake — this is the story of how their ways parted, never to converge again.

Climbing the crest of the hill, the boy could see not only the farm in the marshes and the one by the lake, where his friends lived, but also the vast farmlands all the way up to the mountains. It was a beautiful sight in

the sunshine, but not very mysterious; it was his home district. Although few of the people were personally known to him, he felt they had to be pretty much alike; they all did the same work, surrounded by the same mountains, subject to the same weather.

But the wilderness beyond the inhabited land was different. Not even the brightest sunshine could

penetrate that ever-blue veil which half concealed its looks and nature. Its vastness could not be seen from his hill in the middle of the district, much less the regions back of it. The boy knew there were people on the other side, but that was very far away; no one from there ever came here, and no one from here ever went

there. The roadless wilderness was like an ocean that separated two countries and on which no ship existed. The boy on the hill frequently gazed over to the mountains as if he expected their mystery to be unlocked to him. But it was a futile thing to do. Nothing ever came of it.

2.

The boy was in their company now. At first they had used harsh words, especially about his father, but he had remained silent in order not to provoke them any further. Now, as it was nearing noon, they acted as if they didn't see him.

He had never been with them before. They were all old hands, except he and Ólafur. But one novice was enough, and since they had promised to look after Ólafur, it was but a matter of course that they keep their word. He saw they took turns riding by his side, blathering away. They were probably spouting out the name of this or that mountain-top, laying down the rules of the roundup, spinning heroic yarns about themselves — frenzied pursuits of dry ewes and how they had finally run them down in the wilderness, bringing them, gasping with exhaustion, back into the fold.

He knew for sure, even though he couldn't hear the words, that that's what they were telling Ólafur. That was all mountain men ever talked of. As far back as he could remember, once fall was approaching, Jón the farmhand never talked about anything else — not unless forced to. That's why the boy knew everything about the mountains even though he had never searched them for sheep before; he knew more than they would be able to tell Ólafur in a whole week.

On the other hand, he was only just fifteen, which was indefensible — a

flagrant violation of the rules. Sometime in antiquity they had laid down the rule that no farmer could send a man under sixteen for the fall roundup. That rule might be broken once in a while but not often. A poor farmer who only had a handful of sheep could get away with it; he could tell the mountain king that his son was almost sixteen, to which the king might say, "Well," and let it go at that. But a farmer who was comfortably off couldn't use that kind of excuse, let alone a rich one; they were in a position to hire a man, if they were unable to go themselves, and that's what they usually did.

But then, at dusk the day before, Jón the farmhand had suddenly broken his leg, and instead of searching for a substitute, someone had gone to get a physician. It was then that the boy conceived the idea.

"I'll go on the roundup tomorrow," he said to his father. "Everything is ready, and I can even use Jón's mountain boots; we're the same size."

"They'll send you right back," his father had answered. "You think they'll accept you?"

He was surprised how weak his father's protest was, and he immediately took advantage of it.

"I don't care what they say. I'm going."

"It may be harder than you think," his father said. "And it's important that you hold your own."

"I know," replied the boy.

It was late morning before the others realized what he was doing there — that he was actually one of them.

"Where's Jón?" they asked. "Has he become such a big shot that he needs an assistant like the mountain kings?"

"It isn't that," he told them. "Jón broke his leg last night; he fell off a haystack he was covering for the winter. The bone was sticking out through his skin when we carried him in."

They were dumbstruck for a moment. They knew Jón's legs — good legs, nimble and enduring, un-stumbling among crags and rocks, but now one of them was broken. Strange that a haystack should be his undoing!

Then, looking at the practical side of the matter, they realized what this meant: Jón was out; he wouldn't be searching the mountains this year and perhaps never more. So they asked, in a different, sharper tone, "And whom is the good farmer of Holt sending in his place? It couldn't be you, who are still wet behind your ears?"

"There wasn't anybody else," he said. "Father can't get away at this time, so I had to go."

Some ugly words fell, even some libelous ones, but he endured them; breaking the roundup rules was bound to cost something. But the mountain kings hadn't yet arrived; they had been delayed somewhere, having a drink for the road with old friends. The boy fended off the insinuations with silence, withdrew into his shell for protection; no one had the power to make him stay behind except the mountain kings, and they were still warming their insides. He knew they wouldn't join the group until it had reached the mountains. That's when they could be expected; that's when they would arrive, galloping the desert in a cloud of yellow dust like two small hurricanes, one on a black, the other

on a red mount — two middle-aged farmers the boy had long known. They were generally quiet, cautious men, but today they would be different; today there would be a lively glint in their squinting eyes: sunshine and drink and authority. He didn't expect them to send him back as long as they were enjoying themselves, and they would be enjoying themselves all day; their horses and flasks would see to that.

The boy rode behind all the others, leading his own pack horse. The others had tied theirs together in a caravan. The dry ox-leather straps creaked, the sweaty odour of sixty horses and the smell of dung mixed with the scent of half-withered grass assaulted his nostrils. It was sunny and calm, a murmuring stream somewhere near, and a cluster of midges dancing around his head; these were the last days of summer. Occasionally, thrushes and sparrows would dart up from the path.

Finally, the last farm was behind them, and the wilderness began. That's where the boy first smelled the fragrance of trees; they were approaching the birch lands of Signal Hill. Here, in his daydreams, he had many times built himself a place in a clearing of the woods — he, who by birth was tied to a treeless hill and a tract of bogs. The stunted trees waved at him their autumn-red branches, bush-fed sheep stared at him with their brown eyes, then disappeared, the happiest creatures on earth — and he quietly thanked God for having led him all the way here to this wooded paradise. The two mountain kings still hadn't joined them; perhaps they wouldn't turn him back after he had come as far as this. Ahead lay Ptarmigan Plains, the hard shortgrass flats along the Rang River, which droned to the right by the furrowed slopes of Hekla's foothills. Quickly traversed, the flats were no

sooner underfoot than behind.

In the middle of the sands, where the Thjors and Rang Rivers come closest to each other, the group of mountain men halted briefly. They had reached the Wire — a barbed-wire fence separating the mountain pastures from the homelands. On the other side of the gate a grassy lawn had grown over the driven pumice sands, fertilized by the dung of sheep that was deposited there each fall as they strayed home from the mountains. Here were thick-horned wethers, as fat as millionaires, and lactating ewes with their lambs, training their large eyes southward like refugees at a border; perhaps some of them would get through, otherwise they would have to wait by the wire for another six, long September nights until the whole drove came down from the mountains and the gate would be opened.

No, the mountain kings didn't bother him. They were too happy to want to make anybody sad; they were at peace with all men. They joined up singing — a wave of song rising up from the sand, a quivering mirage of vocal music. Far to the north loomed the figure of a lone rider. The boy heard the others guess who he might be, but there was no consensus. The rider went on alone, and the distance between him and the group rather increased; at dusk, he disappeared entirely.

By sunset they were going through Rang River Head. For a moment the fiery rays of the sunset gave a red hue to the clear water where it welled up from the sand-covered lava bed by the foot of Sheepfell, until the shadow of Burfell put out the light, drew a dark blanket over the waters' cradle, and bade the land good night.

They rode on still farther, with the overgrown lava hills on the right, coal-black sands on the left, heading for

Dayride Gorge, the sheltered nook between Valafell and the bed of lava named for Sólvi.

"Who was he?" asked the boy, but they answered out of context — probably didn't know. Whoever he was, this Sólvi had become a nobody, sunken into oblivion except for his name which had stuck to the lava and thus achieved immortality.

The day's journey was over. They had arrived at Dayride Gorge, where they would spend the night. There was a small grass flat at the head of the hollow, with a clear spring streaming northwest; no springs have better water than those which run in that direction. The boy did as the others: took down from his packhorse a haystack and his food chest and finally the pack saddle. Then he unsaddled his mount, led both horses further into the gorge, and hobbled them. That done, tents were raised on the grass by the spring.

He shared a tent with Ólafur and two others. They were no longer spiteful toward him, having apparently accepted him into their company; only back in civilization did the roundup rules over-ride brotherly feelings.

From every tent in the camp came the clamor of human voices mixed with the hiss of kerosene stoves and the banging of receptacles. There was eating, and drinking: meat, bread, and boiled coffee. Ólafur cut his finger, drawing blood. He lost his appetite and blamed his mother for not having packed him a table knife; there was less likelihood of cutting oneself with a table knife than a jack-knife! He became depressed and homesick and began to loathe the wilderness.

Suddenly, someone outside shouted that a man was missing; the man from Andanes farm hadn't showed up. The tents were emptied as the mountain kings summoned their troops for inspection. Sure enough, the Andanes

fellow was missing. They thought of the lone rider — the one who disappeared at dusk. A momentary wrangle ensued, cursing mixed with wisecracks: Quite an achievement not to find the gorge in such weather! That kind of feat really took a scholar and preferably one who had grown up in Andanes — practically next door!

"No matter, we've got to go and look for him," the mountain kings declared. "Two, three men should be enough."

Two or three volunteers saddled their horses, mounted, and disappeared at a gallop into the calm darkness under the slopes of Valafell. The rest returned to their tents, drinking more coffee and exchanging reminiscences of past but unforgettable roundup adventures. The boy listened silently, having nothing to tell; his adventures had not yet come to pass.

