



# Connect

Celebrating 3 Years!

Winter 2022-2023



## Inside this issue:

Many Yules Ago...	2
Icelandic National League Convention	3
Icelandic "Book Club"	3
Language Classes Starting	5
Calendar of Events	5
Home Away From Home	6
My Summer of Snorri	8
Not All Who Wander Are Lost	9
Nordic Trails	10
An Icelandic Club Disbands	12

Connect newsletter welcomes your submissions!

Send your news, ideas, photos, and articles to:

[info@inlus.org](mailto:info@inlus.org)

Connect newsletter is published quarterly.

## The Good Yet To Come

By INLUS President Dianne O'Konski

There's an energy in the air that has been missing for a couple of years.

People are more willing to come out and socialize and participate in events. Our [INLUS Events Calendar](#) is witness to that with the member clubs holding holiday parties this year – I hope you can be part of the celebration or, if not near an Icelandic club, celebrate Iceland in your own way!

As we finish up 2022, I want to thank everyone for their continued support. Without your membership and donations, we would not be able to provide our [scholarships and grants](#). I also want to thank all those who have been so gracious with their time and energy in providing the webinars, Icelandic language classes, the Reading group, and online gathering, *Kaffi Timi*.

As we contemplate what next year holds for us, I am looking forward to meeting (hopefully) many of you in spectacular Banff, Alberta May 11-13 for the Icelandic National League convention. The Leif Eiriksson Icelandic Club of Calgary is a member of both the INLUS and its Canadian sister organization INLNA and is hosting the event. An article describing the convention is found in this newsletter's pages. The INLUS is planning a meet and greet during the convention, so I hope you can join us – I'd really like to meet you!!

Enjoy this issue of the INLUS Connect!

## Stay Connected to INLUS in 2023!

Most of our valued members have renewals due in December each year. If you have auto renewal, your membership should continue as usual. If not, all members with renewals due in December should receive a notification email from us in early December. Please look for this email in your inbox.

December is also a good time to consider gift memberships for family or friends. A gift membership lets you share all the online webinars, author discussions, language opportunities and participation in the INLUS outreach programs.

Memberships are one of our primary revenue sources and allow us to continue important programs such as grants, scholarships, language classes, webinars and others. To join or renew, visit: <https://inlus.org/about-us/membership/> and click on the Member Application box. Thanks for your continued support.

# Many Yules Ago, In A Land Far Far Away...



A troll who steals spoons from the kitchen, another who uses a long hook to steal meat from the dinner table, yet another that steals milk. Not your typical imagery for the Christmas holiday season, but these are three of the thirteen beloved *Jólasveinar*, The Yule Lads. The Icelandic folklore of these thirteen mischievous holiday trolls dates back hundreds of years.

They are said to be the offspring of *Grýla*, a terrible half-troll, half-ogre whose story was first written by Snorri Sturluson in *Prose Edda* in the 13th century. She is thought to originally be associated with the winter solstice and stories were told of a stick she carried that could spread ice when tapped on the ground. Later, she was connected with the Yule season and would roam the land looking for children who misbehaved. When she found them, she'd kidnap them - often with the help of the thirteen Yule Lads - and fatten them up in a mountain cave until she turned them into her famous bad kids stew.

The stories became so terrifying to children that in the late 1700s, Iceland's government passed a law that parents could no longer terrorize their children with these stories. Gradually, the tales evolved into today's folklore. *Grýla* is still the mother of the Yule Lads, and still a scary ogre, but the *Jólasveinar* have their own story. They live in the rocky

area of *Dimmuborgir*, coming down to the towns and villages during the Christmas season, arriving individually each day starting on December 12th through Christmas Eve. Each has a mischievous streak and will cause havoc around the household with their pranks. If children are well-behaved, they'll receive a gift in their shoes, but bad children might get a rotten potato. The best children might receive thirteen gifts even before Christmas Day!

