ICELANDIC CONNECTION

ISSN #1920-423X

Vol. 71 #3 (2020)

As I have more experience with Icelandic Roots, I am becoming more and more excited about it! This is such an amazing service to the Icelandic community! – *With best regards and great appreciation, Joann*

Thank you for giving of your time to make a difference to so many. Thank you for all that you do to help make Icelandic Roots one of the world's most credible and robust genealogy databases! – *Louise*

Your Icelandic Roots site is the best I have seen. – *Tryggvi*

Wow, wow, wow! Hello cousin! Thank you guys so much for the family info! A friend told me about you guys and the great work you do. – *Lori*

You hard working people at Icelandic Roots Database have ALL the thoroughly researched information! And for that, I am thankful! – *Kari*

Thank you, thank you, thank you for all you do on behalf of Icelanders around the world. Without you, many of us would never have found our families! – *Blessings, Jonena*

ICELANDIC ROOTS

Find Your Story

Connect with Your Cousins

WWW.ICELANDICROOTS.COM

ICELANDIC CONNECTION

VOLUME 71, NO 3 (2020) • WINNIPEG, CANADA

ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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

MANAGING EDITOR Lorna Tergesen
CORPORATE SECRETARY Lorna Tergesen
DESIGN & TYPOGRAPHY Catherine McConnell

SENIOR EDITORS
FAMILIAR ESSAYS Elva Simundsson
FICTION Avery Simundsson
INTERVIEWS Heiða Simundsson
REVIEWS Lorna Tergesen
SCHOLARLY ESSAYS Elin Thordarson
CONTRIBUTOR Stefan Jonasson

REGIONAL EDITORS
SEATTLE Rob Olason

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
BUSINESS MANAGER–TREASURER Rick Loftson
ADVERTISING & PROMOTION Allison Holm

SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADVERTISING & EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE
Icelandic Connection, Box 1156, Gimli, Manitoba R0C 1B0 CANADA
CONTACT Lorna Tergesen (204) 642–9650 for inquiries about the magazine

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
WE ACCEPT U.S. & CANADIAN FUNDS, MASTERCARD AND VISA
ON OUR WEBSITE: Payable by Credit Card or PayPal at www.icecon.ca

Typed submissions of articles, book reviews, short stories and poetry are welcome.
Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self–addressed, stamped envelope.

E–MAIL SUBMISSIONS WELCOME editor@icecon.ca
VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT www.icecon.ca

Printed in Winnipeg, Canada by Dycom Direct Mail and Lögberg–Heimskringla
ISSN: 1920–423X

ON THE COVER

Top (L-R): Anita Daher, Trevor Kristjanson, Caitlin Brown
Centre (L-R): Laurie Bertram, Freya Björg Olafson,
Lindy Vopnfjord (above), Dr. Ryan Eyford
Bottom (L-R): John K Samson, Sigrún Stella Bessason, Ryan Sigurdson

Editorial

COVID-19

by Lorna Tergesen

COVID-19, the corona virus that has decimated the plans and aspirations of so many of us during this year has affected each of us in so many different ways. Despite the fact that we are coping relatively well in following the guidelines and staying virus-free in our little corner of Canada, COVID-19 has turned the world upside down and there has been a great deal of stress for every one of us. To cope with the anxiety we have been feeling, we can focus on all the positive things that have been accomplished during the isolation time. For some it was taking daily walks and working to keep our bodies healthy or doing something creative like baking bread or finishing that piece of knitting that has been languishing forever. Maybe it is to finally get to those clean up jobs that have been put off for years. BUT for our frontline workers it has been a time to work harder than ever, often under some very undesirable conditions. We are so thankful for their efforts and care.

This down-time has given the artists in our world the opportunity to focus their creativity into honing their chosen visual and performance mediums. In this year of COVID-19, it is our journal's attempt with this issue to brighten your day with inspiring stories of several youthful artists from our Icelandic-North American cultural community.

Although some of these people have been isolated, left dealing with cancelled events and frustrating travel changes, they are still creating thoughtful, challenging work. With reflection and positivity, they inspire us to move on. Through ingenuity and hard work, they have made their mark and are still doing so. Their talents are so varied but those that are featured in this issue give us a glimpse of what we can be so proud of in our cultural community.

Their creative and enthusiastic approach to life is so affirming. What they have learnt from their historical culture is always a surprise and a gift. Regardless of the medium or venue, glimpses of our collective heritage seem to prevail. Their Afis, Ammas and parents should be so proud.

Icelanders and those of us of Icelandic descent may be known as a group for our stubbornness or the argumentative blood that runs in our veins. It need not be used for negative thoughts or projects, but with reaffirming talented use of time and energy.

To all the featured artists and contributing writers, I say thank you. Keep up the good work. We do appreciate you and look forward seeing the progression of your endeavors.

Freya Björg Olafson

by Megan Mueller

Congratulations to Freya Björg Olafson for her winning the Sobey's Art Award longlist for 2020.

In this covid time there was no ceremony or gathering with the other winners but the honour was accepted and noted by in the art world. We will share our pride in her winning.

Freya has successfully used modern technology and innovation to strongly support her ability to tell stories in dance and movement, making her a very special, talented young woman.

Her list of awards and grants are admirable. As an intermedia artist Freya works with video, audio, animation, motion capture, AR / VR, painting, and performance. Her praxis engages with identity and the body, as informed by technology and the Internet. Freya's work has been exhibited and performed internationally at the Bauhaus Archive (Berlin), SECCA – South Eastern Center for Contemporary Art (North Carolina), LUDWIG Museum (Budapest), and The National Arts Center (Ottawa). Freya has benefitted from residencies, most notably through EMPAC – Experimental Media & Performing Arts Center (New York) and Counterpulse (San Francisco). Freya holds an MFA in New Media from the Transart Institute / Donau Universität. The recipient of numerous grants and awards, her honours include the 'Buddies in Bad Times Vanguard Award for Risk and Innovation' at Toronto's SummerWorks Festival, the 'Making A Mark Award' from the Winnipeg Arts Council as well as the 'Sobey Art Award' longlist in 2020. In

PHOTO: FREYA BJÖRG OLAFSON, YORK UNIVERSITY

July 2017 Freya accepted a position as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Dance at York University.

All internet sites are included so it is strongly recommended that you look them up, to see the wonderful interpretations of Freya's work.

Freya Björg Olafson is the daughter of Kevin Baldur Olafson and Penny Lynn Olafson (nee Magnusson). Freya's great-great-grandparents on her father's side are Ólafur Oddson and Kristbjörg Antoníusardottir who came from Iceland in 1879. On her mother's side, Freya's great-great-grandparents are Sesselja Daníelsdóttir and Magnús Hallgrímsson

who arrived at Gimli in the fall of 1875 and moved to Ingolfsvík on Míkley (Hecla Island) where they lived for several years prior to settling at Nés in Riverton, which was their home from 1883 until 1890.

In 2006-2007 Freya created a performance, video works and paintings as part of a series called 'New Icelander' which investigated notions of cultural identity as part of her MFA thesis. Since 2006 Freya has been involved with núna (now) as a curatorial committee member helping to plan and coordinate arts programming in Manitoba as well as a few events in Iceland. The mandate of núna (now) has been to generate exchange amongst contemporary artists in Iceland and Canada. Whereas historically this diaspora has found satisfaction in narrowly defined determinants, núna (now) has been interested in fueling broader conversation by exhibiting and supporting artists whose practices intersect and explore the significance of the 'cultural connection' between Iceland and Canada through interpretation of cultural/postcolonial identities, collaboration, and the engagement of ongoing settler/indigenous relations.

Corporeal meets ethereal: Provocative performance blends video, dance and VR
by Megan Mueller

January 10, 2020. Brainstorm, News, Performance & Design, School of the Artsmuellerm

Professor Freya Björg Olafson's body of work has been recognized as cutting edge on an international stage. This month, the intermedia artist in the Department of Dance premieres a new performance work in Winnipeg that promises to deliver a heady and immersive experience for all.

The best contemporary art can't be pigeonholed into one genre because, more often than not, it combines a variety of approaches in new and innovative ways that press or even coerce the viewer/participant into considering their own reality. Simply put: It demands more of the viewer. This is the engaging terrain of York University Professor and intermedia artist Freya Björg Olafson.

Premiering last year (Oct. 31 to Nov. 3, 2019) at the Prairie Theatre Exchange (PTE) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Olafson's "MÆ – Motion Aftereffect" is

OVERLAID PHOTO CREDIT: IAN MCCAUSLAND

"MÆ – Motion Aftereffect" series, video stills: Freya Olafson (2017)

an unforgettable interactive, multimedia experience. It successfully blends dance, video, audio and virtual reality (VR), blurring the lines between the real and the virtual.

"The MÆ project is a new work that aims to catalyze conversations about contemporary culture and performance while imagining societies future with advances in virtual reality, artificial intelligence, 360 video and related technologies," Olafson explains.

"Boldly, and with levity and humour, Freya's imagination and craft gives us a playful window into a world that we can only begin to imagine," says PTE's Artistic Director, Thomas Morgan Jones.

Trailer for MÆ-Motion Aftereffect Premiere Oct. 30 to Nov. 3, 2019 from Freya Olafson is on Vimeo. Vimeo. https://vimeo.com/361544296

Olafson's work combines different genres in a whole new way

Olafson came to York University just over two years ago. If one were to study her work over the years, to trace her evolution as an artist, it would be clear that she has embraced tremendous dexterity. She easily and naturally ventures into different media or genres, unfettered by conventional barriers.

A dozen years ago, for example, Olafson was a bold figurative painter. In the photo below Olafson sits in front of her *New Icelander Series* (2006). "In my early studio work, I based performances off of paintings and I created sets and props. This is before I started integrating video into my live works," she explains.

Today, she is best known as an interdisciplinary artist and pioneering dancer/choreographer on the world stage. Between these two points in time, there have been many exciting developments in her work that drove the seamless shift from painting (a static, two-dimensional art form) to dance and VR – kinetic, three-dimensional art forms that engage viewers in wholly new ways.

Her most recent work centres around identity and the body informed by technology and the Internet, no doubt informed by her six years of classical training at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. This new work considers what it means to be present in our contemporary screen-obsessed world and constructs an experience that interrogates the impact of technology on our bodies and psyches.

It's not a heavy-handed delivery; Olafson's performances are elegant, sophisticated. They feature evocative and multi-layered images with figures and shapes disappearing and re-emerging in a ghostly, elusive way. For audiences, the impact of these works is borne of the experience in its entirety.

"Motion Aftereffect" hone in an out-of-body experience

"Motion Aftereffect" is a body of work that comprises multiple short video works, this upcoming live performance and in the near future a VR installation for exhibition in galleries. Funded by the Manitoba Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts, "MÆ – Motion Aftereffect" was developed, from 2017 to 2019, through residences in Montreal, Portland, Winnipeg and San Francisco.

The premiere in Winnipeg is the latest incarnation of the series.

Olafson explains what is going on and what the viewers would see: "Onstage, I am working with live digital painting with a green screen glitch effect. Often in my work, I aim to conflate the live body with projections of digital figures/avatars. I also work with found video footage of folks testing out their home motion capture systems. In a later section of the work I

actually use the VR headset."

This work asks viewers to consider their own reality, through VR technology, to effectively destabilize meaning(s) of the corporeal body.

PHOTO: HUGH CONACHERE

Freya Björg Olafson in *AVATAR*

As Olafson noted, the project references and uses a variety of Internet content – such as material from open source motion capture libraries, ready-made 3D human models and monologues of individuals recounting their experiences with VR in live gameplay, explorative worlds and VR porn. "These texts and visuals combine with YouTube monologues about out-of-body experiences and astral projection," she explains.

In an out-of-body experience, a person perceives the world from a location outside of their physical body. Astral projection (sometimes called astral travel) describes a person's intentional out-of-body experience. This assumes the existence of a soul or consciousness, called an 'astral body,' that is separate from the physical body and capable of travelling outside and far beyond it – in fact, throughout the universe.

The result is a one-of-a-kind experience for viewers.

What's next for Olafson? Upcoming publications include a score/script of her performance work *AVATAR* as part of Canadian Playwrights Press' 2021 anthology on Digital Theatre in Canada.

Funding acknowledgement: The development of "MÆ – Motion Aftereffect" was possible via the AR/VR Artist Research Residency Pilot organized by Oregon Story Board, Eyebeam and Upfor Gallery in Portland as well as the 13th annual Montréal Choreographic Workshop. In 2017, this work was developed through the CounterPulse (San Francisco) 'Artist Residency Commissioning Program' with lead support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, the Zellerbach Family Foundation, and the Ken Hempel Fund for the Arts.