At midnight the volunteers returned with the lost one. They were raucous and full of jest.

"We found him up by Hald," they said. "He had gone to sleep, cool as a cucumber. He saw he couldn't cross Tongue River, and that was that."

They embellished their story with all kinds of jokes but asked that the Andanes man not be reprimanded because they had scolded him enough already. Besides, he had some sort of excuse, poor chap; he had traced the broad tracks of the South-Holt men across the sands, thinking they were those of his own group, all of which had gone ahead of him; for that reason he never looked back either. Well, anybody could make a mistake.

The man from Andanes didn't contribute to the discussion; he seemed to listen absent-mindedly to the others' talk, as if it were none of his business. The boy had heard that he attended a Latin school every winter, that he had all but absorbed whatever wisdom there was written down in books, and that he knew more

than all the other people in the district put together. All the more curious that he should have lost his way in bright sunshine and gone past Dayride Gorge, way up to Hald!

Finally, silence fell on the camp, the men slumbering beneath blankets with saddles or turf pads for pillows. But the night was short: even before daybreak the first kerosene stove was hissing. Perhaps the chill had crept into the tents during the night and penetrated the blankets. And when it comes to chasing away chill, nothing equals a kerosene stove and boiling hot coffee.

In a little while the camp was bustling. The men ate their breakfast, gathered the horses, folded the tents, tied up the luggage, and loaded the packhorses. At the first faint light of dawn they set off.

All that day the boy was filled with the tingling magic of the powerful mountain spirits. It was as if unknown gods had taken possession of his soul, flying with it from peak to peak, unlocking for it one heaven after another — paradise after paradise, where the sheep roamed contentedly all summer long, blissfully waiting for that sunlit autumn morning when their human friends would come to gather them all together into a wondrously large herd and drive them down to the Land Pens. Never before had the boy laid eyes on Kraka Peak, east of Hekla, awesome and black and so steep and thin that it was bound to crumble one day in a storm. When it finally disappeared out of sight, other vistas came into view. The path followed the glens over driven sand and lavaflows, but all the beauty was farther away and higher. They inched on in a caravan past the three Vala Peaks — three mangled fingers of tuff pointing up in the blue air as if swearing an oath, the hand itself sunk into some lower depths. Then the route

lay along Cave Creek and finally across it.

The closer they got to the Landman Cave, the more curious Iceland became, the more incredible in its majestic splendor, as if right here the Good Lord had given in to His wildest joy of creation and reached the pinnacle of His art. And then, dizzy with triumph, He must have put the crown of cliffs on top of Lodmund, that king of the mountains, and draped him in a green floor-length mantle, setting a mirror of lakes in an ornate frame at his feet. To the east the view was blocked by the vanguards of Torfa Glacier — Big Head and Little Head — tall, snow-capped mountains which perhaps impressed the boy even more than Lodmund himself. He was seized by a titillating fear in the sunshine, as if death were nodding to him — or perhaps God.

"Come closer, little friend," the snowy mountains seemed to be saying, "We've got something to show you."

He couldn't take his eyes off them for a long while, forgot his companions and his errand, letting the great magnet of awe and pleasure suck him dry of will and wit — until he heard a voice calling from the world of humans:

"Get off the horse, boy, and grab a bite!" They had arrived at the Landman Cave.

Here, more than half the group was to stay for the next four days and nights — rounding up sheep while it was daylight, otherwise sleeping. The rest were to alight here only a short while, then continue over to Warm Springs and camp there. Ólafur remained here, but to the boy's delight he was ordered in the group going on to the remotest wilderness, where he knew from the tales of Jón the farmhand that the mountain crests were the sharpest, the cliffs the most awesome, the canyons the deepest.

They took leave of the cave dwellers around mid-afternoon and rode east and northeastward through the Liver Mountains down into Doomsdale, past Frost Farm Lake, where the swans withdraw for molting and the loons wail, come autumn — onward still over the ridge between North Mine and South Mine, down to the mud flats of Glacier Creek, and from there south to the rugged edge of Spring Lava. Here, on the grassy bank of a warm brook by the edge of the lava, roundup men had camped for centuries this very same day — the Saturday in the 22nd week of summer.

Evening came, and it got cool in the shade beneath South Mine, which looked at once sulfur yellow, moon pale, and rusty red. The Spring Lava, rough like petrified surf, black breakers of stone, closed the southward view; to the east could be seen the gaping mouths of Big Brand Gorge and Glacier Gorge and the boiling mud pools of colourful mountains, belching white puffs of steam up into the clear sky. The north was only an evening-red distance, with a look of eternity.

The men settled down on the grassy bank — erected their tents, fed their horses, restored the half-crumbled walls of the sheep pen, ate cold food, and drank a lot of strong coffee. These were the Glacier Gorge Men under the command of Marteinn. In their hearts they looked down upon their companions, the Cave Dwellers, who worked the easier, grassier terrain. The Glacier Gorge Men looked upon themselves as a kind of elite corps, those sent to battle where the danger was the greatest. The boy silently praised his luck: to be allowed to be here and not there — to be a Glacier Gorge Man — and he solemnly pledged to be of good service to Marteinn. He dreamed heroic dreams: engaging in wild pursuits of superelusive sheep,

which he finally captured; running down and killing a fox on the glacier; saving a man's life, and becoming the best mountain man in the whole district, not even second to Óli Vallan.

"Dear God, make me as Óli Vallan!"

Finally, he thought a bit about the girl in the marshes and the lad by the lake and quickly fell asleep.

The overnight temperature dropped below freezing, and when the men got out of their tents in the morning the earth was white with hoarfrost. Marteinn cautioned them as he gave his instructions.

"You go up Sveinn's Gorge with Jón and Mángi," he told the boy, "and be careful; it's slippery."

They all crossed the creek together, a cement-gray stream in a rocky bed. After that, the group split up, some riding north into a brighter, better land, others sloshing over the flooded sandflats into the yawning gorges until they came to the ridge of ascension. Chalk-white fog filled the gorges halfway up, and when the boy, along with Jón and Mángi, had climbed the ridge, as thin as a knife's edge, they stopped for a moment, gazing in surprise down on the roof of clouds through which they had come and watching their own shadows float on the sea-like surface. The shadow of Jón's dog also floated there. There was a clear rainbow circle around the heads of the men's shadows but none around the dog's. Jón said that was because they had immortal souls while the dog did not. The boy believed it and told it to Marteinn that night in the tent. Marteinn asked to be shown the phenomenon, but the boy said it was impossible since the sun was down and dusk falling.

"Light a match!" ordered the mountain king, and all the mountain men laughed and joked about it. A lot of sheep had been found that day, their wool bluish from glacial clay,

their hoofs rather worn and blunt at the tips. None of the men had engaged in a major chase, but a good number of sheep had eluded them in Glacier Gorge and elsewhere. It would be tomorrow's chore to get hold of as many of those as possible, preferably all.

"You'd better have a try at it tomorrow," Marteinn told the boy. "They say you're light on your feet." The boy said nothing, but the blood rushed to his head, and he felt as if he had been knighted.

During the night the weather changed. They were awakened in the wee hours of the morning by the wind shaking the tents and heavy rain pounding noisily on the smoke-blue canvas. For a while they lay motionless, listening to the weather, wondering if the tent could withstand the strain. It couldn't. It was torn up all of a sudden, and one of the poles broke. There was nothing to do but move into the hut by the lava's edge. They carried all their gear there in the pouring rain, lit their kerosene stove, and waited, awake, for the dawn.

That day God fulfilled the boy's wishes: he was sent to search the upper middle part of Glacier Gorge, the part considered the worst and the most dangerous. Here, along with his grown-up companion, he came to grapple with the ovine nature in its most frenzied manifestation in the wilderness. There were seven of them together up by the edge of the glacier — wethers, ewes, and lambs, led by a dry ewe. The chase carried him wide and far about the cliff's slopes, now down to level ground, now up to the glacier, and with the fever of battle like a delirium in his breast, the boy kept thinking, "Rather die than give up!" He was never far behind the sheep. He was, in fact, so close that he could see how their gasping increased as the day wore on, until they could no longer

breathe through their nostrils but were panting like dogs. His companion had long ceased to follow and often stood for minutes on end in some bouldery furrow or some shelf of the cliffs, leaning forward upon his staff. All the others had returned down to the sandflats and stayed there guarding a small herd which they had collected. Finally they gave up waiting and set off out of the gorge, along with the fellow who had looked after their horses during the day.

It was still pouring rain. Sweat and rainwater had long since mixed in the boy's clothing, his body stained with greenish, bluegray, and red sulfur clay from head to foot. The day was drawing to an end, and the closer evening came, the more exhausted the seven sheep became. Their dashes became ever less vigorous, even though the chase never stopped. Besides, they were getting farther and farther out the gorge in the direction of the camp. The boy knew his companion was finished; he saw him stumbling on between rests, taking the shortest route, throwing himself on the ground every few steps, panting out his exhaustion awhile, rising again, and rambling on a few more steps.