And one last note of the holiday traditions in Iceland - when drawing up your Christmas list, you should be sure to include clothes. If not, you risk falling victim to *Jólakötturinn*, The Yule Cat, who seeks to eat those who didn't receive clothes for Christmas. That tradition might just date back to the time of fall sheep shearing, where it was common to receive a bag of wool for your work. Only the laziest people or those who didn't pitch in on shearing wouldn't have new clothes for Christmas, making a fine feast for *Jólakötturinn*!

-Heidi Herman, Author of:

*Yule Lads Legend Iceland's Jólasveinar and The Guardians of Iceland and Other Icelandic Folk Tales.* [www.heidihermanauthor.com](http://www.heidihermanauthor.com)

Learn more about the Yule Lads and find links to more Icelandic Yule books at <https://yuleladslegend.com/shop/>

# Icelandic National League of North America Annual Convention May 11-13, 2023

The 2023 Icelandic National League of North America (INLNA) Convention will be held at the Banff Centre located in the Canadian Rockies May 11-13, 2023. Banff has been voted the World's #1 travel destination by many travel publications for many years. The Leif Eiriksson Icelandic Club of Calgary is the hosting club.

The INLNA Convention offers the opportunity for like-minded individuals of Icelandic descent and those interested in Iceland to come together. It is both a cultural event and an opportunity to entertain and educate attendees in subjects relevant to our shared Icelandic heritage.

The 2023 convention's theme is *A Celebration of our Icelandic Heritage in the Arts*.

Program highlights include:



- ◆ A screening of the film "A Letter from Helga" on Thursday afternoon prior to the opening reception of the Convention.
- ◆ Icelandic Roots will offer free genealogy database access on Friday.
- ◆ Snorri Reunion will be incorporated in the weekend program.
- ◆ Lindy Vopnfjord will be the feature entertainer at the Saturday Night Banquet & Gala.
- ◆ A bus tour exploring the history of the first Icelandic settlement in Alberta takes place Sunday, May 14.

Online convention registration will open on December 15 at [leicyyc.ca](https://leicyyc.ca)

## An Icelandic "Book Club"

—By Lauren Fields

We don't have an official name for our group. It's been alternatively called the Sunday Study Session or, more officially, the INLUS Reading Group, but I affectionately refer to it as Icelandic Book Club.

If you have gone through any of the INLUS language courses (and if you haven't, I recommend them!), then you may be familiar with the optional Sunday study session that David offers each week to review the previous week's material. **(Contd. Page 4)**



**(Book Club...Continued)** This was how it started. A group of strangers of all ages and from all over the United States and Canada were united by an INLUS Basic Icelandic 2 course during peak COVID in fall, 2020, via Zoom. The six-week language course offered an unexpected community of learners who decided to continue the Sunday sessions after the end of the course. This self-run group spent a few weeks reviewing material and grammar lessons before settling on choosing a book to read together as a way to practice reading comprehension, pronunciation, and translation. We selected **Short Stories in Icelandic** by Olly Richards as our first book and alternated reading paragraphs aloud and translating the text.

Since this group is self-run and focusing on reading comprehension, it has a different feel from a more traditional language class. Grammar previously learned on a powerpoint slide “clicks” when read in the context of a story. Different concepts or passages resonate with different people, and we share our insights with the group. It’s a supportive atmosphere: supporting our individual language learning journeys through offering pronunciation assistance or encouraging someone to feel comfortable speaking for the first time. We have also come to know each other socially through this group and coming together each Sunday is relaxing, enjoyable, and a stress-free way to engage with a difficult language.

We finished **Short Stories in Icelandic** in spring, 2022, and started reading **Árstíðir** by *Karítas Hrundar Pálsdóttir* this fall. These short stories, geared toward Icelandic language learners, offer sweet vignettes into Icelandic daily life and culture. With many of the stories, we have been moved to share our reactions as we read them, engaging with the material in a more meaningful way. The INLUS recently hosted an [Author’s Corner webinar with Karítas](#) discussing her new book, **Dagatal**, and many of the Reading Group participants joined in the discussion.



