

# ICELANDIC CONNECTION



ISSN #1920-423X

Vol. 66 #2 (2014)



## **Icelandic Camp 2014 Íslenskar Sumarbúðir**

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# ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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# ICELANDIC CONNECTION



North America's quarterly magazine in celebration of the Icelandic Heritage  
published by Canadian Icelandic Heritage, Inc., Winnipeg, Canada

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## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

**CANADIAN** \$40 CAD yearly, \$80 two years U.S. & INTERNATIONAL \$46 USD yearly  
**E–JOURNAL** \$30 CAD /\$30 USD  
**SINGLE COPIES** \$10 CAD plus postage  
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*The views expressed in all contributions which appear in the Icelandic Connection are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the publisher or editorial committee.*

**Printed in Winnipeg, Canada by Dycom Direct Mail and Lögberg–Heimskringla**

**ISSN: 1920–423X**

# ON THE COVER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RAY SIMUNDSON

Kaillie Humphries holds her gold medals from the Vancouver 2010 and the Sochi 2014 Olympic games. Kaillie and her partner Heather Moyse won gold in the two-man bobsled at both Olympic games. They were awarded the honour of carrying the Canadian flag at the closing ceremonies at Sochi.

# Editorial

## The spirit of the Olympics

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by Kristín M. Jóhannsdóttir

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As I write these lines at home in Iceland, the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi have just finished and the Paralympics have started. These games have been controversial throughout the western world, particularly due to Russia's human rights violations and its anti-gay laws. Because of this, many heads of states decided to boycott the Games while others boycotted the Opening Ceremony, Putin's child, but showed up to sports events in support of their athletes. It leaves me with mixed feelings. On the one hand I believe, we as the human race should do all that we can to help those that are persecuted for the colour of their skin, their religion or sexual orientation. On the other hand I don't think that the Olympics should be political; they provide opportunities to get together in harmony and celebrate empathy, health and honest competitive spirit. It is a task the world takes on together.

Four years ago, at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, I was there in the middle of it all. I worked for the Vancouver Organizing Committee for two years as the deputy manager of language services. It was my job to hire all the professional interpreters for the games as well as assigning and training volunteers for the language services and venue protocol - a team of about 188 enthusiastic people who took time from their jobs to

come out and help us. The language services department was within a bigger unit called International Client Services. We took care of all our international guests, particularly the athletes and the dignitaries. In addition to language services we were in charge of protocol, service to the International Olympic Committee, the Olympic Family and the Olympic Family hotel, as well as all VIP areas in the venues.

Even though I was mostly working at the Main Media Centre I got the chance to go out and see events in the city. I got to see Canada's figure skater Joannie Rochette on the podium. I saw some amazing speed skating. I saw the fun crowd of curling fans cheer their teams on and I saw lots of amazing hockey. I saw smiles and cheers and laughter. All the emotions came out - you could see it in the faces of the athletes and their coaches as well as the crowd. But for every one that wins there are many others that lose and you could also see tears and disappointment. But that's sport for you. You'll never know what will happen. Fortunately, for most people these were minor stumbles on an amazing journey.

First and foremost, the Games are about the sport - and what a show these unbelievable athletes put on. Remember Alexandre Bilodeau winning Canada's first ever Olympic gold on home ground? Remember Joannie Rochette's courage as she skated to the bronze medal just

days after losing her mother? Remember Canada's Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir's gold medal after a hard battle with their figure skating buddies from Michigan? Remember South Korean Kim Yuna's amazing score in figure skating? Remember the double twist of USA's Shaun White? Remember Canadian Jon Montgomery's cheer? Remember Canada's speed skaters, the Hamelin brothers? Remember bobsledder Kaillie Simundson Humpries who has just duplicated her 2010 gold medal performance in 2014? Remember Canada's double gold in hockey? I do. I was there.

The whole city was on a high and wherever you went, there were people in red and white, waving the maple leaf, and everywhere people cheering for their country. The other colour in town was the team in blue – the staff and the volunteers of the Games. The people that made it all happen. The people that showed up to work every morning with a smile on their faces, ready to tackle whatever challenge might lie ahead. But even though it was hard work at times, it didn't matter, because we got to be a part of something very special – something that most people will never experience in their lifetime.

And now four years later, Sochi has put on their show with their volunteers and many new and upcoming athletes. Just like in Vancouver there were smiles and tears, people succeeding beyond their wildest dreams, people failing. Friendships were formed, characters were built, life events were experienced. All in all, the Sochi games were a huge success, in spite of the controversies and once again, the best athletes of the world came together to give

the rest of us one hell of a show.

For us Icelanders, in spite of the name, it's the Summer Olympics that matter, with the handball competition, swimming and track and field, as well as the soccer World Cup. But for Canada it's the Winter Games that really matter – particularly anything on ice. Curling, skating and especially hockey. Two teams, a puck, a goal at each end. That's where the Canadian heart beats. And it certainly rubbed off on me. After living in Canada for twelve years, going to Manitoba Moose games at first and later Vancouver Canucks games, I became nearly as much of a hockey fanatic as my Canadian friends. So, when I moved back to Iceland I tied on my own skates, took a stick in hand and now play with the Reykjavík team *Björninn*, 'the Bear'. We just won the division but lost the playoffs to my home-town team Akureyri. But what a part of Canada to take home with me!



PHOTO COURTESY OF KRISTÍN M. JÓHANNSDÓTTIR

**Kristín M. Jóhannsdóttir**

# Our Olympic Valkyrie

by Sigrid Stefanson

The remarkable story of Kaillie Humphries accomplishing her life long dream of winning an Olympic gold medal is inspiring. Her fierce determination, intense training, and passion have yielded victories in the two-man bobsled event including two world championship gold medals, the

gold medal at the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver and the Olympic gold medal at the 2014 Sochi, Russia games. As Canadians, it was a special moment to see her honoured as the flag bearer for the Sochi closing ceremonies but many did not know there was yet another reason to be proud of

this extreme athlete: her Icelandic roots.

Those who share Humphries' Icelandic background may identify with the qualities she uses to describe herself: passionate, dedicated, focused, driven, and stubborn. We may even use them to describe ourselves which gives us reason to take pleasure in her victories as we claim her as our own. It has become a tradition within the North American-Icelandic community to seek out and celebrate their Icelandic connections.

Humphries' paternal great-grandfather Þorfinnur Marteinn Benediktsson was born in Reykjavík in 1915. In honour of his father, Þorfinnur's son named his sailboat Thorfin. When challenged to



PHOTO: SPRINT MANAGEMENT

find a name for her bobsled, Humphries continued the family tradition and carried on the name.

“Family is the most important thing. Family is everything to me” Humphries has been quoted. Some of the most heartwarming images from the Sochi Olympics include Humphries jumping a fence to hug her parents, Ray and Cheryl Simundson of Calgary, after speeding down the track as pilot with teammate and brakeman Heather Moyses. Humphries’ tattooed body has become a love letter to her family. In tribute to her grandparents, the entire length of her left leg looks like a shield of armour. *Af því þú elskaði mig* (because you loved me) translates a special phrase from Cheryl’s mother into Icelandic for Ray’s father and is inscribed on her ankle.

Humphries has captured our attention and won our hearts. It will be exciting to follow her story as it unfolds further. While preparing for the 2018 Winter

Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, Humphries has taken on a role familiar to the Icelandic Canadian community; that of suffragette as she lobbies to bring equality to her sport. At present there is a four-man bobsleigh event for males but not for females. Humphries proposes that a female event be added, and in the interim is fighting for the right to train and compete with the men as the bobsled’s pilot.

This fierce combination of mental and physical strength must strike fear into Humphries’ opponents. A modern day valkyrie, the sight of Kaillie on the track must slay their hopes for a win because male or female, Humphries seems fated to be the victor.



PHOTO: SPRINT MANAGEMENT



PHOTO COURTESY OF RAY SIMUNDSON

# From Prairie Goolies to Canadian Cyclones: The transformation of the 1920 Winnipeg Falcons

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by Dr. Ryan Eyford  
*Department of History*  
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Late in the summer of 2001, a hockey jersey became the catalyst for a heated public controversy over Canada's Olympic hockey history. The seeds of the dispute were planted in early August when the Canadian Hockey Association (CHA), the governing body of amateur hockey in Canada, unveiled the uniforms that Team Canada would wear at 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City. In addition to the standard red and white sweaters bearing the Hockey Canada logo, a special third "retro" jersey was introduced that paid homage to the 1924 Toronto Granites; according to the CHA, the Granites were the first Olympic ice hockey champions.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this exercise in official commemoration and savvy marketing was flawed in one very important respect—another Canadian hockey team, the Winnipeg Falcons, had won gold four years before the Granites at the seventh Olympiad in Antwerp, Belgium.<sup>2</sup>

The Falcons were an amateur club that represented Winnipeg's large Icelandic community. Except for substitute Allan "Huck" Woodman, all of the players were the Canadian-born sons of Icelandic immigrants. During the 1919-20 hockey season the Falcons went from

local standouts to international hockey heroes. This improbable journey almost never happened; in September 1919 the directors of senior hockey in Winnipeg had attempted to break up the team up by refusing to allow them into the top city league. A mere seven months later the Falcons were Canadian amateur hockey champions and Olympic gold medallists. They returned home to a hero's welcome as thousands of Winnipeggers lined the streets to cheer their two-mile long victory procession. Claude Robinson, one of the officials who had fought to keep them out of senior hockey, publicly admitted that he and his colleagues had been "close to making a serious mistake."<sup>3</sup>

Eighty-two years later, the Falcons' accomplishments had been forgotten by most Canadian hockey fans, even in their home town of Winnipeg. The CHA at first faced no opposition in its decision to privilege the Granites over the Falcons as first Olympic champions. However, Canadians of Icelandic descent soon launched a campaign to defend the Falcons' memory. In late August Helga Malis of Gimli, Manitoba set to work alerting various media outlets of the controversy. She told the *Winnipeg Free Press* "I'm really anxious for Winnipeg to get up and

say, 'You can't do this.' Winnipeg mustn't allow this. Manitoba mustn't allow this."<sup>4</sup> Malis's efforts had the desired effect; the next day major dailies across the country reported on the controversy, and the CHA was on the defensive.<sup>5</sup> One CHA spokesman declared that the Falcons victory did not count because hockey was only a demonstration sport in 1920, but such claims were soon revealed to be erroneous.<sup>6</sup> As the CHA floundered in its attempts to justify its actions, Manitobans came up with their own explanations. Several people interviewed claimed that it was simply another case of Toronto elites ignoring the west.<sup>7</sup> Others used the controversy to reflect on Canada's long history of discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities. These people drew a direct line between the Falcons' failed bid to enter the Winnipeg senior league in 1919 and their rejection by the CHA in 2001. In both instances, one Falcons

supporter argued, they were "the team that nobody wanted."<sup>8</sup>

The portrayal of the Falcons as ethnic outsiders shunned by the Winnipeg hockey establishment because "they weren't of the proper British stock" has become a standard part of the popular mythology surrounding the team.<sup>9</sup> However, a closer examination of the coverage of the Falcons championship season in the major Winnipeg and Toronto newspapers calls this interpretation into question. If the Falcons had truly been the "team that nobody wanted" in the fall of 1919, how were they so quickly transformed into Canadian sporting heroes by spring 1920? The articles about the team that appeared in the popular press reveal important insights into the incorporation of "new Canadians" into the discourses surrounding the social value of sport and war in the building of the Canadian nation in the interwar period. For members of the Canadian



PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**Members of the Winnipeg Falcons hockey team (with an officer and unidentified woman) aboard RMS Grampian, en route to the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp, Belgium.**

sporting press, the Falcons victory served to reinforce prevailing assumptions about the potential of various white “races” as Canadian citizens, and the power of both sport and war to mould immigrants of the right stock into paragons of Canadian manliness.