"I've won," thought the boy, and in his triumph he felt as though a new, inexhaustible source of energy were released from under a heavy load somewhere inside him to grow with the speed of lightning up through the darkness in his legs and thighs all the way up to his breast, akin to fever. He kept on running without feeling how his sense of balance gradually waned so that he became unsteady on his feet; nor did he notice how his sense of feeling little by little gave way to numbness. He could now see the end of his road; it was only a stone's throw to the camp. The seven sheep were in a tight little group no more than a fathom ahead of him, reeling with

exhaustion; he and the animals now one, the herd and the herder, no more conflict between them, their goal but one: to arrive at a destination where nothing pressed upon them any more — a quiet hollow in lee from the weather.

The Glacier Gorge Men came out from the camp to greet them, Marteinn in the lead, bareheaded in the rain.

"Pretty tough of you to wear them out like that," he called out, laughing loudly, but the boy was unable to answer for the moment, only pointed behind him toward the mountains and spoke the name of his companion. Then he silently crawled into the hut and sat down on the floor, stretching his legs.

The weather was getting still worse, the wind increasing, and the rain turning into sleet. The boy in the hut and his three companions thanked God not to be bunked in a tent that night, and they pumped the kerosene stove, boiled themselves coffee, and put on dry woolen underwear in order to ward off the cold. Late that evening two other tents were torn up, and their inhabitants came scurrying up to the hut with their food chests, blankets, and sheepskins in their arms.

"The ground will be white by dawn," they said, shaking off the freezing sleet. Some of them had caught a chill, and there weren't too many dry clothes among them any more. Marteinn, the mountain king, said it was the worst weather he could remember having had during first search.

The following morning Marteinn was sick. When the boy rose from his lair after a fitful sleep, he saw Marteinn resting on his knees and elbows as if ecstatically worshipping some graven image. He had thrust his forehead down into the dirty floor and was swaying back and forth.

The boy waited awhile for an explanation of Marteinn's behaviour,

but the men were busy minding their own business; they said nothing. Finally the boy also got up and opened his food chest. He was no longer tired, but his appetite was still not the best. Nevertheless, he felt it was his duty to eat well, so he wouldn't lack energy for the day's wetsome toil.

Suddenly Marteinn raised his head and looked at the boy.

"You drive the sheep down with Jón today and do errands for him if need be," he said. "There's a goddamned sleet and probably a snowstorm higher up."

"Yes," said the boy. "Is something the matter with you?"

"Nothing more than I'm used to — damned gas pains in my chest," said the mountain king. He let his head sink again until his forehead touched the floor and continued to sway back and forth, the pain more than he could bear.

As the day dawned, the men packed their gear, tying it into bundles for the packhorses; they were breaking camp. The following night they would be by the Cave with the companions they had left Saturday; it was now Tuesday morning. They fetched their horses, which all night long had shivered in an open stone shelter, and saddled them. Marteinn had gotten up; he gave orders for the search as usual, sipped Hoffman's drops and camphor, jested with his men, and pretended to be all right, but his face was bluish-white like wet snow. They stared worriedly after him as he rode into the sleety storm accompanied by the stable boy. Then the pen was opened and the sheep driven off down the lava. It was a retreat.

This day the boy's path lay over the wet sandflats outside the mouth of Evil Gorge, around the snowy eastern slopes of Big Head, westward over the ridge below, and down to the grass-grown plains of the Kringla. He had

reached the domain of the Cave Dwellers, driving before him a herd from the eastern pastures. He was wet all through but not cold; he was happy. And perhaps he was most happy because the bad weather hadn't been able to make him unhappy, only wet.

It was still long before dark when he reached the Landman Cave. Few of the men had returned from the searches, but Ólafur was sitting in his tent, tending the stoves.

"Aren't you searching?" asked the boy. He looked astonished at this mountain man, dry and neatly dressed inside his tent.

No, Ólafur had been offered a different job, considerably better than chasing stupid sheep, a kind of office, really; he was a tent guard, charged with keeping hot coffee ready for the men when they returned, cold and tired, down from their mountain peaks. "Please have some!" He handed the boy a big mug brimful of black coffee.

The boy sat down, clasping the hot mug in both hands; he was a bit cold, and it was good to warm up.

"Have you had a good time in the mountains?" he asked.

Ólafur looked up from his kettles, red in the face with heat and oil fumes.

"Good time!" he exclaimed, shocked and surprised. "What kind of good time could you have on a trip like this — except getting back home? I've promised myself never to go on this kind of outing again."

The boy slurped the hot coffee, relishing its warmth. He was grateful to Ólafur for the refreshment but didn't bother talking to him any more. They didn't speak the same language.

That evening the weather subsided. They mended the broken posts and erected their tents. Under each canvas a kerosene stove was hissing, around it merry men eating fat meat and

drinking mug after mug of strong, hot coffee. Few of them had any dry clothes left; they were unshaven and dirty, and if they used obscenities and told dirty stories during the evening, yet their hearts were pure and their life without blemish. Never had the boy been more content with his lot. These men had become his friends and companions, he had searched the mountains with them and been loyal to his mountain king. They had fully accepted him into their ranks, looking upon him now as their equal, even considering him among the ablest. Never again would his father be accused of breaking the roundup rules by sending him for the search. Never.

Next day he combed the Valafell, and they spent the night in Dayride Gorge, the entire drove locked into a great pen nearby. Then came Thursday; by evening they would be down in Land Pens with their friends from home. The boy thought about his friends, the girl in the marshes and

the lad by the lake. Tonight he would be dancing together with them, telling them of his adventures in the wilderness, and holding his girl. Riding down from the mountains that day he saw the herd flowing over the sands, riders galloping over the flats with the drove like a white stream of lava before them. It was a grand sight. There was now a stiff breeze from the north with light clouds, and the shadows of the clouds and the patches of sunshine between them flowed quietly together south over the countryside as if they were an endless, supernatural herd of sheep heading toward civilization.

So the roundup ended; when the boy and his companions brought the sheep down from the foothills and out of the lava beds west of Hekla, the horsekeeper was waiting with their mounts by the ford of the river, so that they wouldn't have to walk any longer but could ride the last stretch down to the pens.

3.

It was still daylight when they brought in the drove and few people were around except the mountain men from the Holt pastures and a few fellows who were putting up the big refreshment tent for the night and making other preparations. And when the mountain men had erected their tents and eaten, the boy wandered down to the river to wash and comb his hair, so that he would be more presentable, come evening. He knew his friends would be there; the lad by the lake was supposed to leave from there for a second search in the morning, and the girl in the marshes was so fond of dancing that she was sure to come, too. He also knew that his father would be coming, and he couldn't wait to tell them all how he had seen the wilderness: first in sunshine, then in

rain, later in snow, and then once again in sunshine. He wanted to tell them about the flock of sheep he had chased in Glacier Gorge until they, just like he and his companion, were totally exhausted and how only his dreams of heroism made him persevere and finish his task, about Marteinn who continued supervising everything although he was deathly ill, about the Andanes man who knew everything except how to find his way in the sunshine, and about Ólafur who would rather pump the kerosene stoves from morning to night than search the mountains. He waited impatiently for the dusk, but dusk had not yet fallen when the first groups appeared on the western cliffs. He watched the people, dressed in their best clothes, ride down the passes and, veiled in the blue

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shadow of the cliffs, gallop over the hard plains below, their song blending with the hoofbeats; dashing and boisterous they finally gathered at one of the tents. And when the boy saw how well dressed these people were — white collars, silk ties, and foreign boots — it dawned on him that he was still the mountain man in a knit sweater and Icelandic cow-hide shoes, worn at the toes and twisted out of shape, with thongs around his heels and ankles. And somehow he felt that he was not of these people although they were there with him; even their laughter had an alien ring and their behavior a foreign look. It was as if he had just arrived on a first visit from a different country, where duty was enjoyment and enjoyment duty, and dress, laughter, and demeanour were unchanged from one day to another.

This feeling the boy had in the twilight became a sort of foreboding of what the night and the following morning were to bring him: the girl in the marshes danced with someone else all night long, and the boy saw her disappear out into the darkness accompanied by her new friend, never to lay eyes on her again except as a different person. And the lad by the lake — he drank himself unconscious by the pens, drifting off by dawn to heavy sleep under sacks and sheepskins, not to be awakened for the time being. The boy sat over him as he lay prostrate beside

his food chest and the rest of his luggage; after all, he was supposed to be going off to the wilderness for the mop-up. Both their fathers were sitting there, too, not knowing what to do; neither one of them had prepared himself for raising a man from the "dead."

"I'll go in his stead," the boy finally said. "You take my horses and luggage home, and I'll take his."

The men first looked at one another, then at the boy, and their protestations were weak and hesitant, amounting to acceptance. He didn't even listen, but began to tidy up his own chest so that people at home could see that he had been no less neat and careful with his food than Jón the farmhand used to be and had not spoiled whatever was left.

"Say hello to mama for me," he told his father. "She needn't worry about me. I know how this is now."

Shortly after, he was on his way, and when he reached the crest of the cliffs above the commons, where the men were busy sorting the sheep, the first group of people began riding homeward. He looked after them for awhile, feeling a momentary desire to join them on their easy way home. But only momentary; their way was not his. He was heading in another direction and a gustier one: back into the wilderness.