Currently the Reading Group has 23 members but only about 14 active participants. We meet for one hour every Sunday evening via Zoom, and usually have nine to 12 people in attendance each week. We self-assign reading passages to prepare in advance of our meeting, but anyone is welcome to listen in, or volunteer for unassigned passages if they are comfortable doing so. The books we select are accessible in print or e-book formats.

The INLUS Reading Group is currently on break for the 2022 holiday season and will resume in January, 2023. Contact the INLUS if you would like to join the Reading Group!

*Special thanks to Reading Group members Kathy, Judy, Beth, Krislyn, Susan, and Steve for sharing their reflections, summarized above. Lauren Fields is a member of the INLUS board.*

Author *Karítas Hrundar Pálsdóttir* latest book, *Dagatal* – *Sögur á einföldu máli* was discussed on the Author’s Corner webinar.

# New Icelandic Language Classes Begin in January 2023

Have you ever wanted to learn the basics of Icelandic in a safe, nice-paced class? If so, we invite you to check our next Icelandic class offerings by going to our [class registration page](#). Here, you can learn about three different six-week class offerings that begin the second week of January:

- ◆ Our Basic-1 class is for beginners and peels away some of the mystery of how Icelandic works. This class is on Thursdays for six weeks, starting on January 12th .
- ◆ Our new offering is a Basic-1.5 class that gradually builds upon the Basic-1 class without going too hard or too fast into new material. This class is on Mondays for six weeks, starting January 9th. Class size limited to 10 people.
- ◆ Our Basic-2 class is also being refined and trimmed to ease the pace of learning new material a wee bit from our last Basic-2 class. This class is on Wednesdays for six weeks, starting January 11th. Class size limited to 10 people.

All classes are offered on the Zoom video platform so it's easy to participate if you have a computer. All classes will begin at 8PM Eastern Time (7PM Central, 6PM Mountain, 5PM Pacific).

You can sign up from this [link](#).

If you have any questions, please reach out to David Johnson at [david@inlus.org](mailto:david@inlus.org). Registration is now open. If interested in taking any of these classes, be sure to register soon before classes fill up.



The "Yule Lads" courtesy of the Icelandic Association of Utah

**Dec 3: Jolaball-Christmas Festival, Icelandic Club of Greater Seattle**

**Dec 4: Jolabarnaball, Hekla Club, Minneapolis, Minnesota**

**Dec 4: Holiday Party, Icelandic Klub of Fargo-Moorhead**

**Dec 10: Icelandic Yule Lads Breakfast and Jolabokaflod, Icelandic Association of Utah, Spanish Fork, Utah**

**Dec 16: Kaffi Timi, INLUS online conversation hour**

**Feb 18: Thorablót, Icelandic Club of Greater Seattle**

To learn more about these events go to the [INLUS Calendar](#).

*Know of an event in  
your area that  
would be of interest  
to the INLUS com-  
munity?*

*Send news, photos  
and stories to:*

[info@inlus.org](mailto:info@inlus.org)



## Snorri Adventures I:

# Home Away From Home

By: Sierra Jenson

**Note: Sierra received an INLUS Scholarship to participate in the Snorri program. She wrote this story to share her experience.**

Iceland, the land of my ancestors, provided me the environment to be in perfect harmony with my surroundings, and there was nowhere else I'd rather be. Iceland felt like home. Volcanos, glaciers, waterfalls, natural springs, fjords, cliffs, and rolling hills – Iceland is magical.

I think back to the beginning of the Snorri Program, amazed that strangers quickly became family. I was blessed with 21 Snorri cousins, and many genuine friends and family. The first two weeks we stayed in Reykjavík, at the *Dalur* Hostel, where our friendships grew tremendously.

We studied at the University of Iceland learning the Icelandic language, genealogy, history, politics, music, etc. Each day, when class would end, we quickly and excitedly made our way to the bus stop to go explore Reykjavík. We enjoyed spending time at cozy coffee shops, gift shops, restaurants, karaoke bars, and the *Laugardalslaug* Swimming Pool, which was next door to our Hostel. We planned adventures every chance we got; we hiked Mount Esja where we filled our water bottles with refreshing glacier water, did the seven-step ritual at the Sky Lagoon, mud masks at Blue Lagoon, and explored the Thingvellir National Park. I was also honored to meet *Guðni Th. Jóhannesson*, the President of Iceland, and hear that he hopes to someday visit Mountain, North Dakota, my Icelandic hometown.