The Falcons’ story has been the subject of a popular history article and a children’s book, and has been featured in histories of Canadian participation at the Olympic Games.<sup>10</sup> Much of the writing on the team has simply been a celebration of their accomplishment rather than a critical analysis of the reasons why that accomplishment held significance for many Canadians. In this sense, the history of the Falcons is little different from that of the history of hockey in general, which until recently has remained an underdeveloped area within the field of sport history.<sup>11</sup> However, since the publication of Richard Gruneau’s and David Whitson’s pioneering book *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities, and Cultural Politics*, scholars from a variety of disciplines have begun to analyze the shifting and contested meanings of the game using theoretical and methodological perspectives drawn from social history and cultural studies. They have attempted to relate the history of hockey to broader economic, political, and intellectual transformations, and have interrogated the role of hockey in the construction of race, gender, and class identities.<sup>12</sup> Recent scholarship has also addressed the ways in which hockey has come to embody different conceptions of the Canadian nation at any given moment in time. As Colin Howell has stated, “Canada’s cultural institutions – which include the national media, the sporting bureaucracy, and sporting events that act as unifying enthusiasms – help to construct the nation as a coherent identity.”<sup>13</sup> As the hockey representatives of Canada on

the world stage, the Winnipeg Falcons’ victory held tremendous symbolic value for members of the Canadian sporting press. In their transition from community hockey club to Olympic champions, the Falcons were characterized as the ideal representatives of the nation’s manhood. The ways in which that manly identity was conceptualized were a product of a set of ideological formations that had particular resonance in interwar Canada. Older ideas about immigrant racial character and the social value of sport were combined with a new emphasis on military service as a true marker of Canadian manhood.

The gendered construction of manhood or manliness can be a difficult concept to study historically. In her book *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Gail Bederman suggests that no one set of traits, attributes or sex roles can encapsulate all the cultural meanings of manhood in any given historical context. She argues that manhood is best studied as a “continual dynamic process” in which “men claim certain authority based on their particular types of bodies.”<sup>14</sup> A host of different ideas may coexist that link male anatomy to identity, power, and authority.<sup>15</sup> Canadian scholars Morris Mott, Bruce Kidd, and Varda Burstyn have analyzed the connection between manliness, sport, and social power.<sup>16</sup> These writers have observed that while many middle-class Canadians believed that sport could be used to instil proper social values in racial minorities, immigrants, and members of the working class, many of these groups were simultaneously excluded from being considered gentlemen or sportsmen in the same sense as their Anglo-Canadian associates.<sup>17</sup> What has not been sufficiently studied are cases in which teams of “outsiders” – such as the Falcons – were able to enter the upper levels of Canadian sport.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Winnipeg Falcons Olympic Champions display at MTS Centre

The case of the Falcons illustrates how middle-class Anglo-Canadian ideologies of manliness could be flexible enough to include members of some ethnic/racial groups in the category of manly Canadian. It also demonstrates how some segments favoured groups such as the Icelanders – far from being victims – adopted these ideologies in order to cement their claim to full participation in a Canadian society divided along gender, race, class, and regional lines.

Gruneau and Whitson have suggested that a passion for hockey has served to transcend many of the boundaries that divide Canadians and helped to fashion a Canadian national consciousness.<sup>18</sup> While this may be overstating matters, at the very least, hockey has served as a common point of reference for people of diverse backgrounds across the country. The growth of the major circulation daily newspapers allowed Canadians to follow sporting events that occurred far away.<sup>19</sup> Such was the case in the spring of 1920 when thousands of Winnipeggers jammed the streets around the *Manitoba Free Press* building to hear up-to-the-minute reports of the Allan Cup championship series between the Falcons and the University of Toronto Varsity team. According to the *Free Press*, the crowd was larger than those that had gathered to hear news of the Armistice ending the First World War.<sup>20</sup> Sports editor Billy Findlay transmitted a detailed description of the game from the press box in the Toronto Arena that was copied down and announced by megaphone to the waiting crowd in Winnipeg.<sup>21</sup> The championship series also generated considerable excitement in Toronto. Anxious fans began lining up in front of the arena twelve hours before tickets went on sale and by the time the windows opened at 10 am, there were 3,000 people in line for a chance at only 400 tickets. When it

was announced that no more tickets were available, a near riot erupted in which one disgruntled fan was hauled off to jail for striking a police officer.<sup>22</sup> Over 2,000 fans showed up to watch the Falcons practice later that day, and gamblers rushed to place their bets, with the Falcons considered 6-5 favourites.<sup>23</sup>

Predictions of a Falcons victory proved prophetic; the Winnipeg team crushed their eastern opponents 8-3 in the opening game and emerged with hard-fought 3-2 win in the second game to clinch the series, the Allan Cup, and the right to represent Canada at the Olympic Games in Antwerp. The *Toronto Daily Star's* colourful sports commentator Lou E. Marsh, who also refereed the series, was disappointed with the outcome but suitably impressed with the Falcons' athleticism and sportsmanship. In his mind, the Falcons' victory had catapulted them beyond the narrow confines of immigrant and regional identities and transformed them into true representatives of the nation's manhood:

*It is 'Winnipeg Falcons' no longer. The Icelandic-Canadians from the Golden West automatically changed their appellation to 'Canadian Cyclones' when they defeated Varsity 3-2 last night and won the right to represent Canada in the Olympic hockey tournament next month...No more will they hear that unholy name 'Goolies'. It will be 'Hello Canada!' and 'Bon jour Canadiens!' And the joy of it all is that the boys on the team are overseas veterans and so the team will fully be able to represent the athletic manhood of the great Dominion. Born of Icelandic parents in Canada, the lads jumped into the world's war as batterymen and battlers in the air, and were a credit to the nation's manhood as they are to the nation's athletic prowess.<sup>24</sup>*

Goolie – the “unholy name” mentioned by Marsh – was a nickname for Icelanders

that probably originated in Winnipeg as a short form of the Icelandic word *góðtemplari* (Good Templar). There were two Icelandic chapters of the International Order of Good Templars (IOGT) and their community hall, called the IOGT or Goolie Hall, was widely recognized by Winnipeggers as a centre of Icelandic cultural activity. Goolie was generally used as a humorous expression of familiarity rather than an ethnic slur. Falcons' winger Mike Goodman described himself as a "versatile gooly [sic]" in a poem about his club that appeared in the *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*.<sup>25</sup> While Marsh may have misread the meaning of goolie, his comments are representative of the three main themes that sports writers emphasized in their characterizations of the Falcons as manly Canadians: their status as immigrant children who had completed the process of Canadianization, their adherence to the ethos of amateur sport, and their willingness to serve Canada and the Empire in wartime.

By 1920, the Icelanders were hardly newcomers to Canada. The first group had arrived in Ontario in 1873, and within two years Winnipeg had become the primary destination for most of the approximately 20,000 people who left Iceland prior to 1905.<sup>26</sup> While most simply passed through the city on their way to various rural settlements, a significant number decided to stay and make their homes there permanently. Included in this group were Jón Jónsson and Vilborg Guðmundsdóttir, the maternal grandparents of Falcons right-winger Halli "Slim" Halderson who arrived in Winnipeg with their eight children in 1883.<sup>27</sup> Jón and his son-in-law Halldór found work in the building trades, a common pursuit for Icelandic men in Winnipeg during the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>28</sup> Migrants from the country also contributed to the growing Icelandic population of

Winnipeg to 3,000 by 1916.<sup>29</sup> Falcons players Konráð "Konnie" Johannesson, Kristján "Chris" Fridfinnsson and Club President Herbert "Hebbie" Axford were all born in the large Icelandic settlement in the Rural Municipality of Argyle but had moved to the city with their parents near the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike other immigrant groups who entered the prairie west during this period, the Icelanders encountered little nativistic reaction from the Anglo-Canadian majority. Accusations of racial and cultural inferiority that were used to marginalize groups such as the Ukrainians and Italians, and to exclude blacks and Asians, were rarely, if ever, applied to the Icelanders. Social reformers who concerned themselves with the assimilation of immigrants, such as J.S. Woodsworth, regarded the Icelanders as one of the best immigrant groups in the Dominion. Woodsworth's 1909 treatise on immigration *Strangers Within Our Gates* stated that "the Icelanders have taken their place in the development of the country, and become a powerful influence in the social and political life of the three Prairie Provinces. Sober, industrious, thrifty, they are in every way excellent citizens."<sup>31</sup>

The Icelanders owed their favoured status among Canadian immigrant groups to two interrelated factors: the contemporary discourses surrounding race as a social category in western culture and the particular adaptive strategies employed by the immigrants themselves. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the word race was used to differentiate people according to ethnic origin as well as skin colour. In both the United States and Canada, the cultural characteristics and material circumstances of various European races were believed to be largely a function of biology.<sup>32</sup> These

ideas were brought to bear on debates around the assimilation of immigrants in Canada, and served as convenient justifications for exclusionary policies. For the Icelanders, however, this racial logic worked to their advantage. They were generally considered to be part of the Norse or Nordic race and thus the close kin of Anglo-Saxons, who – at least in the English-speaking world – were believed to represent the pinnacle of human development. Many Canadian nationalists of the period believed that future national greatness Canada would be based on the cultivation of a race of people drawn from various hearty, northern racial stocks.<sup>33</sup> Officials in the Canadian Department of the Interior frequently rated the Icelanders near the top of the racial hierarchies that governed the desirability of immigrants. Dominion Immigration Commissioner W.D. Scott's 1914 tract *Immigration by*

*Races* states that Icelanders, Norwegians, Danes, and Swedes “are sprung from the same stock as the English, and when they have acquired the language and become acquainted with Canadian customs, they will be as other Canadians.”<sup>34</sup> Several editorial commentaries on the Falcons' Olympic championship run in 1920 mentioned their Norse racial heritage. The *Winnipeg Evening Tribune* stated that Canada had profited greatly from its association with the Norse race, and that ultimately British Canadians and Norse groups shared the same blood, and were similarly committed to developing Canada into a great nation.<sup>35</sup> The *Manitoba Free Press* said that the Falcons were “practically all of the vigorous Norse stock, which is showing remarkable strength and vigour on this side of the Atlantic.”<sup>36</sup>

The adaptive strategies of the Winnipeg Icelandic community served to validate

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these widely held beliefs about the virtues of the Norse race. While the Icelanders attempted to maintain a group identity through their churches, newspapers, and ethnic organizations, they also worked diligently to integrate themselves into the economic, cultural, and political life of the city. They were unique among immigrant groups in their willingness to adopt the language and customs of the dominant Anglo-Canadian culture.<sup>37</sup> In 1913 Scott wrote:

*In power to acquire a knowledge of the English language [the Icelanders] are in a class by themselves. An Icelander who knows no word of English when the ground is being prepared for seed in the spring will speak the language with scarcely a trace of a foreign accent by the time the harvest is garnered in the fall... Canadian customs are rapidly being adopted by the Icelanders as a whole.*<sup>38</sup>

Many Icelanders chose anglicized names that could not easily be detected as “foreign” by English-speaking Canadians. In Iceland, even to this day, most surnames are a combination of a father’s first name plus the suffix *son* or *dóttir* (daughter). For example, if Falcons defenseman Bobby Benson had been born in Iceland, he would have been called “Benediktsson” (Benedikt’s son) after his father, Benedikt Jóhannesson. Other players in the Falcons line-up used anglicized forms of Icelandic second names such as Fredrickson (Friðriksson), Byron (Björnsson), Halderson (Halldórsson), and Goodman (Guðmundsson). The use of English first names was also quite common; even though most of the players had been christened with traditional Icelandic first names such as Magnús, Kristján, and Valtyr, they were more commonly known as Mike, Chris, and Walter.