To learn more about Olafson, visit her website: freyaolafson.com, or Faculty profile page, https://ampd.yorku.ca/profile/freya-bjorg-olafson/. To learn more about the show in Winnipeg, visit her website or the PTE site.

To learn more about Research & Innovation at York, follow us at @YUResearch; watch our new animated video, which profiles current research strengths and areas of opportunity, such as Artificial Intelligence and Indigenous futurities; and see the snapshot infographic, a glimpse of the year's successes.

Night Windows: John K Samson's Flawed Heroes

by Logan Stefanson

It is widely accepted as Manitoba custom that by a certain age, you have heard the song "One Great City" by the local group The Weakerthans. It is a wry and tongue in cheek ode to the capital city of the province, Winnipeg, a central hub where numerous Manitobans either live or must travel to regularly. The songs lyrics were written and sung by The Weakerthans' frontman and central creative force, John K. Samson, and he sings of Winnipeg's "darker grey breaking through a lighter one", the "thousand sharpened elbows in the underground", and of course the horror of getting stuck in rush hour traffic. Each verse ending with the often-heard local phrase, "I hate Winnipeg". The reason this song is so widely shared amongst Manitobans goes beyond just being funny, this song succinctly captures with a few simple words how every Manitoban often feels about Winnipeg. And therein lies the secret power of John K. Samson's writing; he knows exactly what you are going through and knows exactly how to put it into words. And what is special about that ability is that it is not limited to just Manitobans, Samson's poetry and music have touched fans worldwide, his name now synonymous with literary wit, stunning realism, and perhaps the most important, honesty.

John K. Samson was born in Winnipeg, the son of Eleanor and Tim Samson.

Samson's musical journey began with the Winnipeg based political hardcore punks Propagandhi, a perfect outlet for his growing interest in politics and ethics. Propagandhi made a real statement in 1996 with their second album *Less Talk More Rock*, a pointed and intentional rally

against the sexists, racists and homophobes they saw infiltrating their punk audience. This would ultimately be Samson's last record as the band's bassist, as he found his song writing style moving in a more pop based direction. "I can appreciate Nirvana, but I understand Green Day" said the writer when asked about his punk roots. "I feel like I could play in a Green Day covers band, but I simply wouldn't know what to do in a Nirvana one, you know". When it was decided that some of his newest songs written for Propagandhi were not a fit for the aggressively fast and heavy band, Samson broke off and began his new musical path.

His newly formed group was called The Weakerthans, and they set right to work, re- recording Samson's Propagandhi originals and churning out originals. At this point The Weakerthans still had a punk edge to their sound, but more laid back, almost folky at point, all based around Samson's sharply written snapshots of heartbreak and malaise in the heart of the continent. The city of Winnipeg has always been a central creative figure in Samson's work, either as the backdrop to a story or the main character itself.

> "I'm fascinated by that question of identity. The political punk scene I come from encouraged a healthy distrust of national identity, and that was one of the things that led me to writing about Winnipeg. There was something radical about focusing on the local which appealed to me".

Their debut album *Fallow* was released and followed up by the album *Left and Leaving*, cementing their acclaim and style as Neil Young-esque folk rockers with a literary twist; critics had started to move on from their previous Propagandhi comparisons. Once again, the city of Winnipeg acts as a stage for all of Samson's stories; regret over lost love, the melancholy of losing your favourite old building to new developments, communicating with long lost friends. Stories that weave together deep sorrow and melancholy with Samson's unique pluckiness and sense of humor, making you smile as quickly as it can make you cry.

2003's *Reconstruction Site* saw The Weakerthans move to a major record label (Epitaph), and Samson's song writing style expanding. Presented with songs in the structure of a thematically curated short story collection, we move onto songs that tell such stories as the first arctic expedition with French speaking penguins, to a solemn ode to a fraternal brotherhood and their rituals, and the aforementioned Winnipeg hate anthem *One Great City*. The album also features the first encounter with a recurring character in the John K Samson canon; Virtute, the house cat just doing her best to care for her alcoholic and depressive guardian. Such characters perfectly embody a recurring narrative in Samson's writing; the sensitivity to recognize one's problems, but the helplessness to really change anything. The Weakerthans are not all doom and gloom, quite the opposite in fact. Their songs are an act of defiance against the void, with most songs ending on an optimistic hope, or a promise of change. The album is a further expansion of Samson's philosophy of writing fully rounded and flawed characters.

> "I have this impulse to try to understand other people's lives as a political act of empathy, and also to understand about myself. I don't think anyone really exists alone. We're all shaped by other people. So exploring those characters has always been interesting to me".

By this point The Weakerthans had amassed a loyal fanbase both local and worldwide, who responded not just to

the dire honesty of Samson's pain, but his literary astuteness. How many other bands at the time could sneak P.G. Wodehouse quotes in the middle of a rock song? His metaphors can be understood by anyone who has ever felt loss, loneliness and longing, but truly rewards an active listener willing to read and research. The band released *Reunion Tour* in 2006, which at the time of this writing is the last album of original music by The Weakerthans.

Samson never lost the creative drive though. He continued to be the co-founder and managing editor of ARP Publishing, located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. A musical project focused on Manitoban provincial roads turned into Samson's solo record *Provincial*, released in 2012, where his tradition of blending real life scenarios with historically informed fantasy matured into his most confident product yet. It should be no surprise that at this point in his career Samson had no trouble making an ode to a long torn down Salvation Army Surplus Store one of the most emotionally devastatingly beautiful musical moments of the year. While Samson has inhabited the role of Manitoba's official folk rock troubadour, it's a position he inhabits somewhat reluctantly.

> "I always want my songs to, if they can, emerge from the life I live, instead of the other way around," Samson said in a 2016 Interview. "I don't want to be kind of grasping for things to write about. I want it to emerge naturally out of the community I live in and the people I encounter in it. I do feel like that's more important to me. My daily life in the community is more important to me than writing about it".

It was during this time Samson cemented himself as a truly compelling solo performer, his concerts feel like a very effective rehab meeting, where its simply his turn to speak honestly. Its not uncommon to see the whole crowd singing along word for word, and there's rarely a dry

John K Samson and Christine Fellows

eye in the house. In 2016, Samson released his second solo effort, *Winter Wheat*, which he considers to be a spiritual Weakerthans album. The album is noticeable that it concludes the long running story of the cat Virtute and her newly out of rehab owner.

> "I didn't expect to be able to find a happy ending for that story, and I do think of it as a happy ending, so I was grateful those songs arrived like strange gifts when I needed them".

The album features contributions from several Weakerthans members, as well as Samson's partner Christine Fellowes, a prolific musician, artist and poet.

As of this writing, Samson's most recent recording is *Millenium For All*, a protest song against harsh security restrictions placed in downtown Winnipeg's Millenium Library, an institution he and partner Christine Fellowes held the positions of Writers in Residence in 2017. Samsons dedication to community support and accessibility in the city he loves is a recurring theme that can be traced all the way back to his earliest works as a young punk. In Samson's view, he never stopped being a punk.

> "I still think of myself as punk, because the way I became empowered to play music is entirely due to punk bands. I listened to lots of other kinds of music, but punk is what allowed me to actually play music".

What can be said for certain though, is that Samson's words and music have captured prairie life in all of its eccentricities and flaws across decades, his voice will haunt Winnipeg avenues and backlanes for years to come. There is a reason every Manitoban is shown *One Great City* at an early age, it's the invitation and the motto of an exclusive frame of mind. We can hate Winnipeg and Manitoba because we love it enough to live here.

Lindy Vopnfjord

by Kris Vopnfjord

The hardest part about being a Canadian musician is being a musician in Canada. Canada is really very big and that makes for quite a long drive. I have yet to make that road trip myself but my "little" brother Lindy *(he's 6'8")* has…many times. Lindy is a professional singer/songwriter, entertainer and recording artist. We've been close brothers all his life and since we were kids music has been a huge part of our lives.

We grew up in the same house as our father did in the West End of Winnipeg. On weekends we lived in our cottage in Gimli. Our parents, Len and Karen, were amateur singers and entertainers and by the time we were able to hold a tune and climb onto a stage Lindy and I were part of the family group. The group was known as The Hekla Singers and consisted of our family of four, our cousins Kristin and Erika Stewart-Hay and Tristin Tergesen. We practised and and practised and learned to sing old Icelandic folk songs in Icelandic with the help of our Afi, Axel Vopnfjord *(a long-time Editor of this magazine)*, who wrote the words phonetically on large chart paper stuck to the wall. None of us kids had any idea what we were saying, we just knew that it sounded better the more we practiced.

We performed at multicultural events throughout the Province and as far away as Manitoba's representative in a big inter-Provincial dance festival in Quebec *(we were the only performers that didn't have to dance)*. One night we had a big show in the Winnipeg Convention Centre. We knew it was a big show because Mom told us to "smile big boys, smile like you really mean it!" because out there in the audience is Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. I guess we did alright that night because Lindy and I were summoned to join him at his round plastic table with men who wore sunglasses inside and didn't have to smile. But our favourite show to perform at every year was at Íslendingadagurinn on the Gimli Folk Festival Stage in our Icelandic wool sweaters and woollen socks in the scorching heat of August.

But a big change came one day when Lindy and I were high school age. Our Dad was hired by the City of Victoria to be its

Director of City Planning… and we moved. By then we had both become budding musicians, capable guitarists, vocalists and songwriters. Our folk/rock musical tastes, our vocal harmonies and our songwriting blended well with our brotherly love. And so we put together a band. We added a bass guitarist, a drummer and a violinist. And what a band it was! Within a year "Northern Junk" was the most popular band in Victoria. For a glorious short three years we stood together, brothers, side by side on brightly lit stages, singing songs we wrote to people who paid money to come to hear us, to drink beer, to dance, and to buy our t-shirts and even though some of us in the band were too young to be in bars. Good fortune enabled our Afi to hear our music and he gave us the money to record our one and only album and make CD's. Afi didn't live to hear it but Dad and I put one in his jacket pocket as we said our last goodbye.

After a few wonderful but short years together our band broke up as each of us pursued other paths in life, me in teaching and others in medicine and business. Except Lindy! Lindy had but one calling and so one day in January, the day of the heaviest snowfall in the history of Victoria, he and his guitar left in his car to move to Toronto, the only city in Canada where he could "make it" in music. He got as far as Chilliwack just east of Vancouver. All traffic was stopped and everyone was directed to stay overnight in nearby schools and community centres. Except Lindy! He had a gig booked that night in Trail, BC some 500 kilometres to the east. So he waited until he saw an ambulance following a snowplow heading east on the Trans Canada Highway. With headlights turned off he snuck in behind as the third vehicle in the cavalcade and made it to the gig in Trail a few minutes before midnight where he sang for an audience of three. It was with that dogged determination that he arrived in Toronto several days later.

Twenty five years have passed since then and Lindy has "made it". It wasn't easy at first. He knew no one in Toronto and had nothing but his talent, his big friendly personality and his perseverance. I'll never forget him telling me that one time he was down to his last quarter which he used to buy a turnip for his only meal of the day. But there is nothing that Lindy loves more than performing to a live audience. So that's how he started…he performed at open mics for free in every venue that would have him.

Lindy's music has been leaving a lasting impression on audiences since he released his debut studio album in 1995. Listeners have fallen in love with his mile-wide smile and magnificent talent at house parties, bars, embassies, theatre halls and large festivals. He has toured throughout Canada from L'Anse aux Meadows,

Newfoundland to Lasquiti on Vancouver Island, in much of north eastern United States, the U.K. and Iceland. There have been many memorable performances but a few stand out. Receiving a standing ovation from a sold out audience in Toronto's Massey Hall was certainly one. Opening the show for two sold out concerts marking the 30th Anniversary of Iceland's most popular band, Nydonsk, in Harpa, Reykjavík's splendid new concert hall was another. Performing on the main stage at the Winnipeg Folk Festival in his home town was a dream come true for Lindy. But nothing can be more rewarding for him than playing at the Gimli Folk Festival, a festival that his parents founded more than 40 years ago. Over the course of time these many, many live performances have resulted in a loyal fan base of thousands.