A day I will forever cherish was June 22nd, my golden birthday. I was feeling jet-lagged and exhausted from all there was to take in. After dinner, my Snorri cousins, who I just recently met, had planned a surprise birthday party for me. When I entered the room, they all began to sing "22" by Taylor Swift, had a cake lit with candles, golden champagne, and a birthday card signed by my fellow Snorri's. I was overwhelmed with emotion, there is something extraordinary about making friendships through common heritage, travel, and adventures. We spent the evening eating cake, line dancing, and a night out in downtown Reykjavík.

My third and fourth weeks in Iceland I spent volunteering at the Reykjavík Park and Zoo. I worked amusement rides with the young employees, fed horses, cows, foxes, reindeer, and seals. At this time, I stayed with my host family, who I am related to five generations back.

Living in an Icelandic home, I got an up-close cultural experience, language practice, and the best home-cooked meals. They spoiled me with a trip to their oceanfront summer home in *Stykkishólmur*, located on the *Snæfellsnes* Peninsula. We had many family dinners, went on sightseeing

adventures, took a boat ride to Viðey Island where we happened to run into *Katrín Jakobsdóttir*, the Prime Minister of Iceland. On our last day together, we went to Fly Over Iceland. I felt the wind and mist in my face when soaring over mountains, waterfalls, and all of Iceland's beautiful scenery. I had tears rolling down my face as I could not believe how beautiful the land of my ancestors was. Life was feeling like a dream.

The amount of quality time I was able to spend with my Icelandic family was beautiful and meant so much to me. I learned a lot about our shared ancestors and what life in Iceland was like for them many years ago. Throughout the time of living with my hosts, I was introduced to as many as 32 relatives. I was fortunate to meet multiple generations of family and consume enough home-cooked lamb to survive the year. Most family gatherings were conversed in Icelandic so I would pretend I knew what was being talked about. Although I only caught on to a few words, I felt welcome. I felt content with life, safe in my surroundings, and ridiculously happy.

The final Snorri adventure week was a blast. Traveling up the west coast, we visited museums, volcanos, waterfalls, farms, went swimming, hiking, horseback riding, and ate lots of good food along the way. My favorite day was hiking up the gorgeous *Drangey* Island to watch puffins, learn the history of the island, and then be interviewed to be on the news.

On our last night together, we gave presentations at the Canadian embassy to reflect on our personal experiences and interests. I shared pictures and stories of my Icelandic family and shared that I will be staying in Iceland for another week with my family who flew in from North Dakota. To hear the presentations of my Snorri cousins made me laugh, cry, smile, and feel so unbelievably thankful for all that we learned and experienced. The friendships, memories, and feelings this trip gave me will be cherished forever.

*Takk Fyrir* Iceland and everyone who made The Snorri Program a life-changing experience.



## 2023 Snorri Program Dates:

**Snorri** -a five-week summer cultural program in Iceland, for North Americans ages 20-30. Apply by Jan. 16, 2023

**Snorri West** -a four-week summer program in North America for Icelanders, ages 20-30. Apply by Feb. 20, 2023.

**Snorri Plus** -a two-week summer cultural program in Iceland for North Americans over the age of 30. Apply by Jan. 16, 2023.

[Details and Application online at: www.Snorri.is](https://www.Snorri.is)

Jessica Drake's Summer of  
Snorri Photos:

## My Summer of Snorri

By Jessica Drake



My Snorri experience was the most incredible opportunity I've ever been given. During our stay, we learned about the culture, politics, language, genealogy, and geology at the University in Reykjavík. My favorite classes were the culture and politics topics. Let's just say that Iceland's politics and culture makes a lot more sense to me than the United States version of those things. I appreciated and loved the Icelandic mindset of open mindedness and the value placed in each person simply for existing. I felt that from my host family, as well as by the native Icelandic friends I made along the way.

