

## ICELANDIC NATIONAL LEAGUE OF NORTH AMERICA

### Newsletter – September 2007

Margaret Grisdale, editor and Communications Director email: [grisdale7018@shaw.ca](mailto:grisdale7018@shaw.ca)

This will be the first of several newsletters featuring the members of the present executive. I hope to receive other autobiographies in the near future.

#### IN MEMORIUM EVELYN THORVALDSON 1938 – 2007



Evelyn was born in Winnipeg in 1938, September 11<sup>th</sup>. We now often hear September 11<sup>th</sup> referred to as nine – eleven.

Her father, Joseph Thomas Ganton, died in 1945. Her mother, Ingibjörg, was born in 1911 and died in 1972. Joseph was of Irish ancestry. Evelyn would have been six or seven at the time of his death and was sent to the country to be with her amma and afi, Kristín and Hjörtur Pálsson. Her grandparents were both born in Iceland. Their farm was at Stony Hill but they would soon move to Lundar. It was not uncommon to hear little kids speaking Icelandic in Lundar in the nineteen forties. I liken that to total Icelandic immersion. Evelyn learned Icelandic there.

She later wrote a book named 'My Amma and Me' which came out in 1993. It is a poignant story about the hardships of leaving for a distant and unknown place and her close association with her grandmother. The parents of Kristín did not want her to go and they did not entirely approve of Hjörtur.

They arrived in Manitoba in 1901 and homesteaded at Stony Hill.

Evelyn's early schooling was in Stony Hill and Lundar. She also attended the convent in St. Laurent and probably picked up a bit of French there.

She married my brother, Gordon, who was with TCA, later named Air Canada. Gordon died in 2005. He traveled quite a lot and Evelyn accompanied him on many of those trips. They were transferred to Montreal and spent seven years there, Evelyn was instrumental in establishing the Icelandic club in that city and it still flourishes.

They had a good life and both contributed to Icelandic cultural organizations. They always had a nice home and it was a treat to visit them. Evelyn played the piano and sang. They both danced and jigged. Gordon always had good new jokes.

Evelyn was the first lady president of the Icelandic National League of North America (Þjóðræknisfélag) and she did a marvellous job in that position (1991 – 1992). She made many trips to Iceland and attended some meetings there.

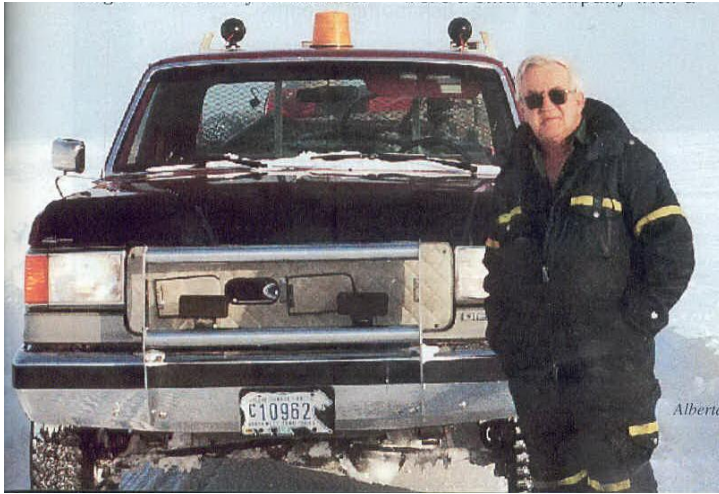
Evelyn did her share as a volunteer, with the INL and Lögberg-Heimskringla. She also worked hard with the Manitoba Curling Association organizing bonspiels and other events.

She was dedicated to Icelandic culture and did things in an Icelandic way - their summer cottage at Lundar Beach was named 'Húsabrekka'. She liked to have kleinur and other Icelandic pastry for her guests when she served coffee. I will end by simply saying – "Goodbye Evelyn".

Gunnar Thorvaldson 2007-08-13

## WALTER SOPHER, PAST PRESIDENT OF THE ICELANDIC NATIONAL LEAGUE

I, Walter Sopher was born and raised in Riverton, Manitoba. My great grand parents were Gisli Arnason and Dyrunn Steinsdottir on my Mothers side - they came to Manitoba in 1883 and settled on the west side of Hecla for 14 years and then moved to Framness.



They came from Skagafjörður county. My afi, Magnus Gislason was born in Hecla and my amma Ásta, daughter of Einar Stefansson and Lovisa Benediktsdóttir came from the Arnanes district of Áustur Skaftafells in 1904 and settled in Framnes.

Valdimar Sopher was born in Riverton in 1906 to Jónina Svanborg Thorlaksdóttir (Schram) who came from Borgarfjörður, Iceland in 1889 with her parents Thorlakur Schram and Katrin

Jonsdottir to Icelandic River (Riverton). Jónina gave my father to Marshall Sopher and his wife Halldora Thorarinsdóttir who raised him to adulthood and he married my mother Gislina Gudrun Gislason in 1932 and they lived in Riverton. They moved to Selkirk in 1950. They have both passed away and are buried in the Lutheran Cemetery in Selkirk

I left school at the age of 14 and went to work the same day freighting from Riverton to Berens River. I stayed on the Lake for 2 years then went to work on Riverton Transfer. In 1950, my parents moved to Selkirk where I worked for 2 years and then I went into the Air Force for nearly 8 years. Here I got lots of education both good and bad. I got married in 1955 and had a large family and returned to live in Selkirk in 1960 after getting released from the service. I then worked at repairing bush planes and running a chartered airline for a few years. This didn't work out and neither did my marriage so we mutually agreed to part ways. I went to work building roads in Northern Manitoba until the company got a job in the North West Territories on the Dempster Highway and there I worked every day for 4 months and had 2 weeks back in Selkirk where I met my present wife, Julie. We moved to Edmonton in the spring of 1973 and I carried on working in the Arctic until 1978 when all the oil companies left the north as I did. I then formed my own company in 1978 and worked the oil patch in Alberta and returned to the Arctic in 1980 until the fall of 1996 when I retired. I began full time with the Icelandic Club, Nordurljós. where I carried out my way that nothing is impossible it just takes a little longer and if you don't tell a lie you don't have to remember what you said.