By the outbreak First World War, Winnipeg’s Icelandic community

was prosperous and upwardly mobile. Professionals, skilled labourers, and clerks comprised over half of the Icelandic labour force, and their community life centred on the newly constructed middle-class neighbourhoods of the city’s west-end.<sup>39</sup> Many urban Icelanders believed that success in the wider society reflected well on their group, and as a result were motivated to become high-achievers. In their coverage of the Falcons’ victory, the three main Icelandic language newspapers in Winnipeg emphasized the fact that even as the Falcons had achieved national and international fame, they still identified themselves as Icelanders. The editor of the Conservative *Heimskringla* exclaimed that the Falcons had written the word “Icelander” in gold-letters across the sporting annals of Canada.<sup>40</sup> Dr. Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson, the editor of the labour paper *Voröld*, considered the boys to be exemplars of the proper way to integrate into Canadian society while retaining respect for their Icelandic roots.<sup>41</sup> For their part, the Winnipeg sporting press found no contradiction in referring to the Falcons as “Icelanders” while simultaneously affirming their status as “true Canadians”. An editorial in the *Winnipeg Evening Tribune* during the Olympic tournament stated:

*So we are proud of the prowess of the young men representing Canada at the Olympic games. They are struggling not as Icelanders, but as Canadians to uphold the reputation for physical strength and endurance of their nation, Canada.... Canada is for Canadians. No man can possibly be a genuine Canadian if his heart is elsewhere. Our young Icelanders are typically Canadians because Canada is their real home.*<sup>42</sup>

As the success of the Falcons demonstrates, the Icelanders also adopted the sporting culture of their new homeland.

In fact, they were active participants in the general transformation of urban sporting culture in Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, the organization, structure and purpose of sports underwent a profound change as Canada was transformed from a predominantly rural, agrarian society into an urban, industrial capitalist order. Standardized sets of rules and regularly scheduled games played between highly organized clubs replaced the irregularity and informality of earlier sporting contests.<sup>43</sup> The middle-class urbanites who developed this new sporting culture believed that sport could be used as a “social technology employed to create a “respectable” social order and a deeper allegiance to nation and Empire.”<sup>44</sup> Team sports were considered to be effective vehicles for the inculcation of normative social values such as discipline, endurance, and efficiency. The role of sport in creating gentlemen from immigrant and working-class men was encapsulated in the ethos of amateurism that was promoted and enforced by organizations such as the Amateur Athletic Association of Canada, formed in 1884. It ensured that players did not receive remuneration for play, but instead played the game for its physical and mental benefits.<sup>45</sup>

The emerging middle-class among the Winnipeg Icelanders actively embraced this new sporting culture. The Icelandic Athletic Club (IAC) was formed in the 1880s, and its *Félag Hús* (club house) on Jemima Street served as centre of boxing, wrestling, fencing, and gymnastics for young Icelandic men.<sup>46</sup> Some of their activities, such as *glíma*, a distinctive form of wrestling, were rooted in the sporting traditions of Iceland. However, by the 1890s North American team sports that were virtually unknown in Iceland were fast eclipsing the old country sports in

popularity. Icelandic baseball teams from Winnipeg and various rural settlements competed annually at *Íslendingadagurinn*, the Icelandic celebration held in early August.<sup>47</sup> An inter-neighbourhood rivalry developed among the Icelanders in the city’s west end. The “north-enders” and “south-enders” occasionally arranged themselves into teams and competed in baseball and football. In 1896 these two sides formed hockey clubs, the IACs and the Vikings, and spirited and often bloody challenge games were played between the two clubs from 1896 to 1902 and again from 1905 to 1909. The family of Falcons’ winger Halli “Slim” Halderson was prominent in the Vikings club; two of his uncles and three of his brothers played for the team, and another uncle was the club President during its early years.<sup>48</sup> In 1908 the Vikings and the IAC decided to combine forces, and the Falcon Hockey Club, named for the national bird of Iceland, was founded.<sup>49</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that during these early years, Icelandic hockey teams had difficulty finding acceptance in the ranks of amateur hockey in Winnipeg. In the fall of 1901, the Vikings were denied entry into the city’s Intermediate league by the Manitoba and Northwest Hockey association. Team captain Magnús (Mike) Johnson wrote a letter to the sporting editor of the *Manitoba Morning Free Press* complaining that the decision would likely kill the game among the Icelanders in Winnipeg. He stated that the level of competition among the two Icelandic teams had declined, and as a result interest was waning among players and fans. Johnson believed that he and his countrymen deserved the opportunity to play against Anglo-Canadian clubs, “It has very seldom occurred that we Icelanders have tried to come forward in a body to make fight in the line of sport



PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIPEDIA

A clipped page from the *Free Press Evening Bulletin*, Tuesday, April 27, 1920

with outsiders, or rather the English speaking people.”<sup>50</sup>

By the time the Falcons were formed this situation had abated, but access to the highest level of hockey in the province remained closed. During the 1910-11 season the Falcons played intermediate hockey in the Manitoba Independent League along with the Monarchs, Winnepes, Kenora, and Brandon. The Falcons tied the Monarchs for first place, but were denied a berth in the city senior league for 1911-12 even though their Anglo-Canadian rivals were admitted. In response, they formed an Independent League and played senior hockey against Winnipeg AAA, Portage, and Selkirk. The Falcons continued to play in various formations of the Independent League for the next two seasons. As early Falcons

player Fred Thordarson later recalled, the ultimate goal always remained entry into the top city league.<sup>51</sup>

After a particularly good showing in the 1914-15 Allan Cup play-offs, the Falcons gained entry into the second tier of the Winnipeg senior league. The enlistment of the entire line-up in the 223<sup>rd</sup> Scandinavian-Canadian Battalion in 1916 meant the end of the Falcons for the duration of the war, although most of the players competed in the Winnipeg Patriotic League as the 223<sup>rd</sup> Battalion during the 1916-17 season.<sup>52</sup> In the absence of their best senior players, Icelandic hockey enthusiasts focused their attention on the junior level. The Young Men’s Lutheran Club (YMLC) team, which included 1920 Falcons’ team members Mike Goodman, Chris Fridfinnson, and Huck Woodman,

were the undefeated Manitoba junior champions in 1918-19.

The Falcons' struggle to enter the city senior league in the pre-war years deserves further research. However, an unwillingness to accept Icelanders on ethnic or racial grounds seems unlikely, since individual middle-class Icelanders with hockey talent often joined top Winnipeg senior teams. This trend can be traced as far back as 1903, when goalie Fred Olsen, a Manitoba College student and former member of the Viking Hockey club, played for the Winnipeg Victorias against Montreal AAA in a Stanley Cup challenge game.<sup>53</sup> When the Falcons experienced financial trouble during the 1911-12 season, three of their star players – “Big Minty” Stephenson, Cully Wilson and Connie Benson – jumped to the rival Monarchs.<sup>54</sup> Slim Halderson played senior hockey with the Winnipeg Ypres during their Allan Cup run in 1917-18, and joined the Monarchs the following year. In the fall of 1919 the Monarchs executive board counted him among the players expected to return for the 1919-20 season.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately for them, Halderson had already decided to join his fellow Icelanders on a reconstituted Falcons team. Along with YMLC junior stars Goodman, Fridfinnson, and Woodman, Halderson united with returning war veterans Frank Fredrickson, Konnie Johannesson, Wally Byron, and Bobby Benson to form a team that the *Winnipeg Evening Tribune* believed was the strongest senior club slated to compete during the 1919-20 season.<sup>56</sup>

In its form, structure, and organization, the post-war Winnipeg Falcons club were the image of an Anglo-Canadian sports club. According to Morris Mott, sports clubs were “institution[s] that required adherence to explicit and enforceable rules.”<sup>57</sup> Falcons' executive Fred Thordarson

believed that a strict regimen of physical training, abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, and the unselfish commitment of the players and the executive to always work in the best interests of the team, was the secret of their success.<sup>58</sup> Ensuring this team discipline was the job of Fred “Steamer” Maxwell, an old Monarchs star, who served as manager of the team. An impressive bureaucratic structure backed up Maxwell and his players. The patrons and executive board of the club was made up of prominent members of the Icelandic community. It included doctors, lawyers, high-ranking military officers, and wealthy contractors. The Honourary President was Thomas H. Johnson, an Icelandic immigrant who was a member of the provincial cabinet, and later served as Attorney General of Manitoba (1922-1927).<sup>59</sup> However, even with meticulous organization and an impressive roster of players, the Falcons were still not welcome in the Winnipeg senior league.

The exclusion of the Falcons from city senior league in the fall of 1919 touched off a nasty public controversy dubbed “The Hockey War” by *Free Press* sports editor Billy Findlay. The newspaper accounts of these events cast serious doubt on the assertion that the Falcons were the victims of ethnic or racial bigotry. Rather, it seems that the hockey war was a fight over scarce economic and manpower resources. The board of the league, composed of the presidents of the three old clubs – the Monarchs, Winnipegs, and Victorias – wanted to ensure that the available money and hockey talent were accrued by their clubs in order to build solid contenders for the Allan Cup. Another club on the scene, especially one as strong as the Falcons, would be contrary to their interests. There were even rumours that because of a lack of players of suitable calibre, two of the storied old clubs would have to merge in

order to field viable teams.<sup>60</sup>

A central part of the battle was the question of who would get ice time at the newly-refurbished Amphitheatre rink and who would have to settle for accommodation at the Arena, considered the lesser venue because it offered less potential for remunerative gate receipts.<sup>61</sup> When Falcons' executives Hebbie Axford and Marino Hannesson met with league officials on October 27, 1919 they were told that unless the Falcons could secure ice time for league games at a location other than the Amphitheatre, they would definitely be excluded from the league. Bill Findlay of the *Free Press* commented that even if the Falcons were able to meet the ice-time condition, the board's concerns about too many teams creating a diluted talent pool, and too many games hurting general attendance, made the Falcons entry into the league doubtful. Even when the Falcons did secure their own ice at the Arena rink, the representatives of the three older clubs were still reluctant to let them in.

The actions of the local hockey moguls were strongly criticized by members of Winnipeg's sporting press. Tim Ching of the *Tribune* and Abbie Coe of the *Telegram* came out strongly in favour of their inclusion in the city's premier league, and drew attention to the fact that the directors of the city league were putting their own economic interests ahead of the interests of amateur sport. Ching said: "There is no reason why the Falcons should not be able to receive the same support in their effort to revive their club as is being given to the Winnipeggs and Vics."<sup>62</sup> He further stated that "The Icelandic Club has done as much, if not more, than any Winnipeg club toward boosting amateur hockey in Manitoba and certainly has been treated very shabbily during the hockey controversy."