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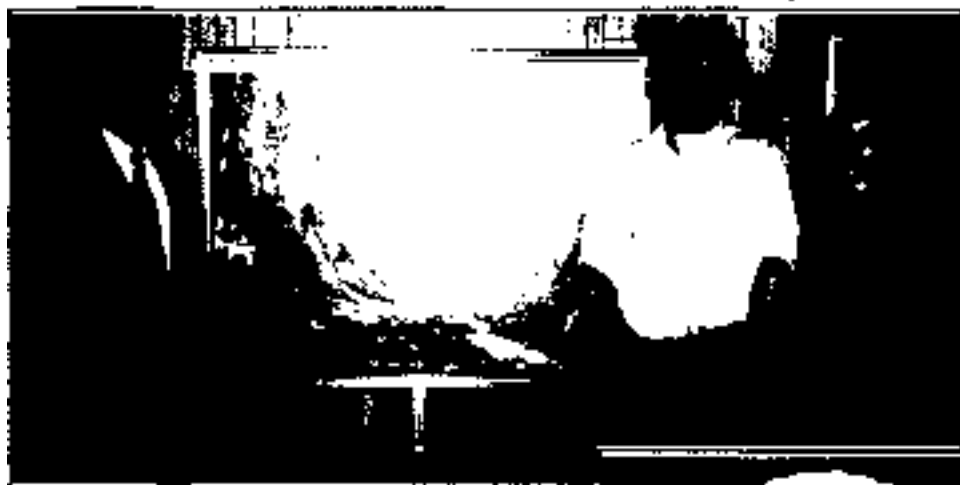
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The Icelandic Canadian Exhibitors Society:

Our First Year



By Steven Black



Above (L-R) Icelandic Consul General Birgir Brynjólfsson, Steven Black and Laura Pearson, arts patron.

Right: A sculpture by Lára Rosa Vöras

When culture is mentioned in association with Icelandic Canadians, the thoughts of most people turn to the literary aspect; yet there is another cultural aspect that is, I believe, equally prevalent, although somewhat less appreciated - namely, the visual arts. It was therefore with this in mind that in 1991, while enrolled in an Icelandic language course at the University of Manitoba, I initiated a search for artists of Icelandic descent.

I knew that throughout the Manitoba Interlake, many artists create artwork that is largely unknown to those living in larger



urban centres. However, the Scandinavian Cultural Centre in Winnipeg does not function as a space for continuous art shows, and the town of Gimli, while home to many fine artists, has no cultural centre dedicated to contemporary art. Thus, I thought it would be possible to form an association of visual artists of Icelandic descent who would put on their own art shows. Each new show would have its own theme or distinct character to better capture the public's imagination and interest. Also central to this plan would be venues for art exhibitions that would be cost free to our group. Too often, artists must pay in one way or another for the privilege of selling their work. Art galleries or agents can and do take as much as fifty per cent off the selling price of a work of visual art.

The Interlake Spectator, a weekly community newspaper published in Stonewall, Manitoba and distributed throughout the Interlake, was notified of the emergence of this new society, and artists were invited to become members. Notices were placed on the billboards at the University of Manitoba's campus telling of the new group, which had been named the Icelandic Canadian Exhibitors Society, or I.C.E.S. for short.

By February, there were nine members and we were ready to launch the Society's first exhibition. To an admittedly biased crowd at the Scandinavian Cultural Centre on Erin Street in Winnipeg, the first exhibition was unveiled and I was pleased to officially announce the birth of the Icelandic Canadian Exhibitors Society.

The second exhibition was held in the Archives and Special Collections Reading Room in the Elizabeth Dafoe Library at the University of Manitoba. This show was dubbed the First Annual Spring Show. The Reading Room is situated next door to the

Library's Icelandic Collection. This show was on during April and May of 1992. As a result of this exhibit, the Society gained greater recognition and attracted more members. The next show held during the month of August 1992 provided a larger venue, the Manitoba Provincial Archives Building on Vaughan Street in downtown Winnipeg.

On this occasion, we had the Icelandic Consul General, Birgir Brynjólfsson, give a short speech to open the show. The variety of the artwork had expanded to include sculpture by the late Harold Moore (our mandate includes promoting awareness of artists who are no longer with us). The reception which followed featured traditional Icelandic pastries provided by Society members Debbie Charlesworth and Norma Torbert.

In November 1992, the Icelandic Canadian Exhibitors Society returned to the University of Manitoba and the Quiet Room Gallery at St. John's College. Due to the limited space available in this room, members were each asked to submit only two works of art. The show was thus appropriately named "2 for the Show." A new professor in the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University, Viðar Hreinsson, provided the opening remarks. A blizzard that evening kept attendance to a minimum, but yet the Society benefited greatly from the event. A local television channel, 13 MTN, sent an entertainment reporter to cover the opening. Mabel Tinguely and I were interviewed, and the segment aired twice during the news that evening and the following evening. The segment also included close-up views of several of the paintings. The show was also the subject of an article that appeared in the local Icelandic weekly, *Lögberg-Heimskringla*. And, as a result of this article, we gained members

from other provinces.

Our final show in 1992 ran during the first half of December in the Pool of the Black Star, an area of the Provincial Legislature set aside for displays and art shows. The exhibition was understandably named "The Short Show."

Prior to the show that returned us to the Provincial Archives foyer for the month of April 1993, the Society met and elected an executive for the next year. As a result of the election, Debbie Charlesworth is our new media representative, Ella Clark is our secretary-treasurer, and I have been given the position of director for a one year term. We have begun working on a newsletter and a budget which will include seeking some external funding. We are a non-profit group that invites applications from all Canadian citizens of Icelandic descent at all levels of experience and in all areas of the visual arts. We attempt to vary the type of show we present, alternating between curated and members' shows. The show at the Provincial Archives was the Second Annual Spring Show and was a members' show that highlighted I.C.E.S. members' best works.

The society today has a membership of twenty-nine and is national in scope. Members include: Steven Black, Winnipeg, Mb.; Deb Charlesworth, Winnipeg, Mb.; Ella Clark, Winnipeg, Mb.; Thura Bjarnason (deceased),

formerly of Gimli, Mb.; Thomas Bjarnason, Port Hope, Ont.; Benjamin Magnus Bjornson, Winnipeg, Mb.; Donald Bjornson, Winnipeg, Mb.; Joanne Gullachsen, B.C.; Svala Dunn, Grand Centre, Alta.; Margaret Decosse, Alta.; Solborg Eamens, Winnipeg, Mb.; Karen Johnson, Winnipeg, Mb.; Craig Peter Koshyk, Winnipeg, Mb.; Darren Merinuk, Winnipeg, Mb.; Harold Moore (deceased), formerly of Arnes, Mb.; John Matthiasson, Winnipeg, Mb.; Don Martin, Gimli, Mb.; Lara Morris, Winnipeg, Mb.; Dan Thorkelson, Winnipeg, Mb.; Eleanor Nordal, Winnipeg, Mb.; Mabel Tinguely, Gimli, Mb.; Shirley Benidickson, Winnipeg, Mb.; Norma Torbert, Gimli, Mb.; Roberta Thomas, Winnipeg, Mb.; Dilla Sallows, Winnipeg, Mb.; Claire Stephenson, Marquette, Mb.; Pat Peacock, Alta.; and June and A.K. (Zeke) Valgardson, Gimli, Mb..

The evidence of any society's culture is found not only in the literary sources, but also in the visual arts that depict the way we live, the appearance of our country, and the emotions and sensibilities of the age in which we live. Icelandic Canadians come from a common heritage, and many of our perceptions flavour the style of art we create. While there is a great diversity in the artwork of the Icelandic Canadian Exhibitors Society, there is also a profound unity.

In The Red River Valley

by Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason

(continued from the summer 1993 issue)

Book II Chapter IX

The Story Told by the Indian

The Indians who live in the north by Hudson Bay are called Christinaux (Swampy Cree). They are related to the Algonquins and have always been thought to be very warlike and barbaric. Once, long ago, the Christinaux were ruled by a king called Kivatinn, or North Wind. He was big and strong, but very cold-hearted, and such a zealous hunter that men feared



Translated by
Thelma Guðrún Whale

he would destroy all the seals and reindeer. He lived beside a high waterfall near the sea into which he hurled all enemies who were unfortunate enough to fall into his hands alive. He had three sons who were tall and strong, but grim-looking and the most quarrelsome of men.

Growing up amongst the Christinaux at this time were three sisters of

the Cree tribe. They had been taken prisoners when they were very young, and were being brought up by a cousin of the king. The eldest of the sisters was called Blue Star and she was considered the most beautiful and kind of the women who were then with the Christinaux. But she was rather strange. She laughed with the waterfall, joined in the song of the night breezes,

and danced with the fireflies on summer evenings when the west wind whistled through the birch leaves or the south wind played the magic harp in the fir trees. "Hi! Ho! Such a pleasant dance — such a pleasant sun dance!" No one saw footsteps of the bride along the winter road better than she. No one understood the lullabies of the fairy women in the

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mountains as well as she. And only she heard the weeping willows cry. "Oh! Sorrow and tears! The water roses sickened and died. Oh! Oh!" And sometimes in the spring, when the birds came from the south and began to build their nests, she seemed to hear them calling: "Come! Oh, come!" Then she became silent, gazed around, hugged herself and sighed. She was filled with a kind of painful yearning. She longed to fly west — far, far away! Something there was willing her to come. She did not know what it was. The wind had no desire to whisper that to her. The clouds would not bring her a picture of it. The woman who appeared in her dreams was silent when she questioned her, and remained so. But Blue Star knew that the thrush called to his mate in the spring, the sweet-voiced, red-breasted plover sang his love song until his bride arrived, and the bluejay yearned for love while his sweetheart was on the way from the south. And this young maiden became fonder of feathers and multicoloured shells and soft deer skins than before. She hummed to herself as she wandered about the forest:

"Who will now sew me a sealskin fur?