Lindy records album, *State of the Heart*, 2020

Lindy is a story teller and has written literally hundreds of songs on a range of topics from love to human rights, politics, his heritage and beauty. He has recorded eight albums which have received radio play on CBC, Sirius XM and others. Some of his songs have found their way into TV shows and movies. A recent one, "No Place Left to Land", soundtracks the 2019 documentary on the life of Margret Atwood, "A Word After a Word After a Word is Power". And Lindy's voice has been heard by you, dear reader, without you knowing it on commercials for the likes of MacDonalds, Telus and Maynards Candies.

His most recent album, *State of the Heart* was released on May 22 of this year to critical accolades. Allen Steinberg in Canadian Beats magazine writes, "State of the Heart" is a state of the art Canadian folk record. Vopnfjord has exhibited emotion, pristine story telling abilities, and memorable melodies in both his singing and instrumentation. His eighth record is poised to be his most successful ever".

Lindy will keep on writing and recording. But his love and passion are above all else given to his role as the devoted father to seven-year-old Joni and soon to be five-year-old Gus Ragnar. They are already following in their fathers footsteps up the stairs and onto the stage whenever they can. Perhaps John Apice in Americana Highways magazine best puts it in his review of the last song in Lindy's new album. "The glorious and realistically sad "Until I Have to Let You Go"…is a masterpiece.

A gentle tale about a father's thoughts as he teaches his child to ride a bike. How the words "until I have to let you go"is applied between letting go of the back of the bike, to when he has to really let go of his child. This is memorable. How many songwriters take time to explore poignantly such a difficult time in one's life? I think it's brilliant in its simplicity. Enough to swell tears in a parent's eyes."

On the Path of my Ancestors

by Anita Daher

The characters authors create are on a journey, be it to solve a mystery, to win a race against time, or achieve some other tangible goal. But it is internal need that drives them, as it does us – authors and readers. People. This is what gives their lives, and ours, texture. I wasn't aware of a recurring theme in my work until after my first few novels, someone asked. "Why are your characters always alone?" The question startled me. Solitary, certainly, but not lonely. They were searching. But for what? In some ways they were like their author, with clues lodged in the events of my life thus far.

For as long as I can remember, I've yearned for connection. This isn't unusual to the human condition, but as a child, without being able to name what wasn't there, this need deepened during many family moves. I began life as an "air force brat" in Summerside, Prince Edward Island. When I was five, we moved to Moose Jaw, SK, and from there to Churchill, MB, Baker Laker, NU, Brandon and Winnipeg, MB and Saskatoon, SK. After high school, a career in aviation took me to Prince Albert, SK, Lynn Lake and Thompson, MB (where I married), Yellowknife, NT, Sault Ste. Marie, ON, and finally back to Winnipeg, the city where my husband was born and raised. We decided we'd moved enough, and this was where we would stay. I settled – physically.

PHOTO: LEIF NORMAN

Still, I yearned. It was always there, throughout our moves, this gnawing thing at the edge of a mysterious "empty." Growing up I'd always loved writing but lacked the confidence to pursue it. While in Thompson, I left the world of aviation to stay home with our young children. My thoughts turned again to story. By this time, I'd conveniently forgotten my lack of confidence, or perhaps I was just too busy chasing toddlers to think about it. I wrote, and eventually my first novel caught the interest of a publisher. I've been at it ever since.

A few years ago, I began work on a middle grade novel called *Forgetting How to Breathe*, about a thirteen-year-old girl in Manitoba's foster care system who finds purpose after being placed in a home close to Gimli, and learns that it is okay to trust, and love. I began with three elements I wished to explore: an alternative family, an Interlake setting, and Icelandic horses. My love for "Iceys" began years earlier when

I met two at a stable in Yellowknife, NT owned by the local vet, who had a fondness for the breed. My love for the Interlake, and in particular, Gimli, began not long after our family moved to Winnipeg in 2004. Every stroll along the pier was never long enough. I began to wonder about my own Icelandic ancestors, of whom I knew nothing.

My father had vague childhood memories of an aunt who would travel to Iceland each summer to visit family, but that was all. Their Icelandic history was never talked about – not that he could recall – and the details we had were few. My great-great-grandparents, Gudny and John Magnus, came over in the late 1800s, but we didn't know exactly when. We didn't know if they married in Canada, or before they left. We didn't know where in Iceland they'd come from, only that they'd ended up in Penetanguishene, Ontario, on the shore of Lake Huron's Georgian Bay, and had a cottage in what is now Port McNicoll. Magnus Beach now marks the spot where the family cottage stood. During a visit with my parents in BC, I pulled a box of treasured old photos from the basement in search of additional clues, but there were none. After a few weekends lost down the rabbit hole of ancestry research online, I had to accept and move on. After all, I had a book to write!

Thanks to a friend with a cottage at Winnipeg Beach, and time spent in Gimli at an Airbnb cottage not far from the Aspire theatre, I sunk into the world of my novel and got 'er done. Little did I know, my journey had just begun.

With the novel finished, still basking in the euphoria of having the final proof sent to the printer, I prepared for the launch. My publisher asked for a new author photo, and so I visited local photographer Leif Norman, well known for his excellent work within Winnipeg's Arts community. Because we were Facebook friends, I knew that he had recently begun exploration into his own Icelandic heritage. Icelandic horses, Icelandic community, and now a photographer of Icelandic heritage. I liked the synergy. I burbled about the novel, told him about my own sliver of Icelandic ancestry, and how the details of my great-great-grandparents' arrival in Canada had been lost. He grinned and said, "We are probably cousins." I thought he was joking.

He explained that because only a few thousand Icelanders came over in the late 1800s, many Manitobans of Icelandic descent with connections to those early emigrants were related. He asked if I had Gudny and John's birth and death dates. I did. The next day, Leif emailed. "Hello, cousin!" He sent me a screen shot of lineage showing we were 11th cousins and told me the Icelandic names of my great-greats – Guðný Jónsdóttir and Magnús Magnússon – which had been anglicised after their arrival. He told me that they came over in 1882 on *SS Camoens*. He even sent me a photo of the ship.

After I retrieved my jaw from beneath my desk, I asked, "But…how? Wah… huh?" or words to that effect. Because we have this deep DNA connection, Leif was able to decipher. He pointed me toward the Icelandic Roots database. I subscribed, connected family threads and read bits of stories connected to names. In my family tree there were farmers and lawyers, poets and priests. I read about Þorvaldur "Vatnsfirðingur" Snorrason (born about 1160), my 22 X great-grandfather, who beheaded a man named Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, known as "The Raven," and was later burned to death by Hrafn's sons in retaliation. Whoa! I made a note. Wheels turned.

Through the stories of my ancestors, including Guðný and Magnús, I considered the courage it must have taken to leave Iceland for North America. I became more keenly interested in the history of Gimli

and all of New Iceland, and those who emigrated from Iceland and eventually landed here. This set me on a new stage of my journey that has had both personal and professional impact.

As part of my book launch celebration and to illustrate a fictional Icelandic emigrant experience through a real historical event, I wrote a monologue called "The Wreck of the SS Copeland." It was performed live at the launch by local actor, filmmaker, fisherman, and 11th cousin, Trevor Kristjanson.

This "awakening" also inspired my next teen novel and current work-in-progress: *Journey to New Iceland* (working title). It is about a fictional young woman whose physical journey will mirror that of those real New Icelanders in their 1874 migration first to Kinmount, ON, then Gimli (Willow Point).

My work has thus far all been contemporary. The idea of writing a historical novel terrified me – specifically, the pitfalls of getting something wrong. All those *facts* to get solid, and *real* family histories. But the idea wouldn't let go. The need to write this novel consumed me as I read the sagas, as well as histories of Iceland and the settlement of New Iceland.

I had another terror: flying. I realize the irony of my having once worked in aviation, but anxiety isn't easily reasoned with. To write a truthful story I knew I'd have to stand on Iceland's soil. For some writers such things are not necessary. For me, they are vital. With my husband beside me to accept the pinch of my white knuckled grip, I undertook a first journey to Reykjavík to see if I felt connected enough to invest the next few years of my life into writing this story – and most importantly, getting it *right*. I did. Of course, I did. We visited museums, cafes, and Videy Island. We drank a lot of kaffi, and a little Brennevin. On my return to Winnipeg, I booked the Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature writers' residence, Gröndalshús (former residence of 19th century writer and artist Benedikt Gröndal), where I would spend the month of August the following year, this time on my own. This was the first of three planned research journeys. I would match calendar dates as closely as possible to follow the approximate timeline of the Icelanders who'd planned to leave Iceland bound for Quebec City in August, 1874, but in fact due to drift ice did not depart until early September. My next journey would be to Kinmount, Ontario, in early October, and then home to Winnipeg, where I would make several day trips to Gimli.

During my stay in Iceland I fell more deeply in love with the land and its people. I walked the bricked streets of old Reykjavík with a smile and a já já, trying to blend

in and not look like a tourist. I may have succeeded, somewhat. One morning while walking along the pier I was stopped by a desperate looking man asking where he might buy cigarettes. The question surprised me, and so I needed a moment to think. He must have interpreted my furrowed brow as a lack of understanding of English, as he raised his voice as spoke more slowly, "WHERE-C A N - I - B U Y - CIGARETTES?" After a few weeks I felt comfortable enough to rent a car and travel to Hofsós, where I spent a few days at the Emigration Center. On my way back I stopped overnight at guest house near Búðardal in the region my great-greats lived and worked before emigrating. During my last few days in Reykjavík I met with local writers, and we connected the dots of our ancestors. I also visited cousins, including Kent Björnsson, who was born and raised in Gimli, but now makes his home in Reykjavík, and his brother Shawn and wife Sherry who came in for the annual marathon.

Secret Lagoon with cousins

Cousins! So many cousins!

When I think of that driver of my earlier novels, that yearning for connection, I wonder if my future work, its themes and explorations will change. If it does, perhaps someone will let me know. Until then, I won't worry about it. I'll write one word and then the next and enjoy the lovely surprise of wherever my characters take me. Perhaps there is more to discover in the past.

A few mysteries linger surrounding my great-greats. I learned from my guest house host who read from her copy of the *Dalamenn æviskrár*, 1703 to 1961 that Magnus Magnusson and Guðný Jónsdóttir were not married before emigrating in 1882. They were "promised." They were both workers on a Dalur farm, and may have been unable to marry due to the poor law. But this will only ever be a guess. Guðný had family in New Iceland. Why did they end up in Ontario? Did they go there immediately, or stop in New Iceland first? These are things I may never know, but will continue to explore, as I work on this novel. My history and my future are entwined with that of my ancestors. We journey on.

Caitlin Brown

by Tom Dorey

Winnipeg-born Caitlin Brown has made a name for herself during her fourteen-year career in the Canadian film and television industry. While she has appeared on camera as a vixen in fellow-Winnipegger Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg* (2007), the bulk of her work takes place behind the scenes; Brown has risen from art department intern and office assistant to become a producer, developing her own projects. Her time at the University of Winnipeg piqued her interest in film and television production, and she entered the industry through work in the city's small but vibrant film scene before relocating to Toronto. There she has been consistently engaged in projects that are in dialogue with popular genres while also making space for more diverse voices and faces. Brown served as an associate producer and development executive for Showcase's popular fantasy series *Lost Girl* (2010-15), which developed a rabid fan following and was groundbreaking with Bo, its bisexual succubus lead character. As that series wrapped, she began working as associate producer again with the critically-acclaimed sci fi space opera *Dark Matter* (2015-17). She later would step to the fore as co-producer, developing the hilarious show *TallBoyz* (2019) for CBC, a sketch comedy showcase for four multi-ethnic comedians from Toronto's sketch and improv scenes, as well as producing *This Blows* (2018), a darkly comedic supernatural web series that plays around with the ramifications of women's repressed rage, also for CBC and their Gem platform. June 2020 saw the release of the Brown-produced web series *Queens*, a riotously funny comedy mystery about drag queens from Toronto's drag community preparing to compete for the Miss Church Street crown while being met with sabotage. Brown spoke with me via text from Winnipeg before and after the June 19 premiere of *Queens* for a casual conversation about the production of her new series and her work in general, arts in the time of quarantine, changing media landscapes, and Icelandic beverages.

[Wednesday June 17]

Tom Dorey: Hi Caitlin, thanks for agreeing to this interview. I'm sitting at the front of the Emmet Ray in Toronto, the jazz bar where I normally tend bar, working the take-out window as we pivot to being a bottle shop under the current COVID-19 conditions, while also researching some logistics for Toronto Outdoor Picture Show, the outdoor film screening series for which I serve as Production Manager, in case we can mount a condensed film festival at the end of summer. Where are you right now? How are you coping under these pandemic conditions?