<sup>63</sup> Coe considered the Falcons to be "the best paper team in the city" and stated that the real reason for their exclusion was the selfishness of the Winnipeg clubs who "would like to have some of the Icelandic boys for their teams."<sup>64</sup> An anonymous fan wrote in to the *Telegram* echoing these sentiments. He felt certain that the Monarchs, Vics, and Winnipeggs simply wanted to strengthen their own clubs with the help of the talented young Icelanders.<sup>65</sup>

The climax of the hockey war came on November 3, 1919, when representatives from all the clubs met to decide the issue once and for all. Claude Robinson of the Vics stunned the assembly by announcing that the Winnipeg league intended to continue with the three old teams, as well as adding Selkirk and Brandon – the Falcons were to be omitted entirely. Bill Noble of the Winnipeggs expressed his reservations, saying that it was necessary not to have too many teams in order to put together a side capable of bringing the Allan Cup. After Robinson had attempted to cool the situation by suggesting the formation of two leagues, with a series of exhibitions between, Noble again interjected and stated that his club would not support the entry of Brandon and Selkirk. In response, representatives of Brandon, Selkirk, and the Falcons walked out and held their own meeting in which they formed the Manitoba senior league.<sup>66</sup> The Winnipeg clubs, apparently concerned that the superior Manitoba league clubs would outdraw them at the box-office, made some last-ditch efforts to coax Brandon and Selkirk into abandoning the Falcons but without any success.<sup>67</sup> The 1919-20 hockey season went ahead with two senior leagues in operation. After a hard-fought battle with Selkirk for top-spot in the Manitoba league, the Falcons went on to play Noble's Winnipeggs in the Allan Cup playoffs. They

easily beat the city champs by scores of 5-0 and 10-1 to clinch the series.<sup>68</sup>

The characterization of the Falcons as “true amateurs” and “gentlemen” by sports writers during the pre-season controversy continued once the Falcons became national and Olympic champions. Canadian Olympic Committee chairman and *Toronto Star* correspondent Billy Hewitt, who accompanied the team to Antwerp, said that they had “left a fine impression of the upstanding qualities of Canadian sportsmen and citizens.”<sup>69</sup> In Toronto the Falcons met with Ontario Premier Ernest Drury who stated that their team demonstrated the value of amateur sport as “the best moral and physical training.”<sup>70</sup> The *Winnipeg Telegram* commented that the Falcons triumph should serve as an example to other young Canadians; it demonstrated how the body and the mind could be disciplined into a harmonious whole for the purpose of serving one’s country.<sup>71</sup> The *Telegram* and other papers that covered the team reminded their readers that the Falcons had served their country admirably in the First World War.

Descriptions of the Falcons as young Canadian sportsmen and gentlemen were almost inevitably accompanied by references to their service in the First World War. Icelandic-Canadians had made substantial contributions to the war effort; in 1916 they were instrumental in the creation of 223rd Scandinavian Canadian battalion. In the same year, Icelandic women formed the Jón Sigurðsson Chapter Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire as a support organization for overseas servicemen.<sup>72</sup> Four members of the 1920 Falcons team and most of its executive saw active service during the war. Goalie Wally Byron and defenseman Bobby Benson fought on the Western Front during the last two years

of the war. Captain Frank Frederickson and Defenseman Konnie Johannesson, had started with the 223rd battalion, but transferred to Royal Flying Corps once in England.<sup>73</sup> Buster Thorsteinson, a pre-war Falcons player, was killed in France in 1918.<sup>74</sup>

According to many Canadian sports writers, the Falcons’ war record was an integral part of what made them representative of Canadian manhood. Marsh of the *Toronto Daily Star* believed that war-time service was an important factor in determining who was a real Canadian: “Somebody says, ‘Huh! Falcons are Icelanders.’ They’re not. They are real Canadians. Every man on the team and in the party except the trainer was born in Canada and out of nine players seven were in France and saw service.”<sup>75</sup> During the interwar years, Marsh and his colleagues in the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada argued that sport could help reconstruct Canadian national life around a culture of service deeply connected to military values.<sup>76</sup> This policy reflected wider developments within Canadian society. Jonathan Vance has noted how in interwar Canada, the memory of the war was seen by many Anglo-Canadians as a constructive force in Canadian national life. It had the potential to weld together fractious and discordant elements of race, ethnicity, and region together into one harmonious whole.<sup>77</sup> Immigrants, in particular, could benefit from the patriotic lessons of the war—it would help them complete the process of Canadianization. This was a powerful idea that was shared by members of the Icelandic community. The climax of Laura Goodman-Salverson’s 1923 novel the *Viking Heart* is when young Thor Lindal dies in the mud of Passchendaele. His mother’s grief is assuaged only by the realization that her son had died for his country, which she

affirms – through his sacrifice – had also become her country.<sup>78</sup>

Strained metaphors of war were a staple of the coverage of the Falcons' exploits at the Olympic tournament. The Falcons defeated Czechoslovakia and the United States to make it to the final against Sweden. Following the Falcons' easy victory over of the inexperienced Swedish team in the gold medal final, the front page of *the Globe* again drew a parallel between sport and war: "The Winnipeg team plays exceedingly fast and very clean hockey, and undoubtedly did full credit to Canadian sportsmanship. All of the team who were eligible to service were with the Canadian forces overseas."<sup>79</sup> In the description of the actual championship game, the tenuous connection was made between the inept Swedish offense and the attack of the German army during the war:

*Reminiscent of the gallantry of Canadian troops on Belgian soil in the defense of Ypres in the Great War was the defence of the Canadian goal in the Olympic hockey championship, which was decided in favour of Canada to-night... The victory of the Canadians is decidedly popular here, not only because of their unquestioned hockey superiority, but also because of their sportsmanship and Canada's fine record in the war.*<sup>80</sup>

The *Vancouver World* commented "On the ice or on the battlefield, Canada gets what she goes after."<sup>81</sup>

The welcome receptions that greeted the Falcons upon their return to Canada also had a decided military flavour. In Toronto, the President of the Sportsman's Patriotic Association remarked that the victory proved that Canada could not only send out troops in defence of the Empire, but also despatch sports teams capable of winning championships.<sup>82</sup> In the evening they were the guests of the United War

Veterans at a boxing match in the Toronto Arena. This trend continued once the team returned to Winnipeg. As they left the train station the band played "Here the conquering heroes come" and divisions of the army marched in their victory parade.<sup>83</sup> As the Icelandic-language newspaper *Lögberg* noted with pride, the first Icelandic organization to welcome the team home was the 223rd Battalion Association.<sup>84</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Hannes Marino Hannesson, the highest ranking Icelandic officer in the 223rd and member of the Falcons executive board, told an assembly of the city's sporting elite that "The Falcons were not only true Winnipeggers and true Canadians, but true amateurs and true sportsmen."<sup>85</sup>

Such statements were not simply praise offered to the returning champions. They were affirmations of a prevailing belief in the power of sport and war to assimilate immigrants and to build a manly Canadian nation within the British Empire. The particular ideological formation of manliness that the Falcons came to represent linked white racial power and a commitment to the philosophy of amateurism with the cult of service emerging out of the First World War. While this was an ideology developed and promoted by middle-class Anglo-Canadians, it was also shared by many within the Winnipeg Icelandic community. Their acceptance of the prevailing gendered ideology around manhood reinforced these ideas in the eyes of many Anglo-Canadians and gave the Icelanders a measure of access to the host society not accorded to other non-British groups. In short, the Falcons victory did not symbolize the emergence of a more pluralistic conception of what it meant to be Canadian for members of the sporting press. It instead served to reinforce prevailing hierarchies of gender, race, and class by affirming their importance to the

building of a Canadian nation that could win on the battlefield and on the ice.

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Following the 2001 controversy, the Canadian Hockey Association has attempted to reincorporate the Falcons into the official version of Canadian hockey history. In 2004, the CHA and Nike Canada launched a line of replica jerseys and apparel modelled after the distinctive black and gold sweaters that the Falcons wore at Antwerp in 1920. Falcons' supporters who tuned in for the first game of the 2004 World Cup were treated to the sight of the modern Team Canada wearing the Falcon colours. A more understated attempt at reconciliation occurred two years previous in Salt Lake City. Following their 5-2 victory over the United States at the 2002 Olympics, the players of Canada's gold medal men's hockey team attended a reception hosted by Manitoba-born businessman Eric Olafson. They had their pictures taken in front of a large mural of the Falcons commissioned through the fundraising efforts of people of Icelandic descent.<sup>86</sup> The presence of Team Canada at the reception was intended to demonstrate the CHA's respect for the previously ignored Falcons. However, it also served to illustrate the many transformations in the cultural meanings and the perceived social value of hockey in Canadian national life over the previous eighty-two years. For a brief moment, an all-star aggregation of millionaire professionals from across the country paused to imagine their communion with an amateur, community-based club of Icelandic-Canadians from Winnipeg's west-end who had once represented Canada in international hockey competition.

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## Notes

### (Endnotes)

- 1 *National Post*, August 8, 2001.
- 2 The Granites won a gold medal at the International Sports Week, an event held at Chamonix, France in 1924 under the patronage of the International Olympic committee.
- 3 *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, May 25, 1920.
- 4 *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 31, 2001.
- 5 See *Toronto Star*, August 31, 2001; *Calgary Herald*, August 31, 2001.
- 6 *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 30, 2001; Barbara Schrodt has asserted that all claims that hockey was a "demonstration sport" or an "unofficial" part of the 1920 games are incorrect, and that the distinction between the Falcons and the Granites championships is really quite easy to make. She argues that the Falcons were "winners of the first official Olympic ice hockey tournament", while the Granites were "the first winners of ice hockey in the Winter Olympics". The confusion stemmed from the fact that in 1920 there was no separate Olympic Games for winter sports. Ice hockey, along with figure skating, was included as part of what would now be called the summer Olympic Games. The Granites won a gold medal in ice hockey at the International Sports Week in Chamonix, France, an event that was later designated as the first Winter Olympic Games the International Olympic Committee. See Barbara Schrodt, "The Winnipeg Falcons: First Official Olympic Hockey Winners," *The Icelandic Canadian*, 57, 3 (2002), 93.
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- 19 Kidd, 20-21.
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- 62 *Ibid.*, October 28, 1919.
- 63 *Manitoba Free Press*, November 3, 1919.
- 64 *Winnipeg Telegram*, October 29, 1919.
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# SÓLSKIN

## LÖGBERG'S CHILDREN'S PAPER

VOL I.

WINNIPEG. 15. JUNE 1916.

No. 37

### *Translator's notes*

by Elin Thordarson

Opposite is the English translation of the first letter that Nobel Prize winning writer Halldór Laxness wrote to Winnipeg's *Lögberg* paper. His letter, entitled "Sunshine Children," appears in the *Sólskin* Children's section of the city's then left-leaning Icelandic language paper. Published in the June 15, 1916 issue, Laxness (born Halldór Guðmundsson) would be 14 years old then. It is an important letter not only for its relative age, we're talking about a letter written by a child in Iceland to the Icelandic speaking children in Canada during the First World War. It is important, as, according to Laxness'

biographer, Halldór Guðmundsson, this may be the first material Laxness published under his own name (19). And it is important for the tone heard in the writing, Laxness comes across as fatherly, experienced, and educated. The writing is especially spirited at times too; in his description of springtime in Iceland and the connection between the Icelandic sagas and the love for his home country. It is one of the earliest examples of Laxness' published works, as certainly from 1916 on, Laxness truly began his life as a writer, reaching an apotheosis some 39 years later with being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955.

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# SÓLSKIN

## LÖGBERG'S CHILDREN'S PAPER

VOL I.

WINNIPEG. 15. JUNE 1916.

No. 37

### Sunshine Children.

*Best wishes from your eastern homeland  
and a friend in Iceland.*

Greetings good children – an especial hello to the Icelandic children.

I have seen “The Sunshine” in “Lögberg,” that section of the paper that you hold so dear. – I have read the little articles that you have sent in – and it amazes me to see how clever you all are – to be able to write such fine and dandy jokes and stories. – Judging by the stories you are doing better than your siblings here in your homeland. – They are a long way off from being able to write and compose works like you – most of them, at least.