And who will make me a birchbark boat?

Oh, someone sing to me of the contest!"

Then her heart became very full, and she felt as if someone was hiding in the thicket. Was it he? Who?

When the sisters were of marriageable age, Kivatinn was so impressed with them that he ordered his sons to marry them. Blue Star was to be the wife of his youngest son and his eldest son was to marry the youngest of the sisters. The sisters were disgusted by the king's sons. However, they did not dare to show their feelings.

"Is it fitting," said Blue Star, "that the hawk should have the ptarmigan for a wife?"

"That is not proper!" said King

Kivatinn. "But the hawk may well be happy to have a wife related to the eagle."

"My sisters and I are captives," said Blue Star.

"But still king's daughters," said Kivatinn, "and brought up with the Christinaux. Will you or will you not marry my sons?"

The sisters asked for time to think about it.

Kivatinn laughed.

"When has such been heard before?" he said. "Still, I will grant your wish. Now the leaves are dropping from the large birch tree which stands beside the waterfall. I shall wait for your answer until the leaves come out on its branches again."

Blue Star heard the breezes sigh. She saw frowning women with dishevelled hair sitting on the cumulus clouds in the northern sky. She shivered and felt cold fingers close around her heart.

Autumn passed. Winter arrived in a white fur coat, stepped heavily to earth, muttered in a hoar-frosted beard, spreading gloom. The northern storm raged, screaming over land and sea, bearing in its arms snow, frost and death. The fir trees wailed. And the wolves hid themselves. It grew colder and colder and still colder until a thick icepack had formed over the whole of the great bay and the broad channel to the northeast. At night, the northern lights spread themselves over half the sky. They were never still but drew together and apart, pulsed to and fro, branched in every direction and took on strange shapes. Near the horizon, headless men were seen. They battled unceasingly with clubs and axes, split each other from end to end and then crawled together again. But the hideous phantom, most feared by all men — pale as death, without a nose, with a toothless jaw and empty eye sockets — reached out its arms and stretched its

withered, crippled fingers to snare the red man. Ah! That was the phantom of starvation!

One morning during the winter, it so happened that three strangers stood outside King Kivatinn's tent. They were white-skinned and fair-haired. They came from the northeast. They had walked over the ice which covered all the great bay and the wide channel. People guessed that they came from Blueberryland which is now called Greenland. The Christinaux knew that white men had lived there for a long time for their neighbors, the Inuit, had often told them about the tall white men who had taken Blueberryland from them.

These three white guests were very tall men but they were very thin and almost dead of hunger and exhaustion. Their outer clothing was of deerskin, but underneath they wore clothing of strange and unknown texture, which the Indians had never before seen. For weapons each man carried a very long rod with a metal tip and a long knife hung at his belt. One of the men was wearing around his neck a band from which hung a small cross made of whalebone. He seemed to be the leader. He talked long and often to the others, receiving no answer, and sang strangely, loud and long. And from time to time he raised his arms, at the same time gazing at length up to heaven. Then his companions knelt and bowed their heads to the earth. And strange as it may seem, these curious gestures and behaviors saved their lives for the time being. For Kivatinn, of all men, was filled with curiosity, and his curiosity always overcame his greed and cruelty. He wanted to find out, by any means, how things stood with these men, where they came from and what business they had in his kingdom. The Christinaux did not understand what the white men said, nor did the white men seem to understand even one word

of the Christinaux language.

"Let them dance the death dance," said the king's youngest son, "to give us a little entertainment. Men will forget hunger and cold in the meantime."

"First I must find out," said Kivatinn, "where the men are from and why they act so queerly, as if they were sorcerers or witch doctors. I have decided to let them live and teach them to talk in our tongue. And while they are learning the language, I want them free to walk unhindered among the people, to get to know everyone, to talk with all and live in whatever tents they please. They may be in this wigwam today, in another tomorrow, just as they wish. No one may frighten them as long as they do not frighten others. But when they have learned the language so well that they can tell me what I want to know, then perhaps they will have to dance the death dance, if we do not agree."

With this he had the white men given reindeer meat to eat, even though provisions were low. And that night he gave them each two large bearskins for bedding.

The white men were comfortable. They mingled with the people and no one annoyed them. They soon began to regain their strength and gain weight. The man with the band and the whalebone cross was amazingly quick to learn the Christinaux tongue. Everyone thought him of most importance. Blue Star often stared at him when she thought he did not notice.

The winter passed. Spring came, smiling with rosy cheeks, wearing a green mantle. It hummed to itself when it came, but it came late. It awakened the flowers from the long winter sleep and warmed the blood of the frog. "I am never cold," said the frog. But still his blood froze every winter. Spring spread a glistening carpet over the ground and clad the forest in green robes. The aspens trembled with happiness, and

the willow wept with gladness because the blessed sun was so good to them. All the trees in the woods stretched out their arms to spring — all but one. The birch tree beside the falls stood sad and silent. It wore no finery. No leaves appeared on its branches, not even a little bud. The birch by the waterfall had frozen during the winter.

"Now the forest has put forth its leaves," said Kivatinn to Blue Star, "and now I want an answer from you sisters."

"The birch by the falls has not yet come out in buds," said Blue Star.

"It will not have leaves all summer," said Kivatinn.

"Then we sisters will wait with our answer until next spring," said Blue Star.

Kivatinn became heavy of brow. He sent for the white men and asked the people to meet at the waterfall.

"Now you can speak in our tongue," he said to the white man with the rosary.

"I understand but can talk only a little," said the white man.

"Tell me from whence you came," said King Kivatinn.

"From the land you call the great Blueberryland."

"Why did you come here?"

"We were fleeing from three enemies.

"Who were they?"

"Hunger, plague and the Inuit."

"Why did not more white men come with you?"

"We were the only white men still in the great Blueberryland. All the rest were dead."

"What is the meaning of the band which you wear around your neck and



the strange bone you carry on your breast."

"I wear it in remembrance of the god I worship," said the white man, looking up to heaven. "It is now better than thirteen hundred and fifty years since he was on this earth."

"Where is he now?"

"In heaven."

"My god is called the great Manitou," said Kivatinn. "He lives here in the waterfall.

The wind and the sea act as his interpreters. And the thunder is his trumpet when he is angry."

"But the god whom I worship is the only true god," said the white man with the rosary in very broken Christinaux language.

"Forget that altogether," said Kivatinn, waving a large feather he was holding. "Instead, tell me if you are going to stay or go."

"We would like to stay here," said the white man.

"Then you shall choose yourselves wives and yourselves wigwams," said Kivatinn.

"I want no woman," said the man with the rosary. "I want to serve my god, but my companions want to wed."

"Point to the unmarried women they wish to wed," said Kivatinn.

The two white men pointed to Blue Star's two sisters.

"If you want to wed these white men," said the king, looking toward the sisters, "then come forward and stand beside them."

Both younger sisters now stepped out from the crowd, for they loved the white men, and stood beside them.

"And you, Blue Star, will you have the white man with the rosary if he points to you?" said the king.

"He does not want a wife," said Blue Star.

"But if he wanted a wife and pointed to you, would you want to be his wife?"

Blue Star remained silent. She understood where Kivatinn was going. She knew what he was looking for. She knew he wanted her to say aloud, in front of all the people, that she would rather marry a white man than the youngest son and darling of the king. She despised the king's son, but she found that she loved the white man with the rosary. She had loved him at first sight. She would gladly have died with him, — would die for him. Still, he did not return her love. That was the most painful of all. Was she so disgusting to his eyes? The forest grew black and there was the smell of death in the grass where she stood.

"Now we shall make the white guests dance the death dance," cried Kivatinn in a shrill voice.

The king's sons uttered a war cry. The three sisters lifted their arms. The people were silent.

The white men danced the death dance for a good part of the day. No one would want that dance to be described. No one dances that dance twice. The white men never complained that they thought this a wearisome game. From them came neither coughs nor groans. But as the day was ending, Kivatinn called to his sons:

"These white men," said he, "must now be sore-footed and out of breath, and I see that they are very thirsty. It would be best to stop this game and let them slake their thirst in the waterfall."

A few moments later, the three white men, their hands bound behind their backs, were cast from the high cliff beside the falls. "Death!" said the falls.

But when the sun was setting behind the forest, the three sisters walked out onto the cliff by the waterfall.