Another thing I particularly enjoyed in Iceland was the art in all forms. The architecture of the *Hallgrímskirkja* church in Reykjavík, the piece of the Berlin Wall, the live shows and music, the street art on the sides of buildings, even the karaoke was phenomenal! I was amazed by how much importance was placed on the arts, and how involved the Icelanders I met were in them.

I also felt deeply connected to nature in Iceland. The greenery, the wildflowers, the waterfalls, the craters, the elf rocks, and the ocean are all harmonious creating the most magnificent landscapes I've ever had the opportunity to witness. Even when I was feeling homesick, I could take a walk outside and breathe the fresh air and feel at peace. There is definitely a powerful and unique energy Iceland holds that is indescribably beautiful. I also learned a deep respect and admiration for the elves. Every single Icelandic I had a conversation with I asked "do you believe in elves" and every Icelandic said a resounding "yes". So naturally, I believed them full heartedly.

There are many things I could say about Iceland, but one overarching thing is that it is a magnificent place that is beyond words to describe. If you ever have the incredible opportunity to visit, you won't be disappointed. I am so grateful to those who provided scholarships, like INLUS, which made it possible for me to attend this life changing program.



## Not All Who Wander Are Lost

*–They Might be on an Expedition!*

By Sigfús Haukur Sigfússon

**Note: This account comes from the perspective of an Icelander visiting North America in 2022 through the Snorri West program.**

I had been cycling for an hour when I finally admitted that I was lost on Washington Island, Wisconsin. In hindsight going out without a map was not the correct course of action. Though if you were to ask me in person if I got lost I, would refuse such an implication and state that it was more of an expedition, rather than an Icelander getting lost in a foreign environment. I started out quite confident thinking that since the island was based on a grid system like other places in the United States, I would have no problem getting back to Richard Purinton's house before nine and meet my relatives that were waiting for me at the community center. I was wrong.

That morning I donned my Chicago Blackhawks hat, which my host in Chicago had so graciously given me, and off I went, cycling through the town and off to the wild forest, which I found surrounded me on all sides. Before I knew it I was lost in nature. The cold breeze in the shade as I cycled down the street was a nice relief from the scorching sun that from its position high above, searched for me ceaselessly. There is a reason why I felt so at home in Washington Island; coming from a small fishing village in the eastern part of Iceland, the small population and the friendliness of the people there, reminded me a lot of home. In fact, all of the people we met on our journey were friendly and open, some more than others, but we never felt that we were being a burden to them.

The wind wafted a sweet lavender smell when I decided it was time to go back. Instead of going back the same way I came I wanted to see more sights by taking a different route back home. My new path led me past a lavender field. It was a beautiful garden with so much blue. It felt out of place. It was as if the English had decided to colonize just that part of the island to raise a tea garden. The red barn that housed the merchandise and goods that the fields supplied was the prettiest barn I had ever seen. The red contrasted so well with the white, and its beauty was rivaled by no other barn in Iceland. The lavender field, as I would later learn, also served one of the best beverages that I had tasted. When I find myself caught in a reverie, my mind wanders to that sweet nectar. I hope to someday go back there.



Sigfús Haukur Sigfússon sporting his Chicago Blackhawks hat in this self-portrait.



The Lavender Fields-photo by Erla Guðný Pálsdóttir

*(“Wander” continues on page 10)*

**(“Wander” continued from page 9):**

Passing the lavender field, I found myself drawn to a strange architecture. It was a brown church. Later that day, our host, Richard Purinton, would tell us more about the church and why it was built. The part of his story that resonated the most with me was the fact that it was a community effort that raised the church. It is worth mentioning that Richard Purinton, was the man who carved the roof boards. The church is a must see since viewing it gave this weary traveler some time to rest from his frantic biking to return on time.

Leaving the church, I cycled a further distance until I found myself at a large lake. From that point, I knew my expedition was drawing to a close. However, without a bottle of water, and the sun beaming down on me, all felt lost. There was no way to go. After that long journey I found myself on the edge of the world. I had passed so many trees that all looked the same to me, and now there it was, the great Lake Michigan. Nothing but water, yet not a drop to drink. To my left, however, I spotted a big house. A woman sat outside enjoying the morning sun while her leg rested on a healthy-looking dog.