Listen, you good children! Shall I tell you a little about Iceland – the country that you all love so much? – I’m sure you agree with that statement, and so now I want to tell you a little about it.

Spring is in the air right now. – When the snow melts down the mountainsides and out of the hollows, when ice and cold flee from the dales, when the sun climbs its way higher and higher up into the sky, when the nights begin to shorten and the days to lengthen – although the mountain roads are still covered in snow and no warmth of spring can be found in the mountain peaks – when new growth begins its life on earth for the livestock to eat, when the ewes give birth, the lambs play in the pasture, the children

take out their toys to build their houses, when the grown up folk put everything in order that the winter has put in disorder, when everything is teeming with life, when everything seems to rise up out of its winter slumber, then spring is in the air. – And it is lovely in Iceland. – I don’t know if you are familiar with the white nights – I don’t believe you are – but the white nights are one of the most beautiful things God has given our country to revel in. Have you heard this quatrain?

Nothing is more beautiful than  
This country’s display of light  
Nor does the heart love as much  
As the white of a springtime night.

This is a lovely poem. Full of sunshine – and one of the greatest sunshine children of Iceland – Þorsteinn Erlingsson – composed it. You should all learn this poem by heart and every time you recite its lines you’ll remember this: that in some places in Iceland the sun does not set (or drop below the horizon) at nighttime, *in the spring*.

Springtime light is beautiful. It is constant light for several days. The midnight sun! This happens later on in the spring, and is called Midsummer’s Night. And it is one of the most beautiful natural wonders in Iceland – and it is praised through out literature.

This winter there was a lot of snow, very much so; in the dale where I live, it has mostly melted. – the dale is surrounded by mountains on all sides. They are still

crowned in white. And the large heath above the dale is completely packed with snow. Not even a trace of the dark rock beneath can be seen for all the snow.

Icelandic children now have a new splendor at hand, summertime. They all look so forward to summer. The boys enjoy tending the sheep, the girls milking them.

On summer mornings when the boys stroll out into the fields with their sheep under their watch and their dogs by their sides, and their sacks on their shoulders, they carry books with them to read to pass the time. When I sat back I read many Icelandic sagas that tell of

the acts of bravery and the sheer drive of our forefathers in the golden age - I had read all the sagas by the time I was eleven years old. - If one longs to love their country and cannot do it directly, the solution is this: To read the Icelandic sagas, through them you will drink in the love for your heritage. I cannot explain perfectly how my love for my country has increased by reading these stories, but one thing is certain: it has increased and it was from reading the sagas; and it's for this reason I want to tell you that this solution is truly sweet.

The summer is the preparation time for the winter - summer is the one grace here. If it weren't for summer there would never have been a settlement in this country. The summer is really quite short, but it is long enough: - if it were always summer everyone would be loafing around. The sun is always shining in the summertime. That's why I felt your paper "Sólskin" should tell you about it. - -

The winter, with all the cold and snow, is, to us, also lovely. - Icelandic children also very much look forward to the winter. That's when they get to go to school, and they get to play in the snow. They sled and ski down the snow on the hills. - The shepherds even round up the sheep on skis. Otherwise they'd be up to their knees in snow. Sometimes it rains over the snow, and then it becomes wet and slushy. It's not easy to travel over land then - There are festivals held in the countryside during the winter, same as those held in the towns. They're mostly dances. I won't to go into them too much. - The children very much look forward to Christmas. But you know all about that yourselves.

Many are poor here and their children never have enough. They are



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helped out as best possible. – Reykjavík is the centre (of all) culture that school and the like touch. There are now many public schools and agricultural colleges in the villages all over the countryside – but in Reykjavík there is the university and the main secondary academy in addition to a great many cultural establishments.

There are many newspapers published here and I want to tell you and Sólskin, that there are two children's newspapers published here in Iceland. They're called "Æskan" and "Ungu Ísland." Æskan is mainly for smaller children and Ungu Ísland is for the older ones. I think highly of them both and I read them both equally. The editors are teachers and are friends to children. Both newspapers come out every month on quality paper, with pictures, stories, poems, and riddles or puzzles, all suitable for children. The papers are bought by many, and for a bargain too . .

Just recently a piece I wrote appeared in Æskan. It was about you and Sólskin. I told Æskan readers about your stories and how hardworking you are, and how it was so thoughtful of the editor of Lögberg to make a space in his paper for you all. I know that I may send you the greetings of your brothers and sisters who read Æskan in your homeland. I know that I can say: Æskan-children in Iceland wish the Icelandic Sunshine children in America a happy future, and all the best!

I would very much like the opportunity to send in a story to Sólskin sometime, if the editor would accept it. It will be all about Iceland. – Our older brothers and sisters have clasped hands across the sea; so why shouldn't little children's hands to do the same, to get to know and love each other through our words and works. – Long live the

children's newspapers in Iceland and the Icelandic children's newspapers in America. Æskan, Sólskin – –

With best wishes to the Sunshine Children,

From your loving friend,

H. Guðjónsson from Laxnes.

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# Camp Counselor

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by Mallory Swanson

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As a first time counselor at Icelandic Camp, I believe I was just as nervous and excited for the start of camp as any first time camper. I had only attended summer camp once as a child, for a brief weekend after completing Grade 5, and it certainly wasn't anything as unique and magnificent as Icelandic Camp in Gimli, Manitoba. For me, summer camp was one of those magical places found in the books and movies of my childhood. I am discovering this week that the reality is even better than fiction.

Many of the campers here are old hats, boasting Icelandic Camp membership for three, five, even eight years. These camp professionals guide the new kids (including myself) through each novel experience.

The older campers and Junior Counselors are kind and enthusiastic, bringing those that are unsure into the fold and helping to keep everyone happy and involved.

I am adding this to my ways to stay connected to my Icelandic ancestry. I did the Snorri Program in 2011, and since then have been swept up in all things Icelandic. My friend and fellow Snorri, Sarah Painter and I will be working here together this week, she is going to be the Camp Nurse, and it is great to be reunited.

## Sunday/Day 1:

Opening day was packed with activities from registration to lights out. There was swimming, large group games and icebreaker activities, and the first session of classes. This year the campers have instruction in Physical Education taught by Haley Fisher,

Music taught by Kenley Kristofferson, and Icelandic Language taught by Signy McInnis. There is also a generous amount of free time given to campers to spend playing basketball, tetherball, trackball, practicing music or just spending time with their friends.

After an exhausting first day, first time camper, seven-year-old Hana reported, "This has been the most fun day ever." I had to agree.

## Monday/Day 2

The campers seem to have accepted me as one of their own. I've been pulled into endless games of trackball, tetherball and various other playground games. The day started off with a Viking Swim. Campers are encouraged to take a quick dip in the chilly waters of Lake Winnipeg. There is a prize offered for those that participate every morning of camp. That's five brisk plunges. About eight brave kids dove in this morning while the rest of us watched from the relative comfort of the sandy beach. The hope is for higher participation as the week continues. If I can work up the courage, I'll add myself to their number.

After dinner that evening we took the campers into Gimli for ice cream at Beach Boy restaurant with the help of some volunteer drivers. In groups of five, in the kids went to place their orders for vanilla, chocolate or twist cones. Out they came, massive ice cream cones in hand and were herded across the street to the boardwalk to finish their treat. The average energy level of the campers far surpasses my own. Time to

step up my game. I might have to take up coffee drinking.

### Tuesday/Day 3

Another early morning Viking Swim for the hearty souls that dared to partake. I counted myself among them today and have to say, I felt pretty tough. A quarter Icelandic and strong as steel.

After breakfast and a morning of classes we had a great group of volunteers drive all of the campers and staff to the rock at Willow Point. In music class the kids are learning a song called "Bahama." It is actually in Icelandic, but the chorus is "Bahamaeyja, Bahamaeyja, Bahamaeyja, Bahama!" This song could not be any more stuck in my head if someone nailed it in there. I'll be humming this one for months and it definitely came along with me on our trip to Willow Point today.

The four Snorri West girls, visiting from Iceland were with us for the day, and joined us in this adventure. From Willow Point we started a walk down the beach

to Gimli Harbor. We all made it to the Viking Statue, some with the help of our drivers. There was a lengthy photo shoot of the group at the statue which required a good deal of coordination and no small amount of yelling of instructions to kids and counselors alike. "We can't see So and So!" "You need to come to the front!" "Don't climb any higher, you'll knock yourself silly!" "Everyone, say something in Icelandic!"

Having eventually gotten everyone photographed, we took a walk to the water fountain in town, for a rest (and some splashing) before walking back to the Viking Statue to wait for the cars to bring us back to camp. Once everyone had been returned to camp we took a lovely swim in the warm, sunshiny weather before dinner.

Meal times here are a complete delight. Our wonderful cooks, Lorraine Hirst and Maria Bear never cease to amaze with delicious dish after dish. Throughout the week we have been treated to spaghetti, perogies and kielbasa, ham and mashed potatoes, hamburgers, pancakes and much



PHOTO COURTESY OF MALLORY SWANSON

more. The granola bars I brought with for emergency hunger situations are not even close to necessary and lie forgotten under my bunk.

After dinner, the four Snorri West girls from Iceland gave us a presentation on Icelandic Christmas traditions, specifically, the Jólásveinar. They taught us the names and characteristics of each of the Yule Lads, and then we sang Christmas songs in Icelandic and danced around a “tree” (it was actually a desk in the Rec Center of the camp). Santa made an appearance and gave everyone t-shirts from the Icelandic Festival and the Snorri West girls gave everyone candy from Iceland. It was a wonderful event.

#### Wednesday/Day 4:

The fishflies seem to be dying off. Our morning walk across the field for the Viking Swim left me only half covered in

them, instead of the head to toe covered I was two days ago. After a thorough de-fishflying, breakfast and classes, the whole group took a field trip to the Vilhjálmur Stefánsson monument. David Gislason gave a presentation to everyone at the camp before we departed, on this and other important Icelandic people and sites in the Gimli area.

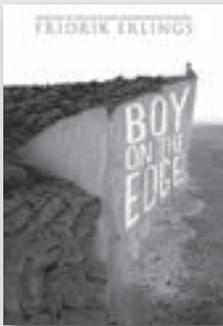
Next on our field trip was a visit to a farm that had Icelandic Horses. The two horses were, I am sure, delighted to see 40 strangers walking towards them, anxious to pet and even sit atop them. They were patient with everyone, from the youngest to oldest campers. I have to say, this was one of the highlights of my camp experience. It took everything I had in me not to push little kids out of the way so I could be the first one to see the horses. I got my turn and was the happiest person in all of Manitoba.

That evening, after swimming and

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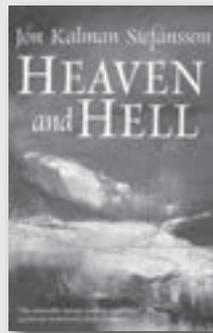
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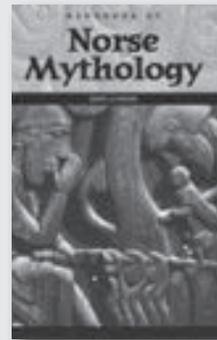
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dinner, we recorded all the kids and staff singing a song sent to us by Icelandic singer, Jón Jónsson. He recorded one of his hit songs, "All You I" and sent it from Iceland with a message to the camp. In return, the campers all learned the words to the song and sent the recording back to Iceland with Guðmundur "Gummi" Hafliðason, one of the counselors from Iceland who brought the Jón Jónsson movie over for us. On the video there are also greetings from several actors, actresses and radio personalities in Iceland.