"Listen to my words, Christinaux,"

said Blue Star, her hair in disarray. "I hear a voice in the wind and I see pictures in the sky over there. The voice calls for revenge for the evil deed which was done here today, and the pictures show what is yet to come in future ages. The lynx cannot gaze directly at the moon because it is ashamed of the brutality of men and the wolf weeps for man's cruelty towards man. — Listen! — Do you not hear howling in the air? They are the avenging Furies. They come from the north and east. They are echoing curses. They say the sun is angry, the moon is angry, and the stars are angry. They say the spirits of the departed are downcast and tormented, because even the night has never seen anything worse than the foul deed committed by the Christinaux. Ah! Now one of the Destinies calls! She is the one who orders the destinies of nations. She shows the future. She shows the events of the future in pictures which she paints in the heavens. Look at the clouds! — White races will come in floating houses over the sea. They will conquer this land. Then what will become of the red man? What can he hope for? King Kivatinn, how can you atone for the evil you allowed to be committed here today? Those white men were your guests. Remember that. They had fled to your mercy. You had spared their lives. Hear now the judgment of the Furies: **A curse will rest upon you and all your kindred until three of your descendants, three valiant men, have suffered death because of three white maidens.** Then, and not before, the curse which strides towards you and all your kindred from this day on will be at an end. My sisters have suffered a monstrous injustice because their lovers were taken from them. We are going with them into the land of the sunset. We hear the white men calling. I will say no more."

The three sisters threw themselves

into the falls together. Three heads surfaced in the pool beneath. The faces were white. Were they the faces of the white men? Or had the sisters become white-skinned? Who knew? "Death!" said the waterfall. The leafless birch tree trembled. It was dying!



Blue Star's words were prophetic. King Kivatinn experienced adversity and his descendants suffered many misfortunes, man after man. But most of them were promising people, the women beautiful and the men strong and wise.

Two hundred and fifty years went by.

White men had settled on the banks of the St. Lawrence River. They had built themselves a strong fort out of tree trunks and rock and possessed powder and lead. The Indians found them unpopular guests and attacked the fort one dark night. It was in the spring, when the mosquito stings the most severely and the frog makes the most noise and the night owls call to each other. It seemed a suitable time to charge one's enemy under cover of night. Among the Indians was a Christinaux who was a direct descendant of King Kivatinn. He was a strong young man who did not know fear. No one hated the white men more than he. He looked upon them as his enemies. "I feel it in my bones!" he said, shrugging his shoulders and clenching his jaw. He had often dreamed about the head gear of the white men and hoped to see them dance the dance of death by the fire. The Indians' attack on the fort was sudden and fierce. Their weapons were bows and arrows and axes. They came like the wolf and the hawk. But they fell in large numbers before the white men's guns.

Finally the leader of the Indians said, "The fort will not be won unless someone can climb up the wall. Who trusts himself to climb up?"

"I can do it," said the Christinaux.

He crawled like a snake along the wet ground and emerged unhurt at one corner of the fortification. He easily climbed up the wall like a spider. He lifted his head and shoulders up over the highest log. A shot rang out. A bullet pierced the heart of the Christinaux. He fell from the wall and died instantly. The face of a white girl peered out from the fort momentarily. She had been the slayer of the reckless Indian brave. "Blood for blood and tooth for a tooth," said the other whites.

And now was paid one third of the debt owed by the descendants of King Kivatinn.



Two hundred years passed. Other white men had reached the Great Lakes to the West and settled there. On the northern shore of Lake Huron were the hunting grounds of the powerful Ojibway Indians, and the home of the Hurons was somewhat to the south, — around Georgian Bay. — At about this time a young man of the Christinaux tribe, a descendant of King Kivatinn, was with the Ojibway. He was a big, courageous man and an expert hunter, as were most of that race. But he often heard strange music in the woods. Sometimes, in the quiet of the night, he seemed to hear the stars singing. And he found his own heart joining in with the stars. His heart wanted always to sing. The forest music developed words and the songs of the stars became long poems. And his heart learned all the words, all the poems, and it sang day and night — long and enchanting verses about the exploits of famous forefathers, about the maple, the oak and the ash tree, about the birds and the flowers, about spring and the west wind and the sun. It sang about youth continuously. "Oh, it is wonderful to be alive!" Near the Ojibway was a small fort occupied by white men. The Ojibway were their friends and sold them furs. The leader of the white men

had a daughter who was exceedingly beautiful. She was gentle and courteous as well. All who knew her loved her. When the Christinaux saw her he was immediately enchanted by her comeliness. He frequently went to the fort and sold his furs to the leader. Once he caught a silver fox. He knew that the fur of a silver fox was costly and thought to be very special. He gave this rare fox skin to the daughter of the white leader. She thanked him for the gift with many fine words and smiled graciously, turning loving eyes toward him. He did not misunderstand her words. He did not misunderstand her gentle smile, but he misunderstood her loving look. A vague, unrecognizable longing arose in his breast all of a sudden. He wanted to enter the fort as often as possible. He liked the ways of the white man more and more. And the white maiden was in his eyes brighter and more precious than the sun. There was nothing more pleasurable than to see her smile and to meet her bewitching glance. The ground she walked on was sacred to him. And even her shadow was for him like a life-giving ray. It refreshed his soul to catch a glimpse of her shadow in the distance. His heart continued singing day and night, but its tune had changed and it struck a different chord. Now it sang of womanly beauty and everlasting love. "Oh, when was the rose so red and sweet, so red and sweet in the forest!" The Christinaux brought many soft and costly furs and gave them to the young, beloved white maiden. He felt her smile becoming always warmer and more affectionate and her glance saying more and more. And finally, he thought her look said: "I love you red man, I love you, — love you!" He had to let her know that he loved her as much as she loved him, perhaps even more. He had to have the courage to tell her that. He knew that women loved brave men. He knew that

shy and fainthearted men are detestable in the eyes of Indian women. Were the hearts of white women not similar? He walked fearlessly to the young white girl, whom he loved, and laid at her feet many skins. She still thanked him with many beautiful words, still smiled affectionately at him and still turned her warm glance towards him. "I love you!" said the young Indian, reaching out his arms. But that was his undoing. The white maid recoiled from him. "How dare you?" she said, stamping her feet on the floor and raising her arms. "Do you dare to offend me?" she shouted, her face scarlet with passion, and ran away from him and his animal skins. The young lovesick Christinaux no longer misunderstood her glances. He knew what consequences this could have for him. White men would hate him till death. The girl's father would conspire against his life. He had to flee! And he fled far away, — far away, far from all white men and the friends of white men. But his heart kept on singing, — singing steadily. And some faint, sad voice, somewhere in the innermost depths of his soul, joined the heart. But the heart had nevertheless changed its song again, struck a strange chord, and sang of sorrow and sadness, of darkness and night and death. "Oh, buttercup, how heavy is my sorrow!" — He walked in the forest for a long time. He walked on the high cliffs beside the upper lake. The moon shone through the clouds. The storm whistled and roared. The water boiled and bubbled. White phantoms danced a round dance on the crests of the waves. They nodded their heads. "Do you want to join us?" said the white phantoms. Of course, he wanted to join them. He ran forward on to the nearest precipice, shouted his war-cry, loud and clear, and cast himself from the rock. — There was a sad sighing in the larch trees, and the elm trees on the bank

shuddered. — And now was paid two-thirds of the heavy debt owed by the descendants of Kivatinn.



Again, many years passed, seventy-six or more. White men had now come all the way to the Red River Valley. Many of them had settled beside the great Lake Winnipeg. But just when they were newly settled by the lake, the noxious smallpox came to them. It was winter. Cracks in the ice spoke of imminent death and groans of death were heard in the frozen forest. A white man lived beside the Berens River with his wife and daughter. Smallpox entered their home in the middle of winter. First the man became ill. He died in a few days. The woman sickened next. She also died after a few days. Then the girl became ill. She was sixteen or seventeen years old. Now there was no white person near to nurse her. A few Indians were living in their wigwams nearby. Among them was a Christinaux of King Kivatinn's line. He was a middle-aged man. He was not a big man, nor was he warlike or a great hunter, and he never heard voices in the wind. He had none of the attributes of his race, except courage. He had been accustomed to poverty since early childhood. He had learned to suffer and endure. The Indians at Berens River were sorry for the orphaned girl who lay mortally ill, alone and helpless. But they were afraid of

the disease. The bodies of the white couple were not yet buried. The Indian chief was silent, grasped his chin and began to think. What should be done? "Who will volunteer to bury the bodies and nurse the white girl?" said the chief after a long silence, wrapping his thick wool blanket around him. There was a long silence. At last the Christinaux came forward. "I will do it. I will bury the bodies. I will nurse the white girl. I will not be afraid to do this work of mercy." A long sigh of relief escaped from the breasts of all who heard his words. "There is royal blood in your veins," said the chief. The Christinaux went to work. He buried the bodies. He stopped moving among the Indians. He nursed the sick girl like a father. Slowly, the girl began to get better. But then the Christinaux became ill. As the girl's health improved, his declined. "I see three young women," he said one evening at twilight. "They stand outside the window and look up to heaven." "They are just three little fir trees in the garden," said the girl. The white girl survived but the red man died. He had given his life for her. Few knew about it and no one sang about it. The ground turned green in the spring but faded every autumn. And the earth rolled on in space as before, just as if no red man had ever died for a white girl.

But the great debt owed by the descendants of the cruel Kivatinn was now paid in full.

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Poet's Corner

In Memory of Amma

by Jay Anthony Willis

There,
Somewhere above the glorious wheatfields
When the morning sun catches the dew
Anointing the new generation of seed
Whose golden crowned heads are slightly bowed
Under the weight of promise.