My life has had many good times and bad times, mostly self inflicted. I have been very fortunate in always having good people around me in the work place as well as in the Icelandic communities. They have all made me look good, including my wife Julie.

**As they say "Yesterday is History and tomorrow is a Mystery".**

**GAIL EINARSON –MCCLEERY, O.F.           Honourary Icelandic Consul for Ontario  
and Regional director for Ontario and Quebec**



Gail Einarson-McCleery was born in 1939 in Gimli, Manitoba and brought up on a farm in the Minerva district. Both parents were of Icelandic background. Her father Stanley's grandparents were among the original 1875 settlers in "New Iceland", having spent the previous year at Kinmount, Ontario. His parents were Sigurður Einarson and Maria Jónsdóttir. Her mother, Herdis Helgason, came from Arnes, Manitoba; her parents were Marsibil Jónatonsdóttir and Thorfinnur Helgason.

After living and working in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Toronto, Wellington (New Zealand), Sydney (Australia) and London (England), Gail settled down in Toronto working for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and married Eric McCleery, a TV producer originally from Australia. During her 30 years with CBC, she worked on radio programs including Metro Morning, and with television as a Unit Manager on arts shows, made-for-TV movies and documentaries. During her last few years at CBC she was a Manager in the TV Arts and Entertainment area.

After her retirement from CBC in 1994, she and her husband Eric became active in the Icelandic community. Gail served first as newsletter editor for the Icelandic Canadian Club of Toronto, later as President (June 1998 - May 2000) and in 2000 as Chair of the Millennium Committee. Her big challenge in this millennium year was the highly successful Vikings in Canada Gala on August 1st in Toronto, a celebration of Icelandic-Canadian writers, artists, musicians and film-makers.

In 1998 she became International Visits Director for the INL. In this capacity she has organized exchange visits with Iceland, including that of art critic Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, photographer Páll Stefánsson and national costume expert Fríður Ólafsdóttir to Canada, as well as sending artist Patricia Peacock, bird-carver Einar Vigfusson and soprano Carole Davis to Iceland. Events in October of 2002 included a North American Tour by mezzo soprano Ingveldur Ýr Jónsdóttir and pianist Guðríður St. Sigurðardóttir, as well as workshops in Iceland by spinning wheel maker Doug Rognvaldson. This was followed in 2003 by visits by aboriginal storyteller Ruth Christie and jazz vocalist/writer Martha Brooks to Iceland. The most recent Visit was the tour in April and May, 2007 of Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson and cellist Karen Ouzounian, who performed in ten cities together, after which Víkingur went on to appear in Montreal and Ottawa.

Gail was presented with the Order of the Falcon on August 4th, 2000 in Winnipeg by Ragnar Ólafur Grímsson, the President of Iceland and became an Honourary Consul in 2002. She is also currently Regional Director for Ontario and Quebec. She has visited Iceland five times now, each trip better than the first!

Gail has a daughter Lesley in Vancouver and two step-sons, Andrew and Cameron, in the Toronto area, as well as six grandchildren.



Rognvaldur Sveinn Lyle Hillman, MD  
Icelandic National League of North  
America Board Member  
Membership Chairman

All of my grandparents were born in Iceland and came to America between 1874 and 1884. Some came to Canada, first living in Kinmount, Ontario, for a winter and then in Markland, Nova Scotia, for seven years. The others came directly to North Dakota and lived in the Mountain Icelandic settlement before moving to the Mouse

River Icelandic settlement near Upham, North Dakota. My parents were both born and raised near Upham and were living there when I was born in 1935. By 1937 their land had been taken by eminent domain for a huge game refuge. My family then moved to a farm near Mountain where I grew up.

My elementary education was in a small country school and I graduated from Mountain High School. I attended the University of North Dakota for BA and BS degrees and the first two years of medical school. I graduated in June 1960 from the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle, Washington. Diane McLean and I were married June 18th, 1960, in Adams, North Dakota. My internship was at the Naval Hospital in San Diego, and then I went to the Navy flight surgeon school in Pensacola, Florida. My remaining Naval service was again in San Diego.

I then went into family practice at the Johnson Clinic in Rugby, North Dakota for 7 ½ years. In 1971 I completed a diagnostic radiology residency at the University of Minnesota and returned to Rugby. My last 10 years of full-time practice were in Williston, North Dakota. In 1997 we moved to Brainerd, Minnesota and I did locum tenens occasionally. I am now fully retired.

We have been blessed with four wonderful daughters and sons-in-law and seven bright, beautiful and handsome grandchildren.

My Icelandic heritage was nurtured well in Mountain as the 17th of June and 2nd of August were always celebrated. At Rugby I practiced with three other doctors of Icelandic descent. When living in Williston, I felt a little isolated. At that time I started getting Logberg-Heimskringla and joined the Minot Icelandic Heritage Club for more fellowship. Also we have been able to travel to Iceland six times and have many good friends and relatives there.

Being on the INL board has been a great experience and it is amazing to see how much programs such as the Snorri and International Visits strengthen bonds for all between Iceland and North America.