Due to rain that evening, there was also the chance for the campers to watch the episode of *The Simpsons* where the characters travel to Iceland and an Icelandic travel documentary that coincidentally happened to feature Jón Jónsson when they covered the Icelandic music scene.

#### **Thursday/Day 5:**

Our last full day of camp already! I can't believe how quickly this week has gone! It is exhausting, but unbelievably fun to be able to be a part of Icelandic Camp. After classes

and lunch we went back into Gimli with the help of our generous volunteer drivers.

We walked to the New Iceland Museum where the kids watched the documentary on the Icelandic settlers and got to tour the museum exhibits. The horned helmets and swords in the dress-up area were a big hit. We also had the opportunity to get Viking names. From now on I will be referred to as Ingibjörg Halfhand. Freshly named, we went to get a sneak peek at the Viking Village as it was being set up. We watched in fascination as one of the men began to cut a hole into a piece of wood using various carving implements. The kids were especially fascinated by how long something like that took to do without the help of power tools. They asked some wonderful questions as they watched the man work, and their curiosity was as obvious as their desire to touch everything in the tent.

The event that all the experienced campers had been looking forward to was due to happen on this last evening. Junk Food/Movie Night. We took everyone to



PHOTO COURTESY OF MALLORY SWANSON

the grocery store where they were allowed to pick out (within reason) some junk food. I was having trouble understanding why the kids were having such a hard time deciding what to get until it was time to decide what my treat was going to be. I regretted having rushed everyone along with their decisions. It wasn't easy!

The younger kids and those that didn't want to take the walk back to camp got rides back in cars. Just as we were about to head out on the walk, which we were led to believe took about an hour, it started to downpour. The dozen or so of us walking back to camp ducked back into the grocery store until the rain subsided, thankfully very quickly.

The weather was not nice enough for the full walk down the beach which can take three hours or more, but we took a route along the boardwalk and near the golf course which was fun as well.

Back at camp, a hotdog roast was on the agenda for dinner. It rained for awhile in the midst of the roast, but that didn't stop us. We were later visited by two frightening, battle-clad Vikings, and (separately) Gummi's Amma from Iceland who came bearing pönnukökur for everyone.

Movie night was a hit, with happy, sugar-filled campers and staff alike enjoying two family friendly films in a row. There were more than a few sleepers on the floor and couches of the rec center by the time everyone was sent back to their cabins at midnight.

### Friday/Day 6:

Most everyone seems a little glum that camp is ending today. It will be a whole year until we are back here again, which seems like an eternity. I for one cannot wait to come back as a counselor next year. This has been a wonderful week. We spend the morning



PHOTO: SIGNÝ MCINNIS

**Icelandic Camp group visiting the White Rock memorial at Willow Island**

cleaning, swimming and practicing for our music program that will close out the week. For lunch we have a glorious melange of leftovers.

Mid-afternoon, families begin to show up for the end of week program and to pick up their campers. We sang the oh-so-catchy “Bahama” in Icelandic, and also the English version of an Icelandic song called Ólafur Liljorós. Certificates and a candy prize were presented to the brave few that managed the Viking Swim every day of camp. We showed the families the video that Jón Jónsson had sent from Iceland and our fearless leaders, Brad Hirst and Christine Schimnowski gave a goodbye speech. There were lots of hugs, pictures and exchanging of email addresses as everyone gathered their belongings and left the camp.

With thirty-some campers suddenly

gone, the grounds seemed shockingly quiet. Only the handful of camp staff were there to tie up the loose ends and get all of our own stuff out of the cabins that had been home for the week. It seemed surreal that there weren’t kids to instruct or messes to clean up or someplace that we all needed to be.

I’m already planning ideas and activities for camp next year. I wish I had known about this camp when I was younger and had the opportunity to attend as a camper. I’m so grateful for the experience of being a counselor this year. It has been all I had imagined and more. Next summer I hope to see many new faces, ready to experience their own first year of Icelandic Camp and I look forward to seeing those that I met this year ready for another great week, embracing their Icelandic roots.

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## Ancestry hunt

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by Gunnar Þór Gunnarsson

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It was in the middle of March this year which is when we usually get a lot of emails from people asking about the Northern Lights, I received an email from Jackie. It was a refreshing change from more or less six months of Northern Lights correspondence. Jackie was born in Canada and lives now in Victoria British Columbia a long way from Iceland. I am an Icelandic guide and a manager in a travel agency in Iceland and have been for the last three years. Jackie wrote about her wanting to visit Iceland later in the year or in September, she wanted to visit

the ancestral farms and birth locations of her family and asked if we could assist her in doing this. This shouldn’t come as a surprise to me when there are now more Icelandic descendants in Canada than there are Icelanders in Iceland. During Iceland’s worst hunger and coldest periods in the 19th century, people heard many good things about the new world causing thousands of people moving from Iceland mostly to Canada and Brazil.

What a wonderful request. I love my job. I love to take people to the beautiful places in Iceland, the places where the



PHOTO COURTESY OF GUNNAR ÞÓR GUNNARSSON

### Skálholtskirkja

history is almost visible right in front of you. Visualize how hard it was to gather food, travel and keep yourself warm for all the long winter nights. I love going on these tours and to do it over and over again but this, to go on an “ancestry hunt”, this was new to me and I loved the thought of it. Jackie had written in her email a few places which she had found out in her research for her family. It so happened that most of these places were in and around the most visited tourist

attractions in Iceland, the Golden Circle. The Golden Circle is actually more of a triangle where you visit Þingvellir (Thingvellir) the old parliament site and learn about the history of the vikings, the geology and the formation of the land under the ice. From Þingvellir the geyser area is visited and then Gullfoss our second largest waterfall. These places have long been visited by the kings of Iceland when the land was ruled by Denmark but I believe it wasn't called the Golden Circle until Vigdís Finnbogadóttir former president of Iceland was a guide travelling this famous route with curious foreigners.

I also received from Jackie some of the names of her ancestors. This came in handy for then I could easily trace how we are related. Now how is that possible? Well it is a long story in which I will try to explain in few words. When the vikings (which some think of as barbarians) settled, they formed societies where everybody had rights.

Even slaves couldn't be mistreated or else you would have to pay a fine, and some of these fines weren't small. The parliament site Þingvellir are actually one man's fine because he mistreated his slave. Enough about that. Where they settled, people had rights and if one would unfortunately kill a person in self defence then that person might have to pay compensations to the victims' relatives. Fair enough. But who were their relatives? The vikings kept

records on their ancestors so that it was easy for them to know to whom to pay if something happened. Well, the people of Iceland just kept on doing this and therefore I and everybody in Iceland can log into a place on the internet and type in a friend's name and see how we are related. I can also type in the name of the first settler in Iceland and see that he is actually my great great grandfather number 30.

After receiving these names of places I put together a route where we could visit all the sites of the Golden Circle, other beautiful places and the places her forefathers had lived in. The last few years had been very good for travelling. Sunny days and warm. Just how you like to remember it when you were young. Always sunny in the summertime and snow in the winter. We know this isn't just the case but this is what our brain does to make life easier on us. This summer on the other hand was a record rain summer. There hadn't been so much rain for fifty years or so in the south of Iceland while up north, the sun was shining most of the time. The day I met Jackie it was no different. Raining cats and dogs. In fact it rained so heavily that day I couldn't take but a few pictures before my camera gave up. Jackie was travelling with her husband and they had rented an apartment down town Reykjavík. I picked them up at 8:30 and



PHOTO COURTESY OF GUNNAR ÞÓR GUNNARSSON

### Tombstone

we started our journey. First stop was at a farm close to Þingvellir where we met a lovely woman in her fifties who lives there now. She told us, like others in so many of the stops, that she had moved to this farm and the descendants of the people that lived there hundred years ago were all gone away. This is no surprise for when technology came along and machines to the farms, there wasn't enough work for everybody. During WWI and specially WWII, people searching for work moved

to the towns. People sent their children to be educated and they didn't come back after their studies. In a way you can say that when the roads were built the people could more easily move away.

On our way we visited many of Jackie's ancestors' places along with the beautiful sites Pingvellir, Brúararfoss, Gullfoss and Geysir. We even visited a graveyard in one of her great grandmothers' parish. Many old gravestones were in the graveyard. It was very hard to read the engravings in the rain for there was moss growing on them and the letters had been eroded. After reading a few gravestones we found her great grandparents' grave. It was like she had found a long lost friend. What a joy. We were all happy and this made the entire trip.

On our way back to Reykjavik we stopped by Skálholt church. Skálholt is a former capital of Iceland or was until around 1780s when a great earthquake shook everything down and the bishop moved to Reykjavik. Of course Copenhagen in Denmark was the capital but Skálholt was the place where the center of culture resided as well as it housed a school founded in 1056. This school, now known as Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík, is still active and graduates hundreds of students every year.

Looking back, I am not sure if it actually stopped raining and the sun started to shine or if it is just my brain making good memory better of the things that happened this day.

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# The Seal's Skin

by Norma Guttormson

## An Icelandic Selkie Folktale

*Iceland's belief in Selkies is shared with the folklore of the Faeroe Islands, Scotland and Ireland. A Selkie is a seal that could take human form. These stories often weave tragic romantic themes.*

There was once some man from Myrdal in eastern Iceland who went walking among the rocks by the sea one morning before anyone else was up. He came to the mouth of a cave, and inside the cave he could hear merriment and dancing, but outside it he saw a great many sealskins. He took one skin away with him, carried it home, and locked it away in a chest. Later in the day he went back to the mouth of the cave; there was a young and lovely woman sitting there, and she was stark naked, and weeping bitterly. This was the seal whose skin it was that the man had taken. He gave the girl some clothes, comforted her, and took her home with him. She grew very fond of him, but did not get on so well with other people. Often she would sit alone and stare out to sea. After some while the man married her, and they got on well together, and had several children. As for the skin, the man always kept it locked up in the chest, and kept the key on him wherever he went. But after many years, he went fishing one day and forgot it under his pillow at home. Other people say that he went to church one Christmas with the rest of his household, but that his wife was ill and stayed at home;

he had forgotten to take the key out of the pocket of his everyday clothes when he changed. Be that as it may, when he came home again the chest was open, and both wife and skin were gone. She had taken the key and examined the chest, and there she had found the skin; she had been unable to resist the temptation, but had said farewell to her children, put the skin on, and flung herself into the sea.

Before the woman flung herself into the sea, it is said that she spoke these words:

*Woe is me! Ah, woe is me!  
I have seven bairns on land,  
And seven in the sea.*

It is said that the man was broken-hearted about this. Whenever he rowed out fishing afterwards, a seal would often swim round and round his boat, and it looked as if tears were running from its eyes. From that time on, he had excellent luck in his fishing, and various valuable things were washed ashore on his beach. People often noticed, too, that when the children he had had by this woman went walking along the seashore, a seal would show itself near the edge of the water and keep level with them as they walked along the shore, and would toss them jellyfish and pretty shells. But never did their mother come back to land again.

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# Helgi Olsen's Memoirs

## *Part V of a series of Helgi Olsen's memoirs*

### *Conclusion, continued from Volume 66 #1*

#### **H.O.'s Memoirs Part 21**

Things had become a bit upset on our farm. The farm had been lost to us, although we were allowed to stay on for a few years. Everything was unsettled with very little money coming in. When the railway came out as far as Oak Point, the settlers all switched their business dealing to there. This meant the store could no longer be operated. The farmers also forgot to pay up their indebtedness. The result was that Fred quit the store and the farm and went out teaching school. I was left alone with Mother. The farm had been lost to satisfy the wholesale dealers accounts. Mother went and stayed with her cousin at River Park and I went in (to the city) also and took a course at Central Business College, then on the second floor on the corner of William and King Streets. I got board and room at my brother Oliver's place, in exchange for tending the furnace and the bucking of the wood. This would be in the fall of 1909.