There,
Carried along by a gentle breeze
Above the wheatfields' whisper and applause
Rising with the song sparrows' trill and
Falling with each liquid note
Of the meadowlark's reply,

I see her spirit.

There,
Before my longing gaze she stands
Arms akimbo, proud in the beauty of her youth:
No furrow creases her brow,
No smile touches her lips,
So strong in arm, hip and leg she looks
A shimmering icon in farmgirl's dress.

And now,
With loving eyes I look upon her face
Hoping for recognition, but none can be found.
Cruelly, her eyes are fixed upon some further point
That I cannot hope to see:
What is my hope?
What is my promise?
Am I just a blind and helpless seed?

As if in answer
She turns her face to the east
Toward Betel
Toward home

And my grief comes home to me



Guttormur J. Guttormsson



Heather Alda Ireland

REVIEWS

AURORA

English translations of
Icelandic Poems
by Guttormur J. Guttormsson

Selected and edited by
Heather Alda Ireland

Vancouver, B.C., 1993, pp. 159

Reviewed by Roy St. George Stubbs

Speaking for himself, in one of his novels, *Woodstock*, Sir Walter Scott, gave these words to one of his main characters, Sir Henry Lee, head ranger of Woodstock: "Repeat me these verses again slowly and deliberately, for I always love to hear poetry twice — the first time for the sound and the latter time for sense."

This is the way Icelandic poetry, even in translation should be read, twice, first for sound and secondly for sense. This simple rule does not hold true, of course, if one encounters an extraordinary poem, such as Guttormsson's

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"For all who love literature,
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— Emil Bjarnason

"Sandy Bar," when two readings will not begin to suffice. Watson Kirkconnell, who by his own exertions must be permitted to speak, calls "Sandy Bar" Guttormsson's 'finest single poem'. Kirkconnell is the author of *The North American Book of Icelandic Verse*, *Canadian Overtones*, *A Skald in Canada*, *A Slice of Canada*, and a small library of books on diverse subjects. If I may be permitted a personal note: I have read "Sandy Bar", in five English translations, at least fifty times and its hidden meanings still escape me. It is a poem about a pioneer graveyard on the shores of Lake Winnipeg, but there is much more about it than that. As I suggest, it has hidden meanings, which Haraldur Bessason takes a good stab at explaining, in the introduction to this book.

The book contains the translation into English of forty-four of Guttormsson's Icelandic poems. Ten translators have had a hand in the making of the book with the lion's share of the translating having been done by Paul Sigurdson, who is a true poet in his own right. However, in my view, the translator who displays the purest poetic vein is Jakobina Johnson. Witness her translation of the first of the four stanzas of a poem which she titles "Good Night":

*Stillness reigns— The winds are
sleeping.*

*All our world is bent on keeping
tryst with night, whose wings are
sweeping*

from the west each ray of light.

*Dusk, a soft and silken cover
over all is seen to hover*

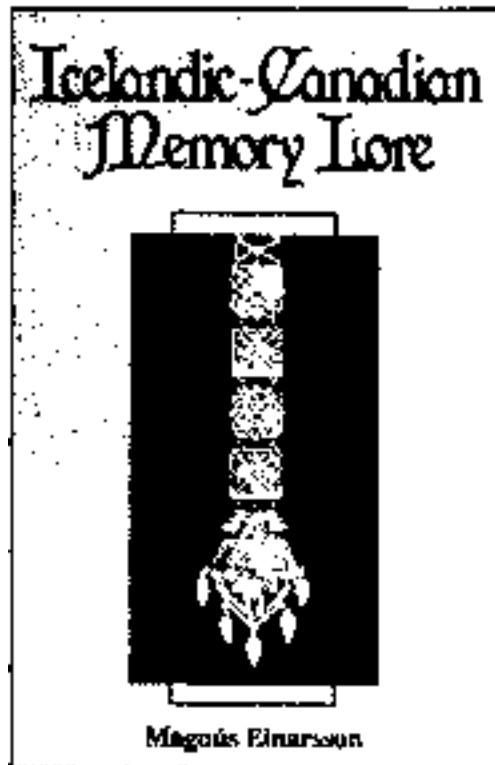


*in its readiness to cover
all the dreary world. —Good night.
Earth, a restful bed inviting
all her tired to sleep. Good night.*

The book contains only two of Johnson's translations, and both were originally published in her book *Northern Lights*, an early effort at translating Icelandic poems into English.

The poet's granddaughter, Heather Ireland, has published *Aurora* in the hope that she may introduce Icelandic poets to those of us whose brain cells are locked up in a single language. This is a most worthy purpose, but let us admit, the signs are not prosperous. Canada is not Iceland, where more volumes of poetry are published every year per capita than in any other country in the world. One cannot discount the stern resistance that the average English

Icelandic-Canadian Memory Lore



by **Magnús Einarsson**

Canadian Centre for Folk Culture
Studies, Mercury Series Paper No. 64.
Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of
Civilization, 1992. Pp. 360.

Reviewed by Kirsten Wolf

Icelandic-Canadian Memory Lore is a continuation of Magnús Einarsson's *Icelandic-Canadian Oral Narrative* published in 1991, and contains a selection of traditional Icelandic poetry and proverbs collected in the late 1960's in the Icelandic communities of western Canada and in North Dakota and Washington.

Included in the volume are a total of 332 examples of poetry and other bound language ranging from children's rhymes, rigmaroles, riddles, lullabies, and prayer verses to adult lore such as dance and drinking

songs, religious and humorous poems, and proverbs and sayings; hence the title "memory lore" as opposed to the more limited "nursery lore."

Over half (23) of Einarsson's 40 informants are from the New Iceland region of Manitoba. Three others reside in Winnipeg and southern Manitoba, and one is from Lúndar. The remaining informants are from the Lake Settlements of Saskatchewan and Vancouver, with the exception of two living in Blaine, Washington, and three in Pembina County in North Dakota. The gender-spread is fairly

(and surprisingly) even: 23 are women and 17 are men. As Einarsson comments: "I expected for no very good reason, that there would be a much higher percentage of women informants. Specifically, I did not expect to find any men reciting rigmaroles. This is, generally speaking, a woman's genre but obviously not exclusively so. On the other hand, I had not expected to find women reciting or singing drinking songs, but this, in fact, turned out to be less uncommon than men reciting rigmaroles" (p. 12). Most of the informants have contributed 10 or fewer items. Gunnlaugur Holm of Vancouver, British Columbia, however, recorded 144 items (primarily proverbs) and Valdimar Johnson of Riverton, Manitoba, 56 items. Einarsson notes that both of these informants differ from many of the others in that they made a special effort to collect rhymes, riddles, and proverbs. Other rich sources of material were Sigríður Björnsson, Sigurveig Sveinsson, and Jóhanna Thorkelsson, all of Manitoba.

After a brief introduction (pp. 9-13) and a guide to the transcription symbols (p. 15), the recordings are presented according to the following classification: Rhymes about Familiar Animals and Pets, Rigmaroles, Nonsense Rhymes, Riddles, Game Verses, Rhymes about Grýla and

Other Scary Figures, Lullabies and Soothers, Prayer Verses, Drinking Songs, Dances and Reels, Humour and Satire, Narrative Poems, Mock Narratives, and Proverbs and Sayings. For each item, the informant's name is given, and each transcription is followed by an English translation, which is, on the whole, fairly accurate and perceptive. As Einarsson notes: "I tried where I could to translate line by line rather than verse by verse, and I tried to have each line retain its original word order. I tried, likewise, since I see this as documentary resource material, to avoid being overly artistic" (p. 13). The book concludes with music transcriptions by Carmelle Bégin (pp. 297-316), useful notes providing biographical information on the informants, when and where their contributions were recorded, explanations to words and names, as well as references to comparative published and unpublished materials (pp. 317-350), a brief index to tale types (pp. 351-353), a list of informants and their contributions (pp. 355-358), and a map of western and mid-western Canada with indication of the places mentioned in this collection (p. 359).

Icelandic-Canadian Memory Lore is an unpretentious book: Einarsson allows the texts to speak their own stories and reveal their own pleasures. As such, the collection stands as a valuable, unfiltered record of performance narrative, oral art, and memorial lore. The book will undoubtedly lead to the study of these proverbs and poems within the larger context of Icelandic lore as an avenue toward assessing the surviving corpus of these Icelandic-Canadian informants and how they preserve, advance, or alter the traditions they carried with them from abroad or inherited from first-generation Icelandic-Canadians.

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PROFILE: Rhian



By Phyllis
Webster

*"I drew
a purple
Triceratops
today."*

According to Rhian Brynjolson drawing is a perfect antidote for stress and a wonderful way to brighten the day. Brynjolson, an illustrator of children's books, is a person who remembers the joys, problems, and wonder of childhood. Turning the pages of *Jen and the Great One*, *The Yesterday Stone*, and *Nanabosho Dances* takes the reader on a wonderful journey into the world of childhood where trees can talk, where children can rescue forests from those who would destroy them, where rubbing a stone can evoke worlds of the imagination, and where grandparents share their knowledge of the world and of the spirit with children.