I considered my options and decided to speak to the lady of the house, and ask her for directions. To make things even more difficult for myself I had a problem remembering Richard's name at that moment, his last name that is. So, with tenacity and exploring the map that they then graciously gave to me, I managed to make new friends with some lovely people. They really liked my Chicago Blackhawks cap since the family came from Chicago. I told them about Iceland and showed them a video of the 2021 volcano. They were curious and courteous. A proper good folk.

*Sigfús gives a big thumbs up response to his Snorri West trip to North America.*

*(photo by Sigfús Haukur Sigfússon)*

After chatting, and drinking a bottle of water, the woman's father was generous enough to drive me back home to Richard where Mary Ann, his wife, waited to take me to the community center where I would meet the wonderful Dan Nilsson and his family.

This was one of the reasons why I enjoyed myself so much on Washington Island, I got to meet such a bunch of lovely people, and the bike expedition was one of the highlights of the trip for me.

# Kent Bjornsson's Nordic Trails

- From Professional Tourist to  
Professional Guide



By Jackie Flaten

Canadian-Icelander Kent Larus Bjornsson is a licensed tour guide and driver who operates a tour consultation company, Nordic Trails, for people visiting Iceland and Icelanders visiting North America. We are pleased that he is also a founding member of INLUS.

Kent moved to Iceland more than 20 years ago, and one of the first things he did was decide to start a tour group operation. Nordic Trails began operating by escorting groups from Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, Utah and Arizona around the beautiful terrains of Iceland.

His easy-going manner is complemented by a thorough knowledge of Iceland's famous attractions as well as those fascinating sites off the beaten path. His reputation has grown over two decades and Nordic Trails is now a bustling operation that brings Icelanders across the Pacific to Cuba and the Icelandic settlements of North America as well.

What advice would he give to someone visiting Iceland for their first time?

"Try not to see it all in a week," he said. "Pick an area and explore it well."

Kent is known for his professional, detailed itineraries and excellent accommodations and planning.

**("Nordic Trails" continues on page 12)**



Parade in Reykjavik (Kent Larus Bjornsson photo)



**(“Nordic Trails” continued from page 11)**

His gregarious personality and passion for the Iceland culture, its landmarks and genealogy adds personal flavor of fun and adventure. Trips have included an in-depth look at Viking history, spectacular scenic drives and enchanting views of the Aurora Borealis.

For all of Iceland’s unique places and landscapes to explore, Kent finds the human element the most important. “My favorite aspect of this business is the people,” he said. “I really enjoy exploring and researching families and places.”

Kent was born in Gimli, Manitoba, but all his great-grandparents were born in Iceland except one who was born in Winnipeg to a couple from the East of Iceland. Kent speaks Icelandic, which helps immensely in his travel business.

He says it’s difficult to choose his favorite place to visit in Iceland -- “There are just too many to pick from!” – but he does particularly enjoy *Styk-kishólmur*, *Hofsós*, and the *Westfjords*.

What advice would he give someone visiting Iceland their tenth time?

Kent says, “There is still more to see! Keep going. Have you visited in every season?”

You can learn more about Nordic Trails by going to <https://nordictrails.is/>, or emailing Kent at [kent@nordictrails.is](mailto:kent@nordictrails.is)



## Southern California Club Disbands

The **Icelandic American Association of Southern California** has unfortunately ceased operating as a local Icelandic club. INLUS President Dianne O’Konski thanked the club for supporting the INLUS and offered to list contact information on the INLUS website and assist in preserving any club records that were available.

The club has made a generous donation to assist funding the ongoing missions of the INLUS. We trust that the Icelanders in Southern California will continue to celebrate the “Icelandicness” in their own ways.



[www.INLUS.org](http://www.INLUS.org)

[info@inlus.org](mailto:info@inlus.org)

2843 27th St S

Fargo ND 58103