Caitlin Brown: We are in Winnipeg now. We snuck away from Toronto and isolated here for a couple weeks, and now we're finally able to enjoy summer with our family bubble here. I'm sitting on the back deck with my mom and my twins, enjoying a light beer. Don't judge me, I know you've got higher standards. Paul [Gagnon, friend and associate producer of *Queens*] needs to

start importing Longslice here already. That was an accidental plug, but unfortunately no Icelandic heritage in Longslice that I know of. Locally I've also enjoyed Little Brown Jug out of Winnipeg lately.

TD: Well I drink and sell enough Longslice and I'm one-sixteenth Icelandic, so that should count for something. I'm surprised there are no Icelandic beers available in Winnipeg, maybe with a touch of Brennivín...

So as we're having this conversation, your new series *Queens* is about to launch in two days. Are you excited?

CB: I think my uncles were looking into starting an Icelandic and Manitoba lake-inspired beer line at some point. I won't give away their secrets here I guess.

Yes, I'm very excited about *Queens*. It's been a three year process and my first solo producing venture after co-producing *TallBoyz* and developing and associate producing on *Lost Girl* and *Dark Matter*. *Queens* was a truly tremendous production to work on. We had an excellent crew and we had so much support from the Church Street Village in Toronto, Glad Day Bookshop, and the shooting location clubs Crews and Tangos and Zanzibar. And the set was genuinely a blast with 7 drag queens who are basically all comedians in their own right. The network (CBC) and everyone across the industry has been so kind to us on this show. Can't wait to share it.

[Saturday June 20]

TD: Congratulations on the premiere! It's great to see some more queer representation on a network like CBC as well, not just included in a show but foregrounded by it. Where did the conception of *Queens* originally come from?

CB: Justin Gray, our creator, came up with the concept from his own experience as a drag queen, "Fisher Price". The drag community is so fun, hilarious and quite naturally inclusive.

It was so nice to be able to create a show that was almost exclusively queer and trans and to have CBC get fully behind it. I think the CBC Gem platform allows for more perspectives and we couldn't be happier with our partner.

It feels like such a relief to have it out there. We've been working on it for three years and finished it during a pandemic. That made it a bit harder to but we couldn't be happier with the attention it's gotten from the press and new fans.

TD: As you should be. You've worked in film, television, and now streaming, which has seen huge growth in recent years. What's attractive about streaming platforms like CBC Gem to you as a producer? What does it allow you to do that you might not be able to with a more traditional network?

Caitlin Brown with the twins Magnus and Siggi in Iceland

CB: I've really enjoyed my two producing ventures in streaming with CBC Gem. I produced *This Blows*, a feminist horror comedy, a couple years ago with Accent Entertainment. It was a blast and something totally unconventional. *Queens*, as a campy, comedic whodunnit, I should say, is not something that you would typically bring up in a half hour network pitch, although I think that could be changing. In a way, the idea of drag and queer culture may seem alternative but really *Queens* is about pop culture, it's a show about comedy, music, and a small amount of mystery. The addition of drag queens just makes it more fun.

I think as a society we are redefining what is popular, what is normal, and audiences are demanding that. I love that Gem gave me this platform, but I hope other networks start to catch up. We need to recognize that shows with an all queer cast or casts that are all black or all diverse can just be as popular, and more interesting.

TD: One thing I've noticed with streaming platforms is that increased flexibility in the shape of the episodes they'll share as well as the content. Where broadcast television required shows to fit prescribed lengths, there's some more freedom in streaming. You could make a ten minute episode to explore one idea or story or theme, and then make an hour-long episode like last night's feature integrating the whole of the show in a longer form.

It's also great for exposure to audiences down the line and in unexpected places, with whole seasons often available when someone's friend turns them on to a show they hadn't heard about before. A show like *Schitt's Creek* is a particularly Canadian success story, becoming really popular in the United States after a few seasons, because of being available on a streaming platform like Netflix.

CB: Yes for sure, you can play with length which is nice and more freeing. I think we've been caught in a traditional system for a while and it's fun to break out of that strict format. At the same time, the nice thing about Gem is it has a variety of lengths. I think the assumption for a long time was that we were all naturally going to go to a shorter format so we could stream things on our phones at bus stops. But I think the new thing will be the variety of lengths and episodes. And how we package a show as a whole.

TD: What type of audience or audiences would you like to see *Queens* find?

CB: I would love *Queens* to find a popular audience. And I would love to be able to make more *Queens* and more campy *Queens*-style '80s feel-good comedies. I miss that with blockbusters taking over. I miss movies like *Clue*, *Death Becomes Her*, John Hughes films, and John Candy and Eddie Murphy movies. Let's bring that back without the sexism, transphobia and racism that often came with the '80s.

TD: *Queens* is such a fun show and makes drag culture both accessible to outsiders and also hilarious, so I think it has a great shot. I guess we have a generation who grew up on movies like the ones you mentioned creating movies and shows now, but with more informed and evolved politics. Now they just need that money...

CB: Haha, yeah I guess those are the movies we grew up with. I just want more goofy heros, okay?

TD: You occupy an interesting position as producer, having to be concerned with funding and budgets, yet also fostering art and creativity. How do you blend those together? Do you feel like you have to put on different hats to deal with those different poles of the work? Does that integration of the business and creative sides come more naturally to you?

CB: For me it's pretty natural to be all business and creative at the same time. In a lot of ways I think I'm more creative but

I've always enjoyed math and numbers and problem-solving. As you know I like board games and strategy and a lot of that comes into the business side of it. At the same time I started school with theatre, film editing, directing, photography and DJing. In a way I like art creation and curation I guess. And the business side allows me to push it into the world.

TD: We've been friends for a while and I've always found it very admirable, and a too-rare rare marriage of skill sets. You're also a mother to two young, energetic boys, with all the improvising and pivoting problem-solving that that demands. Has motherhood changed how you approach your work at all? Not to say that writers and actors and so on are necessarily children you need to manage, but…

CB: Hahah. I mean we have to take care of each other at home and at work and sometimes the producer becomes 'that role' but I don't mind it. And sometimes I need support from my colleagues too.

Yes, my two lovely sons, Siggi and Magnus, have taught me a lot. Mainly that work comes second and that problems at work don't really matter. They shifted and pivoted my priorities and I'm thankful to them for that. I also couldn't be doing this without my super helpful partner (Laurie Bertram), who is an Icelandic Canadian superstar. Don't know how we've gotten through the last busy couple toddler years but we did. Friends and family helped A LOT.

TD: Finding our communities, for support or collaboration, is so important. I know you're even close to some Winnipeggers in your adopted Toronto home who don't even have any Icelandic heritage…

CB: You can't blame them for that but yes.

TD: Speaking of that Icelandic background, though, do you have any plans for future projects incorporating parts of your own background or your time spent in Iceland itself?

CB: Yes, I've been trying to dream up Icelandic and Canadian coproductions for a while. Recently I've been trying to help my friend Ása Helga Hjörleifsdóttir get one of her films off the ground, but COVID-19 derailed that a bit. I'm working on two other TV show concepts. The one I'm currently working on is called *Monstrosity*. It's a concept my partner and I came up with based off of her colleague's monster research. We hope to dive into historical Icelandic monsters and develop it in Iceland possibly next year. The other one which is always in the back of my mind is the famous Icelandic Canadian Falcon hockey story, in a series format, but we want to find the right writer first to take that on first.

On set with one of the lead queens Jada Hudson and our actor Mark Che Devonish from *Queens*

TD: Classically there hasn't been that much representation of Icelandic history or culture in Canadian or American media, so that's a rich well to draw from. Thinking about your work on shows like *Lost Girl* and *This Blows* and *Monstrosity*, what is it about the magical and monstrous and fantastical that you're drawn to?

CB: The sci-fi and supernatural genre has always had room for exploring how we are different from each other, and 'the other'. It lets us explore it and ourselves without boundaries. It's also a progressive and groundbreaking genre that women have historically had an important place in. From Ursula K. Le Guin to Mary Shelley.

TD: I don't want to keep you any longer on a beautiful day here in Toronto or there in Winnipeg. Thank you for taking the time to text with me and congratulations again on the release of *Queens*! I'll be waiting to be terrified by those Icelandic monsters some day, and I'll let you enjoy some solstice sun with your family.

CB: Thanks for taking the time Tom. It was fun to chat.

Dr. Ryan Eyford

by Tammy Axelsson

Dr. Ryan Eyford, PhD is an associate professor in the Department of History at the University of Winnipeg. He teaches courses in Indigenous and Canadian history and his research brings together Indigenous and immigrant histories linking the colonization in western Canada to the global history of colonialism. Dr. Eyford resides in Winnipeg with his wife Aleisha Reimer and their two children, Lilja and Ben.

Ryan's interest in the history of Indigenous-settler relations began in his formative years growing up in the West Interlake region of Manitoba. He spent his early years at Vogar, a hamlet in Treaty 2 territory, on a farm between the Metis village of Vogar and the Lake Manitoba First Nation. He refers to his ancestry as "Scotch on Ice" as his Scottish ancestors predominate his family tree. The "Ice" comes from his afi Jörundur Árni (Jerry) Eyford. Jörundur's mother, Baldrún Jörundsdóttir emigrated from Laxamýri in Suður-Þingeyarsýsla with her parents, Jörundur Sigurbjörnsson Eyford and Anna Jónasdóttir, in 1893. They settled along Lake Manitoba in the district that Baldrún's father named Siglunes. The family adopted the name (Eyford) in honour of Eyjafjörður, where the family originated. When Baldrún married Framar Jónsson in 1906 her husband elected to adopt her surname since he was also from Eyjafjörður. Baldrún and Framar raised a family of ten, five boys and five girls on their farm in Vogar. Their eldest son Jörundur inherited the family farm and raised three children, Arnold, Arlene and Allan with his wife Eileen (nee Smith). In 1974 Arnold married Heather Weir of

Peterborough, Ontario and Ryan, the first of their three children arrived in 1978.

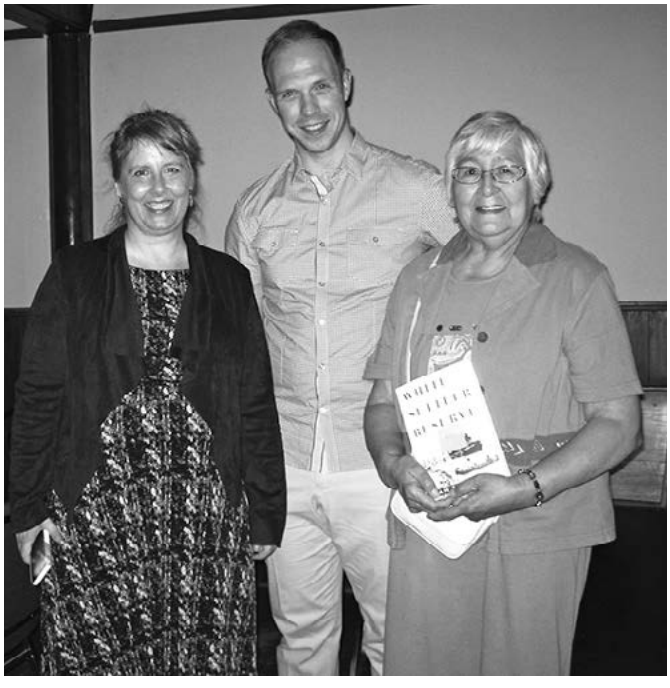
In 1986 Ryan's family moved from Vogar to Winnipeg Beach. He graduated from Gimli High School in 1996. He then moved on to the University of Winnipeg where he completed his Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in History in 2001.

Dr. Ryan Eyford U of W faculty photo 2018

In the year 2000, while completing his studies at the University of Winnipeg, Ryan began to become a familiar, integral and invaluable part of the broader Icelandic-Canadian community in Manitoba. He was hired by the United Icelandic Appeal to work on what was then a state-of-the-art family history on-line kiosk project, the "Book of Life". This project is now a resource for recording family histories of life members of the New Iceland Heritage Museum and can been found on the museum's website. He worked for the Jon Sigurdsson Chapter of the International Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) digitizing the books produced by the IODE Jon Sigurdsson Chapter: Minnigarrit Islenzkra Hermanna, Veterans of Icelandic Descent World War II and the booklet, A Supplement to Veterans of Icelandic Descent. These books record men and women of Icelandic descent who served in the armed forces of Canada and the United States in World Wars I and II and those who served in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. The information from the books is now available online through University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections.