The year following I got employment with the J.H. Ashdown Hardware Company's retail store on the corner of Main and Bannatyne. The owner and founder of James H. Ashdown's Hardware Company was born in England. He came to Canada as a young lad in or about the year 1868. He was rather short in stature, with piercing blue eyes and a keen business sense. He started in the tinsmithing trade and peddled his wares on a one horse out fit in what was known as the Forks, later to be known as the City of Winnipeg.

With the influx of immigrants from

Europe, Mr. Ashdown set up shop on the corner of Main and Bannatyne. He progressed so well with his retail store, that he soon opened a wholesale hardware house on Bannatyne Avenue East. He later had a branch in Saskatoon, Calgary and Fort MacLeod.

When I started there, in the house furnishings department, incoming settlers were passing through Winnipeg at the highest point and so many were getting off and staying in the city. Just then retail sales were at their peak. Hotels and restaurants were opening up. New equipment had to be installed. Coffee urns, operated by steam, were set up, enamel and steel ware was imported from Hungary and Germany while stoves and ranges came in from the United States. These and many more lines, including tools, builder's supplies, paint, oil, glass and a full line of sports equipment and supplies, were handled by the retail department, on the first two floors, at first. Then the whole six-story building was used for this purpose. Each department was run as a separate unit and each was supposed to show a profit. The pay was low, but was supposed to be made up by the prestige of being a hardware clerk. The hours were from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm and until 10:00 pm on Saturday nights and on days before holidays. Advancement was slow. Many of the brighter minds left and started businesses of their own at some western town. Some did well and some failed. I stayed with the firm until the war broke out in August 1914.

Social life in the city was very lively, with theatres and movie houses all over. The most popular and classical theatre was the Walker

Theatre, on Smith and Ellice, later called the Odeon. Here was to be seen all the big travelling plays that were so popular before the advent of the talking picture era.

I remember seeing that wondrous play, Ben Hur, with the chariot race shown with twelve live horses galloping across the stage, running on a tread mill, so that during the whole race the horses were there before the audience. I saw those horses outside the back door of the theatre. They were really beautiful animals, all Arabians. This drama was something never to be forgotten. Other plays, dramas, grand operas and the appearance of the world's most beautiful singers, both male and female, Caruso, Nelson Eddy, just to name a few gave performances at the Walker. On Notre Dame Avenue and Adelaide Street was the Winnipeg Theatre, the home of their stock companies. The same group of actors performed their plays every week. This was where the average wage earner spent his leisure hours, once a week. This was before the era of popcorn and rowdy teenagers. Then there was the vaudeville, at the Orpheum Theatre on Fort Street and the Bijou on Main Street.

In Winnipeg's north end, on the corner of Dufferin and Main Streets, a beautiful theatre was built and here there were plays of a different type. One play, called Three Weeks, was performed there, but was stopped on its second performance. The love scenes were too realistic for the censors to permit so the theatre was condemned and locked up. It was later remodelled into an office building and apartment dwelling.

This was the age of the movie theatre. You could take in a matinee for fifteen cents, where no music was played. The evening prices were twenty-five to thirty-five cents with one piano player, or you could go downtown to the more classic theatres, with a full orchestra for fifty cents.

The centre of interest for us of Icelandic descent, was the old Good Templar's Hall on

Sargent Avenue. Here was the gathering of the clan. People coming into the city to seek work (anyone that had a hammer and a saw could qualify as a first class carpenter and get top wages) came to meet up with friends from his or her part of the country or get acquainted with new friends from some other part of the country. Here many a couple met for the first time and then shared their future life together. This was a very respectable hall for a good many years. Later a rougher element took over. The Hall became known the Goolie Hall. How the word originated is in some doubt, but there is no doubt, that the word did come from the fact that the Icelandic hockey teams were popular and the word goalkeeper became "goalkeeper" and so "gooley" became attached to this Icelandic-owned building.

In the winter of 1913-14, the war scare was on and business slackened down. The rosy boom of the immigration period was now dying down. When war was declared August 4, 1914, unemployment became rife. There were now two options. One was to join up in the army or go back to the farm. I was the only single man in our department so I was let out first. I was not ready to join at that time, so I choose to go back to the farm where I was of some use and could prepare myself for the future. I had no steady girl friend and did not feel this was the proper time to think of marriage. I felt sure that I would enlist at some future date, so it was just a matter of marking time.

### **H.O. Memoirs Part 22**

The years that were before the war were more or less waste years for me, years of marking time. I couldn't get started on anything definite. I knew that I would have to, sooner or later, join up in the army or be drafted after conscription was enforced.

I was getting tired of being homeless, depending on the good wishes and welfare of my relatives and friends. With that thought in mind, I took up a home on the northwest

quarter of section thirty-five, township eighteen, range west of the principal meridian. This was the next quarter east of Einar Johnson's farm. It was centrally located, ten miles east of the railway station of Clarkleigh and about mid way between the three towns of Oak Point, Lundar, and the town of Inwood. I built on this quarter a small log cabin where I could stay between jobs.

I now felt that the time was ripe for enlistment so I joined the army in October 1917. I was exempted for the term of the fishing season, as that was considered an important occupation. I was back in early March 1918, and reported at Minto Barracks (in Winnipeg) and started training. It was the order of the army that all training should be carried on in England so all troops were sent overseas as soon as all inoculations and immunizations were completed. I received some basic training and then on May 3, I was sent to England along with a draft of 600 men. We marched on foot from the barracks to the Canadian National Station on Main Street. I was amazed at the number of people who had gathered in the rotunda of the station. We were not allowed to mix up with the crowd to see who we knew but were marched right through on to the station platform and into the cars. Once we were safely aboard the train, the crowd was allowed in and those soldiers that were lucky enough to get a place at a window had a chance to say good-bye to their friends and sweethearts. We left Winnipeg with the good wishes of thousands.

The cars that we travelled in had wooden seats, the same as the old colonist cars used forty years before to bring the immigrants west. The meals were brought in by orderlies of the day, all very substantial and satisfying. We were taken off at intervals to stretch our legs by doing short route march and P.T. exercises. The men

would pass away the time by playing cards. Gambling was the order of the day though the regulations banned the showing of any money. I believe that gambling, of one sort or another, was one of the main reasons for unrest in the army. The men would bet their tobacco allowance and their shirts, then be broke until next payday came along.

We were three days on the train from Winnipeg to Halifax. The train went right on to the dock and we marched straight from the train to the bowels of the ship. As it was late in the afternoon when we went aboard, we got our bunks ready and retired early. Next morning we were given permission to go ashore and to report back at 10 pm.

I got a kick out of visiting Halifax, as this had been the home of my parents for three or four years back in the early 1880s. The Citadel Hill was still there. The tall Clock Tower was also still there. Three of us chummed together; Oli Olafson, called the bartender, as that was his occupation before he enlisted, and Stoney Gillis. He was a coal stoker with the CNR. We walked down to the waterfront and watched the many types of boats tied up at the dock and the busy harbour scene. It was here that a ship, with a cargo of munitions exploded doing so much damage to the waterfront. We wandered on into the residential area and noted the many nice homes and the many squalid type dwellings and the many dilapidated tenements, all the same type and so uniform in height. We had supper at a quiet restaurant on one of the side streets. The charge was only about thirty-five cents for a full course meal. We wandered around until dark then found our way back to the ship.

About midnight, we became aware of some disturbance going on above deck, but we did not pay it too much heed. Next morning a notice was posted up that no further leave of absence from the ship

would be granted. It appeared from the information gathered, that a few men had been more interested in the flavour of the water front liquor and the brothels than to sightseeing and had got into trouble.

One place of drinking had been almost completely wrecked by too much liquor. The MPs had been busy all evening quelling riots and bringing in drunks. We were confined to ship for the next four bright sunny days just because a few had got intoxicated and been causing a disturbance. (This was the common experience all through the war. A few put the seal on the majority.) We were confined on that ship for four or five days, then one night the ships sailed away silently. When we arrived on deck no land was to be seen, but ships were all around us: large ships, small ships, fast ships and slow ships. Our ship had waited until a convoy was assembled. There were thirteen ships in the convoy, guarded by destroyers, gunboats and airplanes. The sea was smooth as glass. The ships kept zigzagging first in this direction and then at almost right angles to the left. It took over thirteen days to reach the port of London.

The zigzagging kept up for three days. Then we were caught in the throes of a nasty storm. The boat rocked and shivered. We were locked below deck and were not allowed above deck. The men were getting seasick and were puking all over the bunks and the floor. The smell was getting unbearable. The only consolation, to my mind at least, was that every night, after lights were out, the men would start to sing. I was thrilled, in spite of my weak stomach, with the wonderful quality of some of the voices singing in such lovely harmony. I can still, in my minds eye, hear the songs so familiar to all: In The Evening by The Moonlight, Sweet Adeline, and so many other songs that lend themselves to choral singing. We even forgot our seasickness spells while listening. When we

were allowed up on deck, we discovered all the superstructure had been washed over board, even the spare washrooms. They had disappeared. But boy, did it feel good to be able to breath fresh air once again. Now we were short on toilet facilities so that long waiting lists formed below deck to use the toilets there. The air became dank and humid. The storm blew itself out in three days. What a relief it was to be allowed on deck.

I repeat. There is one fond recollection that remains in my memory from our enforced confinement below deck. That was the nightly chorus performed by a number of beautiful male voice singers. We even forgot our seasickness spells while listening in the total darkness. First one would start with singing some well-known song, and then others would join in. I don't think that any one, at any time, will recollect more harmonious singing and at a more welcome moment. When one lies awake in the dark, with no place to go and no place to relax in, a bit of soothing music adds peace and quiet to the soul.

On the eleventh day out from the port of Halifax, we were aroused from our slumber at 3:00 am, to fall in on deck. A U-Boat attack was feared. An American ship, one of the convoy, had been torpedoed but did not sink. It was able to move under its own power and was attempting to beach itself, so to save its cargo. As day light had come on, we could see that escorts had come out from Britain to protect the convoy from then on in. It was said that the U-Boat was sighted and sunk, as no further molestation was felt the rest of the voyage. Our ship left the convoy and sped along the south coast of England, past the White Cliffs of Dover and so into the Thames Estuary.

The ship docked at an east London pier. So the hazardous trip across the submarine filled ocean was accomplished without any serious incident.