Brynjolson's maternal grandfather, who in order to get a teaching job in Saskatchewan in the 1930s, had shortened his name to Jolson, gave Brynjolson a box of acrylic paints when she was a teenager. She was privileged to sit beside him as he drew and painted. This gift of paints and time, along with her Welsh maternal

grandmother's love of literature, especially of poetry, and her uncles and aunts who told stories of their exploits as children, and her tendency to be a voracious reader, fostered a love of telling stories and drawing pictures in which children were the heroes. Steve Repas, at Argyle school, and Larry Jamieson, an instructor at Symposium School, were very encouraging about her art work. But art, until much later, remained a pleasurable avocation. During studies toward her Economics degree at the University of Winnipeg, she worked as a community worker on West Broadway. It was a time of great personal growth, as she watched babies drinking Coca-Cola instead of milk from their bottles, and small children wandering unattended at 10 o'clock at night. Painting pictures of the children "became a way to understand what was happening."

After a brief stint doing economic research for Legal Aid, she began working at Mary Mound School where she taught art. Realising that she

knew very little about art programming, she enrolled in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Manitoba where she majored in print making. The degree was interrupted by the arrival of her family.

Becoming a children's book illustrator, after short careers in the world of research and teaching, was, it seems, partly serendipitous and partly because she lived close to the Manitoba Métis Federation on McGregor. One day, after two years of gathering her courage, she took a portfolio of drawings of Métis and aboriginal children to Pemmican Press, associated with the Métis Federation. Virginia Maracl, the editor, just happened to need an illustrator for *Jen and the Great One*. In two and a half months, Brynjolson had completed the drawings of Peter Eyvindson's delightful text about Jen who loved "to hug the old tree she called the Great One." All the illustrations for the Pemmican books are done on large pieces of paper which are later laser scanned and digitally reduced to the correct size for the specific book.

Interestingly, authors and illustrators normally do not consult with each other. Peter Eyvindson, also of Icelandic background, and Brynjolson have since completed *The Yesterday Stone*. Each had decided that one child should be native, and her friend, non-native. They later discovered that they had "been on the same wavelength." They are now collaborating on a new book, *The Missing Sun Business*, which will be published this fall. On one of the tables in the Brynjolson's studio are pictures of "Emily", a little girl whom Eyvindson had met in Inuvik. The story is about a fictional Emily, but the real Emily is the model for the illustrations.

The *Nanoboscho Dances* written by Joe McLellan, presented some "interesting problems" for the artist in that she felt it was a little presumptuous to interpret the stories of a culture different from her own. However, after visiting schools in the north as part of the Artists in the Schools Program, speaking with the elders, doing historical research with the help of Katherine Pettipas at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, and speaking with hoop-dancer, George Bear, of Winnipeg, she felt that her drawings were accurate and respectful of the traditions of the people in the story. The illustrations are set in borders which are based on traditional beadwork, quillwork, weaving, embroidery, ribbonwork, and scraped birchbark patterns found in the Ojibwa culture. A first time reader of this delightful book cannot help but go back to study the pictures and their borders very carefully.

Brynjolson, in addition to mothering Ian, aged four (who loves the fish in his aquarium), and Nonie, aged 7 (a budding artist), and illustrating children's books, enjoys spending time in Manitoba schools. She has travelled as far as Berens River, Wanipigow, Matheson Island and Swan River where she enjoys reading the books she has illustrated and teaching the children to use their own imaginations to express their experience of the world. She also teaches in the Winnipeg Art Gallery Studio Program where she will be teaching children's classes this winter.

Brynjolson has also worked on two sequences for the Canadian *Sesame Street*. She has drawn 30 illustrations for each of the sequences and has enjoyed working with an art director, while at the same time enjoying artistic freedom.

The small studio which doubles as



Above:
Noni (right) helping
Ian type names of
dinosaurs.

Right inset:
H.T.B. Jolson,
Rhian's grandfather.

Right:
Rhian Brynjolson
Photo by
Jeff DeBooy,
Winnipeg Free
Press



the master bedroom, means that Dale Klassen, her husband "sleeps in my office" chuckles Brynjolson. Looking at the illustrations pinned on the wall and the work in progress on the sloped drawing table, one cannot help but wonder when Brynjolson, with her sensitivity to the world of children will become both the author and the illustrator of her own book. An uncle, obviously a consummate story teller, used to tell

the gathered children about a giant named Ernie who lived in the ceiling. The uncle suggested that the children throw eggs up to the giant. One wonders if this story, embroidered and reinterpreted, will not one day provide lovers of stories and pictures with many hours of pleasure.

In the meantime, next time I feel tense, I am going to draw an orange triceratops and then I'm going to go outside and hug a tree!

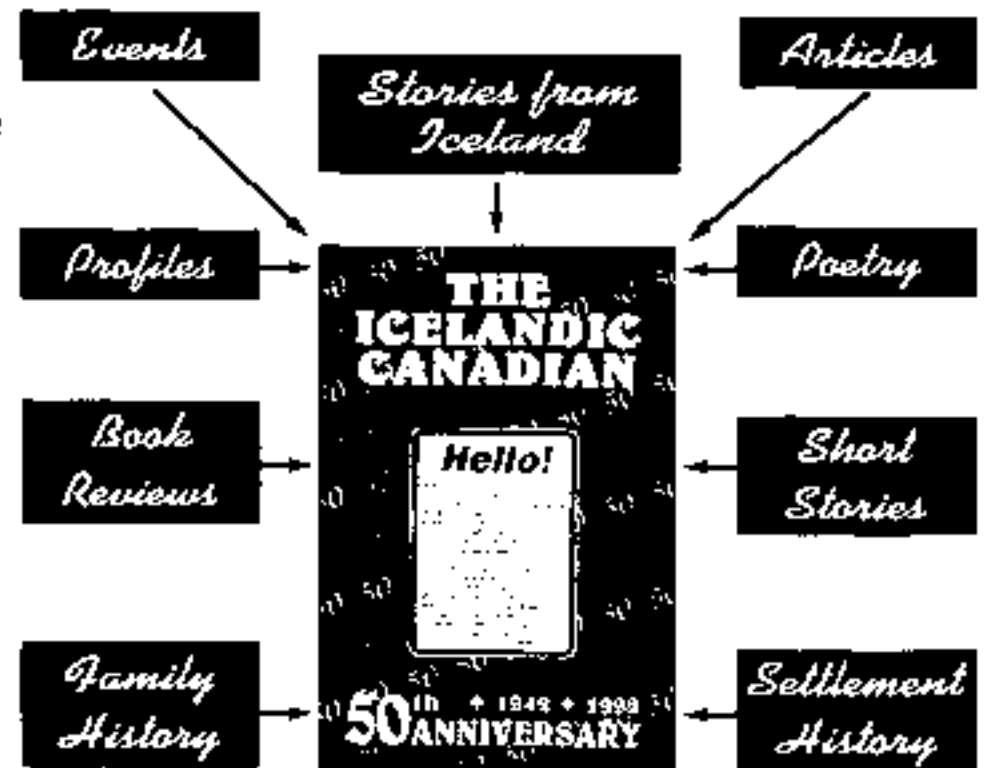


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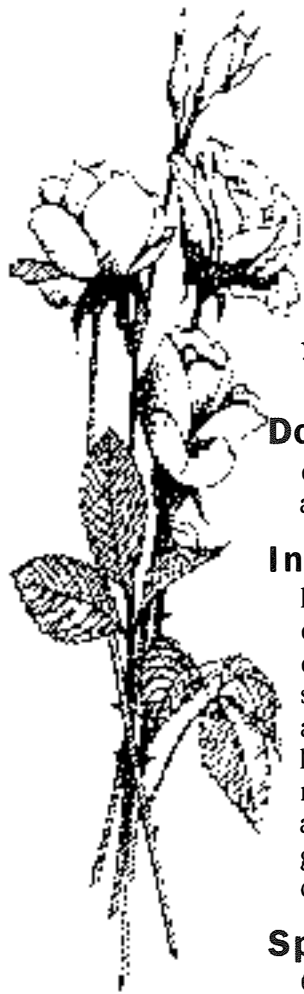
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Matthiasson, John S. "Adaptation to an Ethnic Structure: The Urban Icelandic-Canadians of Winnipeg." In *The Anthropology of Iceland*, ed. Paul Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989, pp. 157-175.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Steven Black, Director of the Icelandic Canadian Exhibitors Society, is a Winnipeg art teacher specializing in portraits. He is the son of Regina Halldorson Black and the grandson of Jon and Lilja (Moller) Halldorson who emigrated from Reykjavik, Iceland to Selkirk, Manitoba and finally settled in Winnipeg.

Hallberg Hallmundsson is a New York based writer and translator. He has several books of poetry to his credit and his work frequently appears in the quarterly journal, *Iceland Review*.

Kristiana Magnusson is the British Columbia editor of *The Icelandic Canadian*. Formerly from the Arborg-Riverton area of Manitoba, she now lives in White Rock, B.C. She is an author and poet and a frequent contributor to the magazine.

Kristine Perlmutter is acting managing editor of *The Icelandic Canadian*. She is employed as a resource teacher in Winnipeg and has been very active in the Icelandic community. Her parents are Borja Jacobson of Winnipeg and the late Dr. Bjarni Jacobson.

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