Ryan's first published article as a historian was about the Winnipeg Falcons. It was written in response to the announcement that the Toronto Granites were to be honoured as the first Olympic champions in ice hockey. Ryan recalls that it was Helga Malis, then working for the Icelandic National League of North America who first drew attention to this attempt to rewrite history. Her call-to-action led to a resounding response and show of solidarity and support for the Winnipeg Falcons from the Icelandic-Canadian community that set the record straight and saw the Winnipeg Falcons take their rightful place as the first Olympic champions. Ryan's article, "From Prairie Goolies to Canadian Cyclones: The Transformation of the 1920 Winnipeg Falcons," published in *Sport History Review* in 2006, addressed the controversy and explored the relationship between immigrant communities, nationalism, and sport.

In 2003 he obtained his Master of Arts degree in History from Carleton University in Ottawa and earned his doctorate from the University of Manitoba in 2011, a few months after returning to the University of Winnipeg as a professor.



Ryan with Professor Adele Perry (his PhD supervisor from U of M) and Ruth Christie at the book lauch hosted for him on July 28, 2016

His publications include:

"Quarantined Within a New Colonial Order: The 1886-1887 Lake Winnipeg Smallpox Epidemic." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. 17 (2006): p.55-78.

"Slave Owner, Missionary, and Colonization Agent: The Transnational Life of John Taylor, 1813-1884." *Chapter in:* Karen Dubinsky Adele Perry, and Henry Yu, eds. Within and Without the Nation: Canadian History as Transnational History. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

"Close together, through miles and miles apart": Family, Distance and Emotion in the Letters of the Taylor Sisters, 1881-1921." *Histoire Sociale/Social History*. p.47-96 (May 2016): 67-86.

Dr. Eyford's first book *White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West* (UBC Press, 2016) examines the history of the Icelandic reserve (New Iceland) in relation to Canada's larger nation-building project in Northwest North America. It explores the complex and contested interface between the Icelandic colonists and the developing settler society of Manitoba and compares the Icelanders' experiences with those of the Indigenous people they displaced. Eyford deals with this subject by analyzing themes such as race, land, policy, public health and municipal government. The book draws out the tensions that accompanied the process of colonization in western Canada and situates the unique circumstances of this region within the history of the nineteenth century British Empire.

The latest publication he is working on is Sigtryggur Jonasson's biography for the Dictionary of Canadian Biography for historical figures who have died between 1941-1950. Sigtryggur, known as the 'Father of New Iceland', is featured prominently in the New Iceland Heritage Museum.

Dr. Eyford became a member of the Board of Directors of the New Iceland Heritage Museum (NIHM) in Gimli in 2011 and is currently the museum's president. In doing so, he has effectively come full circle from his early days as a summer student working on the Book of Life kiosk for the museum. NIHM is very fortunate to have Ryan serving alongside the many other volunteers who give so generously of their time and talent to the museum and to so many other Icelandic-Canadian organizations. As president of NIHM Ryan is taking the lead on raising funds for the Heritage Trust Campaign that will help to ensure the long-term

sustainability of the NIHM and the Lake Winnipeg Visitor Centre. He asks those who would like to contribute to this campaign to please contact the museum.

It has been my great pleasure and privilege to have known Ryan and to have worked on projects with him over the years. But more importantly it has been fascinating to watch first-hand as he has become one of the key individuals "carrying the torch" in the preservation of so many important pieces of Icelandic-Canadian history in Manitoba.

Reel to Reel: An Interview with Trevor Kristjanson

by Will Jakobson

WJ: Let's get right into it. What was your first feature, series, or short film you were truly proud of at the time?

TK: Oh. Probably "The Voyage". That was the first time that something that I was a part of came out that I was actually proud of that I wanted to show people, because before that, my first experience doing anything film related was just making amateur stunt videos back in the day as teenagers, but that wasn't really anything. I guess it got my foot in the door to making anything film related, but [The Voyage] was a two minute short film that we made for a contest that I believe a local TV station was putting on where the prize was a camera so our goal was to make a film because we hadn't really done anything like that before, and that was a ton of fun. We realized how rewarding it could be to make movies. I guess that was 10 years ago now.

WJ: You said you filmed stunt videos back in the day. Would you care to elaborate?

TK: Oh. Well what really got me into anything creative or film related was as a teenager, several of our friends would basically...we wouldn't reenact Jackass videos, but we were inspired by the CKY skateboard videos and Jackass stuff at the time. We were making these amateur stunt videos and it ended up becoming actually quite popular. The Ellen DeGeneres show showed one clip when we were 16 or 17 years old and after that several news outlets followed. It became a bit of a big thing where we thought we were going to become big and successful which is such a teenage dream in retrospect. It's so funny to think that that was our goal, but I'm grateful for all of it because it was a gateway to making real movies and getting involved in the film industry. I guess it grew a passion for creating and making movies.

WJ: But without the possibility of breaking your legs.

TK: Yeah exactly! Instead of doing

Trevor Kristjanson

these crazy things, it made my passion kind of grow, like writing, editing, and filming, and being in front of the camera, to eventually directing.

WJ: Was it one specific thing that made you want to turn this into a career, or a compounding of all the small things you've done?

TK: I guess I've always done it more for fun than to really grow a career out of it. Like I had never really done it for the money because if you're making your own short films or whatever you're not really making anything.

WJ: If anything, you're losing money.

TK: (Laughs) Yeah! Often it's not a great financial venture. It's just more thinking about how fun it is. Basically making movies with your friends, I can't think of anything I enjoy more, so I would say I got into it for all the right reasons.

WJ: You've recently completed Boy Toys, a comedy; Surfacing, a dark drama; Platypus, a dark drama; and Party Animal, a comedy. When you're not shooting comedy, you seem to exclusively lean towards very macabre themes. Why is that?

TK: That's an interesting question. I don't know what the reason is for that, I think in the winter time I usually write comedy because it kind of lightens the mood because the winters can be so long and dark and cold, So winter is the time for writing light, funny stuff, and then in the summer I'll write something darker.

WJ: That's very counter to most other people. Usually in the dark times is when people write dark pieces, and vice versa in the summer, but you actually use it as a therapy it sounds like.

TK: Absolutely! That's exactly how I would describe it. It's kind of therapeutic, which I guess any art form should be. It should be good for you, whatever you're doing. You shouldn't be agonizing over it. So I guess film has always been a good outlet for me and I've always used it as a kind of way to teach myself things and it should be enjoyable at the end of the day, but yeah, I've always gone back between the two sorts of extremes I guess with those two genres. For some reason those are the two that interest me the most.

WJ: You've worn a lot of hats on yours and others' sets including acting, directing, writing, producing, sound, to name a few.

TK: I guess the opportunity came to actually work in the industry and basically have a paying job so I took it and I started

doing production assistant, which is pretty much the entry-level job into film. It's like the lowest tier thing that you do and it's sort of a – how would I describe it – it's like an odds and ends job where you were doing anything and everything that needs to be done to pick up the slack. After that I ended up as a props master on a low budget feature called Road of Iniquity.

WJ: A props master? What's the weirdest prop you had to find or make?

TK: That's such a good question. The weirdest prop I ever had to go find was for "Escape or Die", which was a reality show about the escape artist Dean Gunnarsson. I essentially had to find the right size jockstrap for him, and so I remember having to call him and he's laughing really hard because, you know, basically I'm asking him how big his package is. Luckily he was a super cool guy and I guess he didn't really care at all.

WJ: Instead of jockstraps, maybe we can get back to the hats that you've worn on set.

TK: Yeah. Basically over the course of several years I had worked in many different departments in the film industry. It paid the bills at the time, but really the best thing about it was that it gave you experience from every department's point of view on a film set, and that will ultimately make anyone a better director because you won't take anyone for granted and you realize how hard everyone has to work to create the sum, which is the film. As a director you can't just assume that, "Oh. The film will be good or bad because of me." That would be super arrogant because there are so many pieces that have to come together to make anything good, right? I'm grateful for all those experiences I had, and working a tough job like production assistant can be really tough and same with being a props master or what have you.

WJ: It's like going to order at a coffee shop after you've experienced working in the service industry. You realize how tough those jobs can really be.

TK: Absolutely! It's exactly like that! Once you've worked at the bottom, you'll appreciate what you have more when you rise through the ranks.

WJ: Do you feel that your versatility in the film industry has improved your directorial skills?

TK: I guess so. Yeah. I'm not particularly great at any of those jobs, but I think I've developed into a decent filmmaker but it's been through a ton of hard work, and at the end of the day you have to really care about the project you're working on. The responsibility is really on the director to make or break a movie or

Trevor Kristjanson in the New Iceland Fisheries van

TV show or whatever project, because if you don't care about it nobody else is really going to, and to get it past the finish line you have to become almost obsessive with it and be working at it more than anyone else. Actually, the one big lesson that I learned after working different positions is as a director you don't want to be wasting anyone's time. Most of your work is done in prep before you even get to set. Essentially you should be getting there and it should be almost easy, because you should have so many things prepped and you should foresee all the possibilities of how the day is going to go. You don't want to show up and waste people's time. You want to be prepared so that anyone can come to you for an answer right away and you're not unsure of anything. You should always be decisive. If you don't know, you should be honest about that too. Basically don't show up to waste anyone's time because they're working super hard as well to make a good product.

WJ: You were recently featured in Ice Vikings. Tell me about that.

TK: Ice Vikings is a documentary/TV series focussing on several Lake Winnipeg commercial ice fishers and I'm lucky enough to be one of the main featured commercial fishers as well as an associate producer of the show, and so I'm able to work in front of and behind the camera on it. It's a really exciting first for me – and for I think anybody – because there hasn't really been a show to the scale done about the ice fishery here. It's funny, because the show is almost a culmination of both of my worlds: the commercial fishing world, which my family has been in commercial fishing since the 1890s, and my filmmaking world that I've been doing for the last 10 years or so.

WJ: So you're an accomplished fisherman as well as your aforementioned skills.

TK: I've sort of transitioned more into running my own fishing business and that's really been sort of my bread and butter. Recently I launched my own fishing business called New Iceland Fisheries, so that's been my main focus lately, but filmmaking is still a big passion of mine and something that I still enjoy doing for fun; I guess for fun and for work now that Ice Vikings is happening.

WJ: As a new entrepreneur and local business owner, do you feel you'll have time for filmmaking?

TK: It'll definitely be tougher to be able to make films now that I'm so busy with the company. I'm hoping I can find some time this summer to write something because I do miss it.

WJ: Thanks for your time Trevor, and good luck with your new venture!

TK: Thanks!

Sigrún Stella Bessason

by Brynjar Björgvin Chapman

In late December of 2019, the Icelandic-Canadian singer-songwriter Sigrún Stella Bessason, who lives in Toronto, sent her latest song, "Sideways," to an Icelandic radio station. She had done this lots of times before and usually heard back pretty quickly; some of her songs had even charted pretty high. But this time, there was radio silence. She figured that the station hadn't accepted it and had simply forgot to let her know. She only found out that the song had been aired a few weeks later, when her friend sent her a video of it playing on the radio. After another few weeks, "Sideways" had become the number one song in Iceland.

"Sideways," is like much of Sigrún Stella's work. It's folky and moody with the type of lyrics that would be impressive if you found them in a book of poetry: "tracing the days from your past/tracing the stars on your back/dancing around you like a shadow/that you couldn't cast." The closest comparison to her sound is probably the '90s indie folk band Mazzy Star, that is, if Mazzy Star's singer were a hybrid of Lauryn Hill and Adele. In other words, Sigrún Stella's voice is powerful, capable of belting it out with the best of them. But what gives her sound its special edge is that she doesn't go all out all the time. When she does, like on the chorus of "Sideways," it is a very pleasant surprise.

Although she had a feeling that the song was good, she never expected it to do as well as it has. It stayed at number one for two weeks and at the time of writing, in late May, four-and-a-half months after it was first played, the song is still at number eight. Over the past few months Sigrún Stella has been interviewed in Icelandic newspapers and even appeared on the cover of a magazine. She says that it has been surreal watching her song climb the charts in Iceland while being stuck across the ocean, in Toronto. "It's kind of like watching a movie or something," she said, "it doesn't feel like it's really happening cause I haven't been there." Luckily, her friends in Iceland have been keeping her in the loop, supplying her with a steady stream of videos of the song playing out of their

car radios or drifting out of the speakers in grocery stores."I can feel it through the people," she said.