# POETRY

## Of Dreams and Fate (Guðrún Ósvífsdóttir)

by Bailey Palsson

An island girl of superior beauty;  
a mind no less clever,  
in the aftermath of disturbed slumber  
Guðrún is found in want

In the wake of her dreams  
a curiosity arises  
that the daughter of Ósvíf  
finds hard to contain

An explanation to her dreams  
she seeks;  
the words of a kinsman,  
offers knowledge replete

And as she reveals  
the designs of her dreams;  
the impression left,  
Gest surely sees

A headdress tall and  
not well suited;  
was soon cast upon the tide.  
this union crumbles down

a decision borne  
on the brunt of humility  
the price for wounded pride  
is expensive indeed

A second dream of  
great despair;  
a treasure of silver  
is kept with care

This ring well suited  
and of great affection  
lasts but briefly –  
another claimed by honour's quest

But there is another,  
apart from dreams,  
for whom she falls  
appears on scene

One held most dear  
to be but lost to folly;  
chagrin is quick to follow  
when the mind overrules the heart

But a different suitor  
enters the stage,  
by a ring of gold  
he is portrayed

This third dream full  
of careless regard,  
the ring of gold  
is presently marred

to his dismay,  
this ring of gold,  
is pitted against  
his kin turned foe

but the conniving mind  
that weaves this plot –  
her spiteful ways  
deem her worst off

the slaying of Kjartan,  
an evil deed;  
bred from Bolli's  
chided hand

but a vengeance sought  
is soon repaid  
with honour at stake  
another is slain

and round and round  
the circle goes  
where it stops  
nobody knows

the years pass by  
and children grow,  
a guilty party,  
has seeds to sow

With Snorri the Goði,  
a pact is made;  
a cunning covenant  
of which is obeyed

Her thirst satiated  
and deception wrought,  
a new path is laid  
for her to trod

Now a golden helmet rests  
upon her head.  
another treasure;  
one hard to bear

Yet there's no intention  
to renege this gift,  
she is the one,  
whom he befits

But the best of intentions,  
where fate is concerned,  
will have no impact,  
for the last time she burns.

The loss of Þorkell,  
was the last straw,  
and Guðrun is off men  
once and for all

To the church she turns  
to bear her grief,  
for it offers solace,  
a sweet relief.

Thus puts an end  
to all her dreams,  
the truth to which,  
Gest had rightly seen

But for whom did her love  
surpass the rest?  
Though she treated him worst,  
she loved him best

"The most determined of women,"  
our heroine played,  
is now a life laid out  
for all to assay

*Rev. Stefan Jonasson*

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# Book Review

## The Seven Teachings and More

by Garry “Morning Star” Raven  
and Björk Bjarnadóttir



### Anisinaabeg share their traditional teachings with an Icelander

Björk is an Environmental Studies graduate from the University of Iceland. In 2003 she came to Canada as a visiting scholar at the University of Manitoba to study aboriginal traditional knowledge of plants as medicines. She connected with an Ojibway traditional teacher, Garry Raven and became his acolyte and companion until his death in 2010. He taught her that the Ojibway call themselves Ansiniaabeg. They are the original peoples lowered down to Mother Earth by Creator.

The book’s colophon lists Garry Raven and Björk as the primary authors but in her acknowledgements we see that the compilation and writing was done by Björk. She also lists Garry’s brother Raymond and a friend, Flora Ruck as contributors to the teachings. The book is divided into chapters and each of these describes a specific teaching or concept. Björk narrates the teachings of Garry Raven and the other contributors to reinforce the message of our responsibilities to Mother Earth. She uses a simple, straight-forward narrative. As she quotes her teacher: “We speak simple English and don’t use fancy words”. The book pulls the teachings together in an easy read format interspersed with excellent pencil illustrations by artist Gerald Folster.

She quotes Raymond Raven in the front of the book to introduce the book title

Reviewed by Elva Simundsson

*The Seven Teachings and More*

by Garry “Morning Star” Raven  
and Björk Bjarnadóttir

KIND Publishing, Department of  
Icelandic Language and Literature,  
University of Manitoba) xxiii, 129 p. 2013

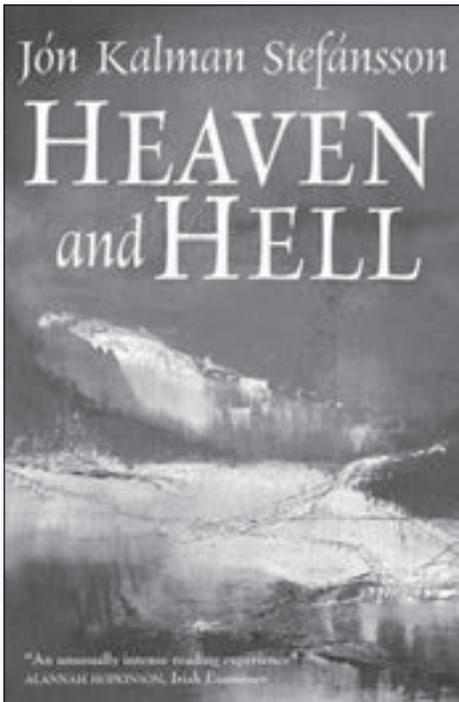
concept: “Like the seven teachings we were given: truth, honesty, love, respect, wisdom, humility and courage. Those are the things we are supposed to live by and that’s all we need to know.” Throughout the rest of the book there are frequent references back to these seven fundamentals. Not only should we live by these truths but it is also our responsibility to teach them to others. There are chapters devoted to the four elements: earth, water, air and fire. There are chapters devoted to the manifestations of the teachings through the pipe ceremony, sweat lodge, drum and tipi. There is a description on how we can use the medicine wheel for our own well being and that of our

communities. There is also a tie-in to the Christian faith and an explanation on how these teachings are not mutually exclusive.

Mother Earth has survived by cleansing herself from time to time through fires and floods. However, our unchecked industrialization has destroyed her natural abilities to heal herself. She has lost control of the environment that gives us clean water, air and nutrition. The basic message is that we need to take better care of Mother Earth so she can take care of us. With the passing of Garry Raven, the Anishinaabeg people have lost a traditional teacher. With Björk’s book, we have all gained access to his enlightened message.

## Heaven and Hell

by Jón Kalman Stefánsson



Reviewed by Kristine Perlmutter

*Heaven and Hell*

Jón Kalman  
Stefánsson

Translated by Philip  
Roughton.  
Fiction. Quercus,  
Imprint: McLehose  
Press, 2014



*Heaven and Hell*, the first book of a trilogy, in Philip Roughton’s masterful translation, is an introduction for English language readers to the work of Jón Kalman Stefánsson. The remaining two books in the series are *The Sorrow of Angels* and *The Heart of Man*.

Is it a historical novel? A philosophical

novel? A coming-of-age novel? A novel of the continual struggle between man and brutal natural forces? A novel of the response to loss? All of the above.

*“Some poems make you forget, forget the depression, the hopelessness, you forget your waterproof, the frost comes to you, says, got you and you’re dead”*

On the face of it, the story, which is told in a mere 208 pages, is a simple one. In Part I (The Boy, The Sea and the Loss of Paradise), a boy (unnamed throughout) joins his friend Barður in a trek across the bleak, frozen and dangerous landscape of West Iceland at the turn of the twentieth century. They struggle through the bitter cold to an ocean fishing hut to join the rest of their six man crew. When the terrible weather allows, they set out to search for cod. Barður, who has had his head in a book (a borrowed translation of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*), forgets his most critical piece of gear- his waterproof. The intense struggle is between man and the indomitable ocean “in an open coffin on the polar sea”. When conditions turn even more dangerous, he is without protection from the cold and wet, with tragic results.

In Part II (The Boy, The Village and the Profane Trinity), without his only friend, the boy leaves the fishing crew and goes on a perilous journey overland to return *Paradise Lost* on behalf of Barður. The extreme hardships he endures on his journey seem unimportant to him as he wrestles with the idea that he has nothing left to live for. Although they seem suspicious and unwelcoming at first, the villagers, and their interactions with him, help the boy to find that a new life is possible.

Although I may be accused of being a “spoiler” to have divulged so much of the plot, it is difficult to review this small book (only 208 pages) without doing so. The tale is a simple one; it is the telling that is magical. The descriptions of the privations endured by the characters are so vivid and

I had such a visceral reaction that I literally went for an extra blanket. I shared in the relief when shelter was reached and I was totally engaged. It reminded me of Stephan G. Stephansson’s description of the cold harshness of the Canadian prairie and of Halldór Laxness’s *Independent People*.

At the same time, I had to stop every so often to think about some phrase or to mull over the meaning of friendship and of life and death. The prose is truly poetic.

At first, Kalman’s use of tenses and punctuation (or lack of it) takes some getting used to. His long phrases are peppered with rhetorical questions and comments and it can be heavy going until you find the flow. The superb imagery makes it worth it.

This thought-provoking and moving novel will stay with you forever. It changes the way you look at the world and you keep on stopping to think about it long after the reading experience is finished. What more can an author hope for? It is well worth a read and “like an oyster-a glinting treasure in a rough shell” (Der Spiegel), a rare combination of truth and beauty. I am looking forward to translations of the final two books of the trilogy and of some of his other works.

*Some words are bullets, others are notes of a violin. Some can melt the ice around one’s heart, and it is even possible to send words out like rescue teams when the days are difficult and we are perhaps neither living nor dead. However, words are not enough and we become lost and die out on the heaths of life if we have nothing to hold but a dip pen.*

Jón Kalman Stefánsson was born in Reykjavik in 1963. His novels have been three times nominated for the Nordic Council’s Literary Prize. He has won the Icelandic Literature Prize, the P.O. Enquist Award and the Bookseller’s Prize.

Philip Roughton is the Reykjavík translator of the works of Halldór Laxness and of a biography of Laxness by Halldór Guðmundsson.

# Contributors

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

GUNNAR GUNNARSSON was born in 1964 in Reykjavík. He, like so many Icelanders has two professions. He is an electronic engineer working for Vaki Aquaculture Systems and also has his own company, Season Tours as manager and guide. Season Tours was founded in 2010 specializing in small groups and private tours all over Iceland.

NORMA GUTTORMSSON, M.Ed., is a second generation Icelandic Canadian. She is the daughter of the late Dr. Pétur Guttormsson and Salín Reykdal. Norma is a retired ESL instructor living in North Vancouver. She has four children and four grandchildren.

KRISTÍN JÓHANNSDÓTTIR is an Icelandic citizen who spent twelve years living in Canada. She taught at the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba for six years and then went on to finish her PhD in Linguistics at the University of British Columbia. She spent 2008-2010 with the Vancouver International Olympic Committee organization as linguistics coordinator culminating with an incredible insider's view of the event. She now lives in Reykjavík where she teaches at University of Iceland and plays hockey in her spare time.

BAILEY PALSSON was born and raised in Hnaua, MB. She grew up on a dairy farm and after getting her B.A. in Icelandic studies and completing the medical radiologic technology program, she currently works as an X-ray technician and takes pretty pictures of peoples' bones.

KRISTINE (JAKOBSON) PERLMUTTER was a member of the board of *The Icelandic Canadian magazine* for 25 years. In her retirement, she is very interested in *The Icelandic Connection* and is a contributor from time to time.

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

SIGRID STEFANSON lives in Calgary where she works as a Registered Nurse. Frequent trips home to Gimli are a necessity to keep sons Bergi and Bjorn connected to their roots.

MALLORY SWANSON was born in Cavalier, ND and grew up in Moorhead, MN. She attended the University of Minnesota for both her undergraduate and graduate degrees. She is a Speech Language Pathologist for St. Paul Public School District. She is secretary of the Icelandic American Association of Minnesota and a member of the Hekla Club. She was a Snorri participant in 2011 and has been to Iceland three times and cannot wait to go back.

ELIN THORDARSON, an *Icelandic Connection* board member, is currently working in the Winnipeg libraries. She is a graduate (October 2011) of the University of Manitoba's Icelandic Department's Masters program. Her thesis *A History of the Unconsoled: The Plays of Guttormur J. Guttormsson* is the first graduate level piece to be written on The Poet of New Iceland's works.





PHOTO: SIGNÝ MCINNIS

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## The Back Page

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The Icelandic Camp kids visiting the Icelandic horses. Shown: Hana Sigurdson on Odinn with Mallory Swanson (standing beside) at Allan Johnson's farm in Arnes.

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