* * *

Sigrún Stella was born in Winnipeg on March 23, 1979. Her mother, Margret Björgvinsdottir, immigrated to Winnipeg shortly before Sigrún Stella was born with her two teenage kids, Gudrun and Brandur. Her father, Haraldur Bessason, had moved there from Iceland 20 years earlier, and had three daughters from a previous marriage: Steina, Ella and Kristín. Both parents were pillars of the Icelandic-Canadian community. Margrét was the editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, the Icelandic newspaper of North America, while Haraldur was the chair of the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at The University of Manitoba and a world-renowned scholar of Norse mythology and the sagas. But aside from their academic and literary pursuits, Sigrún Stella's parents were both passionate about music. Haraldur loved the Canadian jazz pianist Oscar Peterson, and Magga is "a huge fan of Cowboy Junkies and Connie Kaldor." Decades later, it's easy to see how these acts have seeped into her music. But Sigrún Stella was also, from a *very* young age, obsessed with the big-voiced pop stars of the time. Her sister Gudrun remembers how "when [Sigrún Stella] was two or three, she used to sit by the record player, right beside the speaker and listen to Barbara Streisand at full volume" and how "everybody's just surprised that this kid, basically a baby, would be doing that."

In 1987, when Sigrún Stella was seven, the family moved back to Iceland so that Haraldur could take a job as the President of the newly-founded University of Akureyri (Gudrun and Brandur, now grown up, stayed behind in Canada). Relocating from Winnipeg to Northern Iceland was a big adjustment for a seven-year-old and Sigrún Stella dealt with it by getting more and more into music, learning the piano and writing her own "weird songs" that she shared with her close friends and family. She also got to know her maternal grandmother, Amma Stella, a notoriously gregarious woman who loved to sing and play the guitar. She was "quite the entertainer," Sigrún Stella says.

Along with inheriting her name, Sigrún Stella has also inherited her amma's magnetism and knack for performing. But generally, at that point, music wasn't something that Sigrún Stella though to actively pursue. "It was just a dream," she said, "but I never knew that it was an option. Only people that were really close to me knew that I lived and breathed music."

After high school, Sigrún Stella was unsure of what to do next and, feeling pressure to choose a path, decided to go to university. Her siblings, Gudrun and Brandur, had moved to Toronto years before and she had visited them often as a teenager, so moving there seemed like the natural choice. At the age of 22, in 2001, she enrolled at the University of Toronto and started studying psychology. But she quickly realized that school didn't excite her, it only felt like what she *should* be doing, especially since her father was the president of a university. But funnily enough, when Sigrún Stella told him how she felt about school, he asked her: "what about music?" Soon after, she dropped out and started studying music business at Trebas Institute.

At Trebas, she learned about the nuts and bolts of the music industry: contracts, marketing or, as Sigrún Stella calls it, "the boring stuff." The program was mostly populated by people who wanted to go into music management and so she still felt a little out of place. "There weren't a lot of artists there," she said, "I was one of the few that had that mindset." Luckily, she started meeting like-minded people outside of school. Working at a restaurant (Utopia, on College street), she befriended a coworker named Katherine who was involved in

the music scene. Through her, she started meeting more musicians, including Michael Dilauro (or Mez, to those who know him), who is now her partner and close collaborator. Originally, she had only intended to stay in Toronto for one year. But after the year was up, she was finally starting to find her footing and so, she extended her stay for one more year. At the end of that year, her parents retired and moved to Toronto, so she decided to stay for good.

Around this time was when Sigrún Stella played her first show. The way she recounts it, someone asked her if she wanted to perform and she "just said sure," even though she was secretly thinking "what the hell am I saying yes to?" At first, she just performed covers and some of Mez's songs, but soon she started getting excited about performing her own; some of them the "weird songs" from her childhood, others new. People began to take notice, including the Canadian music legend Rich Dodson, of The Stampeders, who invited her to record a demo of his classic song "Sweet City Woman." Of this whole experience, Sigrún Stella says, "it just kind of happened."

Sigrún Stella is quick to downplay her talent in this way and is very nonchalant about her songwriting abilities. "I always wrote songs," she said, "if there's anything that comes naturally to me it's probably that. I've always done it, I just had to a bit more professional about it." This comes off in person as a charming humility, but it expresses itself a little differently in her private relationship to her own work: she holds herself and what she does do a very high standard and is quick to critique her own music. So much so that her first album, *Crazy Blue,* is mysteriously absent from every streaming platform. She says the she's "never been super shy about putting out stuff, when other people would maybe hold back" and that, in hindsight, she might have done things differently (even though that album is actually quite good–one reviewer called it "a don't miss" and "a very strong debut album").

Sigrún Stella's most recent album, *King's Park* (which *is* available on streaming platforms), is an homage to her early years in Winnipeg and an exploration of her dual identity as an Icelander and a Canadian. The album's title comes from a childhood nickname, given to her by her brother, Brandur. He remembers three-year-old Sigrún Stella as a kid who always got her way and "ran the whole house," even though she was a toddler. One day, the family was planning to go to an important function in Gimli. "I think the Governor General was there, all the community leaders. [Haraldur's] presence was requested and he was supposed to speak," Brandur said. But Sigrún Stella had other plans. Brandur remembers rolling his eyes and retreating to his room to wait for everyone else to work it out. "Twenty minutes later," he said, "they headed off to King's Park. That's why I call her 'King's Park' and that's why she called her album King's Park." The album, which includes a song called "Winnipeg," is a country-inflected meditation on being torn between her childhood in Winnipeg, her coming-of-age in Akureyri and her adult life Toronto. But it's also a celebration of that feeling. After living in Toronto for a few years, Sigrún Stella remembers thinking that "I couldn't figure out exactly where my home was." Haraldur, who passed away in 2009, told her something that changed her perspective: "you don't have to be stressed about it, you have two homes. You're lucky."

Even so, Sigrún Stella says that "when I was in Iceland I always missed Canada and when I'm in Canada I always miss Iceland." The rise of "Sideways" has served to illustrate that divide. Even though she's played countless shows in Iceland and has opened up for some of the biggest Icelandic bands (like Svavar Knútur and

Of Monsters and Men), becoming one of the country's most famous musicians while she's watched from overseas has led to some funny mishaps.

Like when she sent a public birthday greeting that read "happy birthday my dear uncle" to a man who is, in fact, not her uncle, but a fan (he replied by simply writing "thank you"). Or the radio interview which Sigrún Stella ended, in response to the host's confusion about her last name (Sigrún Stella goes by Bessason rather than Haraldsdóttir to simplify life in Canada) with a classic line "I guess I'm my grandfather's son." But even with all the confusion, Sigrún Stella is happy to have such a peculiar relationship to home.

* * *

Since "Sideways," Sigrún Stella has felt like her music is coming into it's own. She was recently recruited to write songs for the renowned UK label Hospital Records and she says that being payed to write music all day has helped her hone her sound: "better songs have been coming because I've had to just be sitting down." And although the coronavirus pandemic has postponed her yearly trip to Iceland and cancelled an appearance at the Iceland Airwaves music festival, it has also had a silver lining; being cooped up indoors all day, she's got nothing to do but write. "It's been nice to be forced to stop," she says, to "sit and write and not have the stress of a show." She expects to release an EP in early summer, recorded at Mez's studio South River Sound, which will include "Sideways" and a few other new songs that she thinks might be her best yet. So, although the future is uncertain, Sigrún is feeling optimistic: "as long as I have the energy I'm gonna continue."

Ryan Sigurdson in rehearsal for *Cinderella* 2018

My Life In Musical Theatre

by Ryan Sigurdson

My life in music probably started before I was born. My parents both came from families who loved music. They met after joining the Icelandic Society of Edmonton and got to know each other by singing with the society choir, The Saga Singers. My father is a bit of a renowned folk singer and my mother's grandfather, Oli Thorsteinson, was a violin and piano teacher, as well as a violin maker.

Studying the violin when I turned three was really the beginning for me, though. (I was actually two and three-quarters years old when I started, but at that age we learned using a cigar box wrapped with elastic bands, so I'm not sure it counts.) My parents wanted to have children who could play the violin. My mother wanted us to take after her afi and learn classically. My father grew up worshiping 'Johnny and his Musical Mates,' a dance orchestra from the Interlake region of Manitoba. They were led

by Johnny on the fiddle. So, as my brother and I grew up we would play classical music during the school year, and fiddle tunes like the Gimli Waltz for the family over the summer. (My afi Oli wrote that song, and I still play on a violin he made.)

Very few kids in my elementary school played the violin. Even fewer had an Icelandic background. When I turned eight, I asked my parents if I could start piano lessons, too. I imagine there were even fewer kids who wanted to do that. On a piano I could learn to play accompaniments for musical theatre songs. I had started to love musical theatre from watching my dad and brother performing in community productions. At the piano I imagined I was playing each of the instruments I heard on the Broadway Cast recordings I loved.

To me, singing was a given. My grandparents all sang, and most of my cousins. A family gathering wasn't complete without someone bringing out a guitar and hosting a sing-a-long. My favourite pastime at recess in elementary school was to wander around the playground singing to myself. I liked the fast songs best. "A Modern Major General" from the *Pirates of Penzance*, or "Another Hundred People" from Stephen Sondheim's musical *Company*. I didn't really understand the meaning of these songs. And little did I know, but I'd get to perform both of these shows later in life.

Violin, piano and singing. Learning about each fed my abilities on the others. As my voice changed, and I started to study the trombone in junior high, I learned about the bass clef. I joined the Edmonton Youth Orchestra and learned that there were many other kids who also played the violin. Suddenly classical violin was fun.

In grade nine, I got a part in my first musical. At this point I had a lot of formal music experience but almost none in theatre. I had thought it would be all fun, but it turned out to be a real challenge. I remember being so surprised that my director was just as strict and demanding as my violin teacher. At the end of the run (which I performed singing through a case of whooping cough because the show must go on), I realized that being a part of a musical was something I wanted to do again and again. It's a thrill I enjoy to this day when I get to perform at my best with a large team of passionate experts on a project that is so much larger than any of us.

In high school I performed in five more musicals, but my focus was academics. I graduated from university with a Bachelor's degree in Cell Biology. Before I would allow myself to continue down the path of medical science, I knew I needed to dig deeper into theatre. Every show I saw made me want to participate. The idea of performing still attracted me, but it was the insight in the writing that amazed

me. One favourite musical, *Sunday in the Park with George* showed me loneliness, obsession and frustration. What it's like to want something and to fight for it with only the strength of your will. To lose everything and move on. Theatre showed me the charismatic side of humanity.

I had been a quiet kid who preferred solitary activities. I found it difficult to interact with others. As an adult I learned that many of my colleagues in the performing arts struggled with this as children. The musicals and plays I watched revealed to me the struggles of many people. By empathizing with these stories, I began to understand and have compassion not just for others, but for myself. I thought surely the epiphanies and insight I got out of theatre would be worth sharing with others. For me, theatre was the most important work.

So I started a two year diploma in theatre arts. Acting is living honestly in imagined circumstances. Developing emotional honestly comes only after in depth self-examination. This might be one of the hardest parts of studying theatre, but also was the most rewarding. Even after graduation my teacher encouraged me not only to keep up my performing skills, but to dig into what it was that made me unique. For me that was my Icelandic background. I decided to take my mother's advice and apply for the Snorri program.

The Snorri Program was created and funded by the Icelandic government as a way for "Western Icelanders" to discover their roots. I spent six weeks in Iceland, meeting cousins and learning a little of the language. (I also got to see two local musical theatre productions – Icelandic translations of *Chicago* and *Hair*.) To my surprise, the biggest epiphany of that trip came before I even got to Iceland. My flight had a layover in New York City, so I had decided to visit my cousin there for two days. On a trip to find my roots in Iceland, I discovered my "tribe" in a basement musical theatre sing-a-long bar in Greenwich Village. A whole room full of people who would rather sing "Another Hundred People" than doing almost anything else. My Snorri excursion certainly opened my eyes to the stories of my ancestors, but I came home feeling more Canadian than before.

Once home, I delved into theatre more deeply. Working at several high schools and children's theatres, I taught the skills and insights I valued. I taught myself how to be a musical director. I worked as a pianist for large theatres, and at smaller theatres I discovered a new love of composing. Some of the work I'm most proud of in my life are the shows I wrote while living in Edmonton. The musical *Everybody Goes*

Grant and Ryan Sigurdson playing violin duets at Christmas 2017

To Mitzi's deals with characters who realize that despite the allure of going abroad to find happiness, building it at home is more rewarding. After writing *Mitzi's*, I did quite a bit of travelling, and have now come to the same conclusion.

Still, to keep growing I sought out some workshops and other experiences found me. I sang in the National Youth Choir of Canada and studied at Canada's National Voice Intensive. I studied piano and later taught at a summer opera intensive in Edmonton called Opera NUOVA. I even taught theatre devising for a summer in the south of France. But each of these short term experiences left me wondering how I could take myself to a higher level. To combine my loves of musical theatre and teaching I decided to get a Master of Music in Orchestral Conducting.

The University of Cincinnati has one of very few programs in musical directing in the world. Luckily, they accepted my BSc and my acting diploma as sufficient prerequisites. The University of Cincinnati is repeatedly listed in the top five schools for working performers on Broadway. And I was going there!

Two years went by quickly, and with degree in hand I moved to New York for a third year in the US. I saw many shows, met many people. The most interesting experience I had was studying musical theatre writing at the BMI Lehman Engels Musical Theatre Workshop. Several of my favourite writers studied in this program. When COVID19 started I was touring with the First National Tour of *Anastasia*, a musical by two BMI members. The composer Stephen Flaherty also went to the University of Cincinnati, as did the original Broadway Anastasia. After all these years I'm connected to the people on the recordings I grew up loving.

When my visa ended, I moved to Toronto to be with my partner. But I didn't have much time to feel at home before receiving my first offer to tour. For many months I played keyboard in the pit orchestra for the national tour of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Cinderella*. We played venues ranging from indoor hockey rinks, to Vaudeville theatres a hundred years old. Over two seasons with *Cinderella* I performed all over the continent, from Anchorage, Alaska to Monterrey, Mexico. From Saskatoon, Saskatchewan to Tampa, Florida.

The next season I joined the tour of *Anastasia*. These tours opened my eyes to facets of musical theatre I had never imagined I'd learn. Performing a show over 250 times takes a level of nuance and discipline beyond what I was used to. It was never boring since there were so many variables. It wasn't just the venues that changed, but the audience responses from region to region. We had polite claps in Palm Springs, but were treated like rock stars in San Diego. Our reception in Toronto was worrisome at first to some of our cast. They were used to vocal Americans responding to every twist and turn. These demure Canadians saved their thunderous ovations for the very end.

Other variations came from cast replacements. And, for *Anastasia*, each city we went to had a new orchestra. Well, almost new. The conductor and two keyboard players travelled with the show. For three hours I played my keyboard constantly, watching the conductor, and listening diligently to the new players to encourage them to speed up or slow down as I knew the conductor wanted. In a way, my keyboard part was like a temporal blueprint for the entire orchestra. I did have some passages to show-off, but mostly I enjoyed supporting the other players and singers.

Sadly, come mid-March, after the final curtain came down on a Thursday matinee in Fayetteville, Arkansas, we heard that the tour had been suspended indefinitely. I flew home to Canada.

All stories have a turning point to separate the journey into before and after. In university I learned the term for this was "liminality," the simultaneous coexistence of a subject in two states. Like standing in a doorway, neither inside nor outside the room. There is an emotional liminality that goes along with this moment. When I coach actors I often ask them to describe what I call the "tension of opposites," a paradoxical coexistence of positive and negative that the character is experiencing. For example, in a moment of loss, an actor must show the love they have for what they have lost, not just sadness at having lost it. And to add a third layer, perhaps the reason for the loss is something wonderful to come. My ancestors knew this layered feeling when they emigrated. Whether they called themselves western-Icelanders, or Icelandic-Canadians, they held onto their familiar Icelandic culture, while embracing new North American ways with hope and sadness. My dad wrote a song about it, "The New Iceland Saga":

At Íslendingadagurinn we crown the
mountain maid
Both young and old eat harðfiskur
and skyr
We come from miles around to join
the old songs sung and played
at this legendary new Icelandic fair.

* * *

I don't know what is next for me as we all await COVID19 containment. I know I will continue to try to enrich the lives I touch with stories and songs. But the performing arts may never be the same. Hopefully, we can use this liminal period for metamorphosis into something wonderful.

Interview with author, L. K. Bertram on the release of her new book, *The Viking Immigrants: Icelandic North Americans*

by Mylee Nordin

L.K. Bertram's debut, *The Viking Immigrants: Icelandic North Americans*, examines the history of Icelanders that came to North America between the 1870s and 1914. Small pockets of communities were formed with a cultural identity and customs that seemingly tied them closer together as they drifted further away from where they had come from. Bertram's book explores both the "tension and the unity" of these threads to present a rich historical account and layered understanding of what shaped the experience of these early new Canadians.

What does an immigrant, in a new land, faced with the jarring reality of new surroundings, hold on to and what must they adapt to survive? What makes the book most captivating is not just the formal historical account, but Bertram's ability to take mundane objects, daily staples of immigrant life, and use them to build a story of hardship, perseverance and prosperity. The reader learns to find a deeper meaning in coffee pots, recipe cards and clothing. It is also a story of the nuances of adaptation, shared through the image of a young Icelandic fisherman wearing sjómannavettlingar on his hands and moccasins on his feet. The book also includes many stories that can't be found through formal documentation but, perhaps most relevantly, delves into the contributions of women to the families and communities and to the acknowledgement of settled land of the First Nations and Métis.

From the sometimes commercialized symbolism of the Viking identify to the strict adherence of a family's vínarterta recipe, Bertram's strength as a writer, teacher (Bertram is an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto) and thorough researcher, shines through with an accessible writing style that balances personal accounts with a true love of storytelling; long known as a strength of the Icelandic people.

The interview below took place in June of 2020, a couple months after the book was released.

You touch on this in your introduction, but now that it is published, can you speak a little on how the book came to be, both in terms of a final printed piece, and also your journey with the research?

Absolutely. My book is basically a guidebook to the history of commonly found traditions in the Icelandic community. Readers will recognize many of them, from Viking parades to particular foods. I believe the surprising, larger history of these traditions reveal a lot about the history of how we've evolved.

I was raised in an Icelandic and Scottish

family in Manitoba. I grew up with many of the traditions that are commonly found here, Viking statues, vínarterta, freaky ghost stories, cherished Icelandic heirlooms, and all night coffee drinking and story telling/debating. These, and many other traditions were a big part of my life and identity, even though I had never been to Iceland. In 2006, I started participating in the Icelandic cultural festival, núnanow, which put Icelandic North Americans back in touch with Iceland through contemporary art and music. It was great and I made a lot of friends but I was totally shocked by our conversations. Most of these Icelanders had learned very little about the emigration and, much to my surprise, had no idea what I was talking about when I introduced them to our "Icelandic" traditions. I began to realize that not only were our many everyday traditions unique, there was also a larger history behind many of them that we had yet to explore. They weren't simply "from Iceland." I hoped the book could help as a guidebook that explains some of our differences and history to Icelanders at home in Iceland, as well as for the many Icelandic North Americans so interested in their own history.

You now are based in Toronto. I am curious on your relationship to the work and research after you moved physically away from it. Did you notice, or were there any shifts you went through when you moved away from these physical reference points?

Moving to Ontario was a hard one for me. I absolutely love Manitoba, the Interlake, and Winnipeg and feel so at home here. I came back a lot for research and interviews and used to have a standing invitation to staying in a guest bedroom stacked to the ceiling with old Icelandic books at my uncle, Nelson Gerrard's house in Hnausa, Manitoba. But I was also so fortunate to have had access to many Icelandic online resources, including the fabulous Icelandic periodical database, Tímarit. I wish I could have been here more physically, however. Every time I got to visit the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba I felt like I had won the lottery. It's such a huge treasure trove. There are also so many Icelandic historical sites on the prairies, especially unmarked sites. It feels like every time I come home there's something new to see that has an important

connection to the community.

As you explored that space between Icelandic identity of Icelanders and Icelandic Canadians, did you find your connection to what you personally marked as 'Icelandic' growing up shift?

That is such a great question. I really did begin to notice more about how the two groups differed and discuss many of those in the book. I love spending time in Iceland and now feel very at home and welcome by people there. I have a lot of close friends there and love to go back. But I am also proud of the distinctiveness of the Icelandic immigrant community as well as how they adapted to and experienced new possibilities for themselves in North America. As I began to better understand the earlier generations, I could see the wild side behind these static black and white portraits.

Icelanders tend to pride themselves on being individuals – even eccentric, but it became clear to me that a number of Icelandic migrants were the eccentrics who were too eccentric for the land of eccentrics. From gay men, to adventurers, to political radicals who decided that Iceland was too constraining, there was a kind of "eccentrics plus" quality within the immigrant community. I really like that. There were also many conservatives and extremely image-conscious people as well as ferocious feminists, women fleeing abusive marriages, and even future circus performers. Every illusion I had about "the Icelandic immigrant community" being made up of a group of similar people went down in flames after I started to learn more about all of these often very strong personalities. These differences are part of what gave the early community its vibrancy. It's what makes our culture and history so fascinating for me. There is never a dull moment in Icelandic immigration archives.

You make note of your uncle Nelson Gerrard and your Amma, a self-taught curator who inspired your approach to the book. Can you talk a bit more on how 'domestic' material, or practical items – the everyday details of life – fit with more formal documentation to give a greater understanding of history?

I mention in the acknowledgements section of my book that I submitted my page proofs for this book as my Amma, Helga (Olafson) Gerrard was dying. She was 99 1/2 years old and had spent her life as a farm wife and self-taught curator of the local museum. I actually hit send and then drove to her bedside for our last coffee together. She passed away the next day and I got to be there. I was so grateful for that chance.

Objects were central to how my Amma talked about her own history. She was born in Riverton in 1920 and learned Icelandic as a child, but as I discuss further in my book, many older Icelandic speakers faced a lot of social pressure to totally Anglicize. She also moved to a farming community with few Icelanders, so seldom spoke it. Instead of teaching me Icelandic, she'd often tell me stories using objects from her house. She'd grab an old broach or a piece of fabric and say something like "now my Amma who lived at 738 Arlington in Winnipeg bought me this at Eaton's while I was working at Standard Brands..." and trail off into a whole long story about how her Amma used to host séances for Icelanders in the West End, ran a business, survived as a widow and had psychic dreams. These kinds of long narratives were pretty easy to find in other families as well, and I began to see objects as "data containers" that I could use to find stories, especially from Icelandic women, that may not have been recorded in writing.

Though Icelanders in Iceland usually focus on the language as the be all and end all of Icelandic identity, it's important to remember that for Icelandic immigrants,

it could actually be dangerous to speak Icelandic in Canada and the US. During the wars especially, speaking a "foreign" language or with an accent could attract some pretty negative attention – even violence, so I increasingly understood why my Amma kept the language tucked away. Rather than being embarrassed about not being raised with the language, I now think of this kind of learning through objects as part of how we've survived as a community. It's also part of a living culture that works for us and is accessible to future generations who also might not learn the language.

Laurie and her amma, Helga (Olafson) Gerrard

You have dedicated the book to your family and detail important figures in the acknowledgements. Can you say anything more to the book as a bridge between your ancestors, or grandparents, and your children?

Definitely. This book was first a way of understanding past generations in the community, and the world they came from. Although there has been a lot published on the community, too often it focuses on formal institutions and male leaders and figures. I wanted to understand the experiences of women, their massive often unsung impact, and the cultures that they built.

Now, for emerging generations, I hope that they book can help fill in the blanks about how and why the Icelandic community in North America *is* different from modern Icelandic society – and that these differences have an important history and are part of a living culture.

How do you think visiting Iceland or more access to current popular Icelandic culture, has – or will – change Icelandic-Canadians 'Icelandic identity'?

Immigrant communities tend to be a bit self-conscious about how they look to their cousins in the homeland, but I strongly feel that Icelandic Canadians and Americans should maintain the unique traditions we have and not abandon them because we believed that Icelanders in Iceland have the market on authenticity cornered. I like our distinctiveness, though I also remember when I first went to Iceland and how self-conscious I was that the culture that I knew was somehow less real. I also hated the stigma against speaking the language imperfectly or with an accent. I spent a lot of time learning Icelandic and found that part really hard.

When I went to Iceland for the first time, it was not the magical "return" I imagined, particularly since I grew up surrounded by images of and cultural throwbacks from 19th-century rural Iceland. Reykjavík's was a very modern city and was totally not what I was expecting. At first I felt like the Iceland that I had hoped to see was totally gone, and then I really connected with the people. And it was FABULOUS. The intellectual

engagement, the weird simliarities, the culture, the art... it opened up a whole world of possibility. I've spent a lot of time in Iceland now and feel that it's as much about having a historical connection as it is about having a living connection in the present. Being able to spend time in Iceland and connect with modern Icelandic culture has really benefitted me in many, many ways. It also made me better understand the immigrant generation, as part of a larger radical tradition of change, rupture, and creativity. Seeing the landscape, the archival / museum collections, and the historical locations also meant so much. It gave me a much stronger understanding of how important it was for them to maintain connections to Iceland – and I think it still matters today.

On a practical note, what was the experience of the release of the book during our 'time of isolation'?

Great question. Well, this book took me about 15 years to research and write. I actually didn't know my book had been published when Toronto went into lockdown. I was at my office at University of Toronto grabbing the books I'd need for the next few months when I thought – "I should really go check my mailbox." I was in a rush, so I almost left. Then I turned around and ran down the hall to grab whatever was in there. There was a brown envelope and I grabbed it without thinking. When I looked inside there it was. I laughed at the terrible timing.

I've had time to get back on my feet with my kids and work and have been reflecting on whether or not this is terrible or perfect timing. Now I believe it's the latter. The year 2020 actually marks the official 150th anniversary of the mass migrations to North America that began in 1870 (there were earlier waves to Utah and Brazil.) I also spend quite a bit of the book talking about how the small pox epidemic in 1876-7 shaped Icelandic immigrant culture, so it was timely in an unsettling way. Now as I try to shift life and work online, it's also giving me a chance to work on producing historical content for digital platforms. Though I'd long dreamed of an in-person book launch, I've developed an Instagram account @thevikingimmigrants to showcase some of the research and am working on a podcast. Everything seems to happen for a reason.

Lastly, can you speak to the story of the cover art and artist?

For a long time I couldn't envision finishing this book in part because I couldn't find the right cover image. I really struggled with it. There was no historical image that really represented all of the community. I did have one contemporary image that almost worked: a shot of my partner's cousin Bryna holding some hardfiskur that was featured in Vice Magazine. It was fab, but it wasn't really historical. Finally I contacted my old childhood friend, Charlene Kasdorf, who is a really talented illustrator currently living in Qatar. We played together often as kids and she read the whole book before it came out, so she really had a strong understanding of my personality and perspective. She built this amazing image of a Viking, modeled after the Viking statue in Gimli, in a strong black cup of coffee-which was / is an Icelandic immigrant obsession that I also discuss in the book. Charlene's image brought together so many innate but difficult to articulate parts of Icelandic culture. I loved it.

The Viking Immigrant: Icelandic North Americans *is by L. K. Bertram and published by University of Toronto Press. It can be purchased through the UofT press website (https://utorontopress.com/ca/the-viking-immigrants-2), or your local bookstore.*

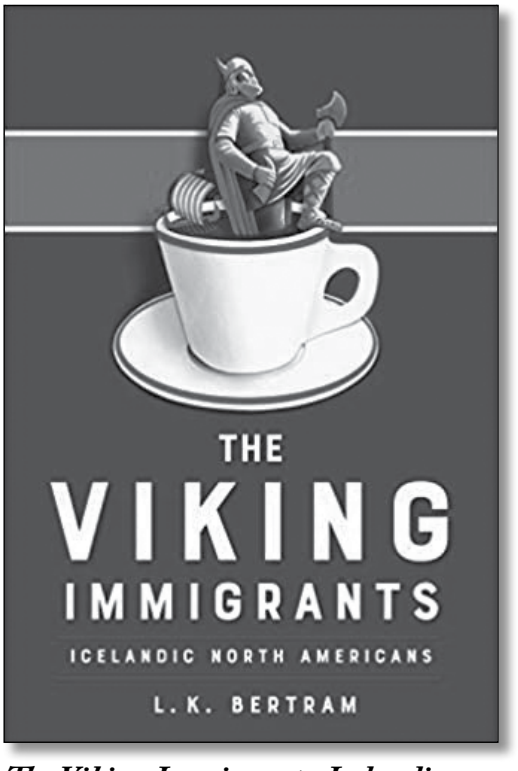
Follow more of Bertram's work on the subject on Instagram @thevikingimmigrants

Book Review

The Viking Immigrants: Icelandic North Americans

by L.K. Bertram

Reviewed by Sharon Arskey



The Viking Immigrants: Icelandic North America
By L.K. Bertram
University of Toronto Press, 2020

An alternative sub-title for L.K. Bertram's T*he Viking Immigrants: Icelandic North Americans* could be "The Cultural Significance of the Mundane".

Published this year by University of Toronto Press, Bertram's work examines ordinary objects and activities in Icelandic North American households and how they were instrumental in maintaining and strengthening the Icelandic culture in a land so far away from home.

Language is often considered the predominant marker for cultural identity, yet the Icelanders have mostly relinquished theirs over time while still retaining a strong sense of themselves as Icelandic North Americans.

Nowhere is this solid sense of identity more evident than in the full chapter devoted to vínarterta, the black and white torte that has come to define Western Icelanders on this continent, despite the fact that Icelanders at home gave up the habit a long time ago. Never underestimate the power of a vínarterta to unite or divide, the debate itself a unique descriptor of the Western Icelander. As a descendent myself of Icelandic immigrants, I have my own take on a proper torte (seven layers, no to cardamom, yes to almond flavouring, icing and sprinkles perfectly acceptable on special occasions.)

The new settlers quickly blended

Icelandic wool with indigenous dress to keep warm in cold winters. But they also soon discovered that urban fashion was a pragmatic way to fit the image they wanted to project.

The Viking image was used to develop a respected and popular image for the new immigrants. An exception related to the consumption of alcohol, which was seen by many Icelanders as a practice "that brought out the Viking in Icelandic men" – and that was not seen as a good thing.

If liquor was a no-no (at least in theory), then coffee was a triple yes. But only good quality coffee brewed in the traditional way with a coffee bag. Icelanders reportedly considered emigration to Brazil because of the proximity to high quality green coffee beans. The pot was always on and both morning and afternoon coffee breaks were common. It was a measure of hospitality and the better the coffee, the higher the status.

When an immigrant's daughter married into the nationally famous Eaton family in the early 1930s, the Icelanders' status was cemented. Over the following decades, the Icelandic community, its organizations, and publications, would benefit from this connection.

There is a gender aspect to these discussions. It was Mamma or Amma who made the cakes and brewed the coffee. It was Mamma or Amma who knit the socks and mitts. Fashion was a predominantly feminine pursuit. The Fjallkona was/is a woman.

A chapter on ghosts and superstitious beliefs was especially interesting, at least partly because it was new to me, although I was familiar with Iceland's hidden people and the indigenous spirit world. Bertram places both in juxtaposition with colonialist policies that effectively pitted new settlers against indigenous residents. More tragic spectres relate to the graves of those lost to the smallpox epidemic of 1876-77. The disease, carried unwittingly by a group of Icelandic settlers who had made a stop in Quebec City, spread beyond New Iceland to nearby areas, resulting in the deaths of Icelanders and indigenous peoples alike. Awareness of the ghosts signifies an acceptance of the history and any responsibilities resulting from that history.

Bertram herself has connections to the Icelandic community in Manitoba and that connection, along with the everyday nature of the subject matter, helps to make what is essentially an academic work into a highly readable book.

Those with Icelandic connections will recognize and respond to their own histories after reading *The Viking Immigrants*, while descendants of immigrants from other cultures may look at theirs in a new and different way.

Contributors

SHARRON ARKSEY has been writing non-fiction for more than forty years. Her debut novel *The Waiting Place* came out in 2016. In 2018, she and her husband retired from the family farm at Langruth, MB and moved to Winnipeg, where their adult children live. Her adventures in Icelandic class were detailed in Classroom Notes, a column that appeared in *Lögberg-Heimskringla* from September 2019 to April 2020.

TAMMY AXELSSON spent three of her early working years in Iceland.When she returned to her home town of Gimli, Manitoba, she took on the position as Executive Director for the Icelandic National League of North America. From there she moved to take on the helm of the New Iceland Heritage Museum where she spent twenty years, during which time she was also the Mayor of the Rural Municipality of Gimli for one term. She is currently the Constituency Assistant to the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Interlake-Gimli Constituency.

BRYNJAR BJÖRGVIN CHAPMAN lives in Montreal and has been writing professionally for two years.

ANITA DAHER is the author of fifteen books for young readers, including *Forgetting How to Breathe*, and her just released teen novel, *You Don't Have to Die in the End*. She splits her time between Winnipeg and a summer residence in Gimli, where she continues work on the first draft of *Journey to New Iceland*.

TOM DOREY, a former Winnipegger with Icelandic heritage who studies film and now lives in Toronto.

WILL JAKOBSON is a Gimli-grown Icelandic Canadian, dabbling in writing, video, photography, web design, and coffee. He co-owns Swell Creative; a media and marketing agency that services Winnipeg and the Interlake.

MEGAN MEULLER is a senior manager, Research Communications, Office of the Vice-President Research & Innovation, York University, muellerm@yorku.ca

MYLEE NORDIN is a Professor of Ecology and Commercial Beekeeping at Niagara College in Niagra on the Lake, Ontario.

RYAN SIGURDSON, now of Ontario, was raised in Edmonton. He is very proud of his heritage.

LOGAN STEFANSON writes sometimes. He was raised in Gimli, but now lives in Winnipeg, MB.

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

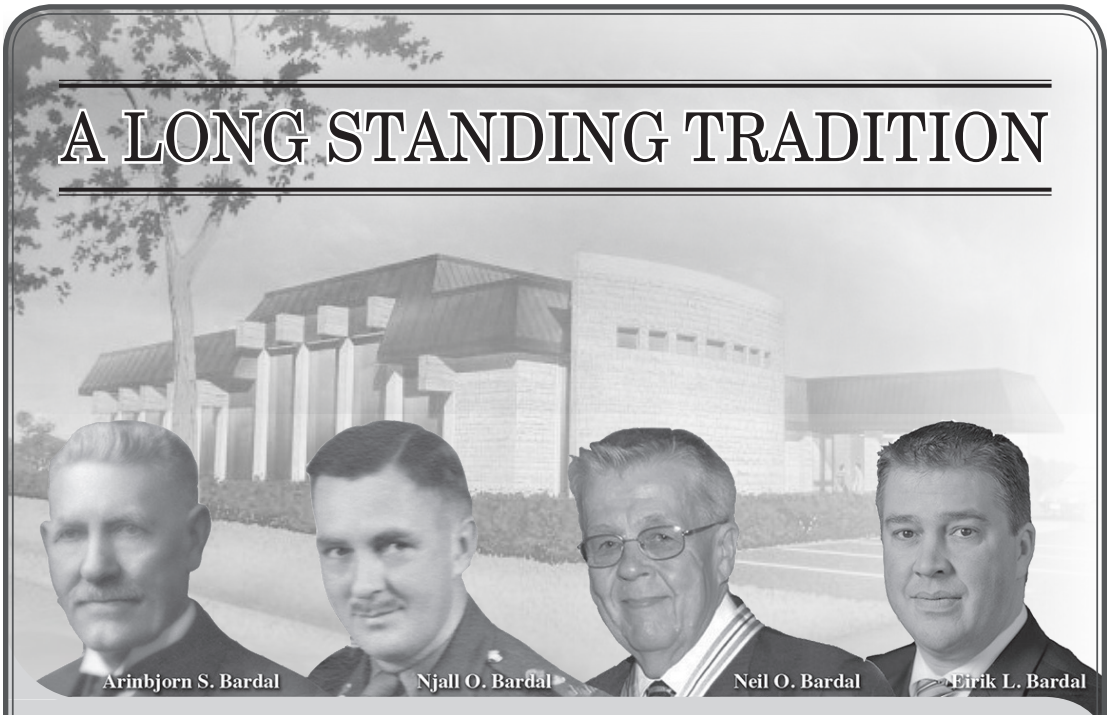
KRIS VOPNFJORD, Lindy's older brother, lives in Victoria, BC.

PHOTO CREDIT: RUTH BONNEVILLE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Freya Björg Olafson

The Back Page

A LONG STANDING TRADITION



The Only Funeral Home Owned and Operated by the Bardal Family

One Winnipeg Location Only Across from Brookside Cemetery

Call: (204) 949-2200

3030 Notre Dame Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3H 1B9

neilbardalinc.com
info@nbardal.mb.ca

neil bardal INC
FUNERAL CENTRE

CANADA ICELAND FOUNDATION INC

An organization funded by Canadians of Icelandic Descent, dedicated to the preservation of their Cultural Heritage

For scholarship information please contact:

chairman@canadaicelandfoundation.ca

Gifts and bequests support our ongoing work
http://canadaicelandfoundation.com