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Connect newsletter welcomes your submissions!

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

info@inlus.org

Connect newsletter is published quarterly.

Celebrating an Adventure Filled Icelandic Summer

This edition of the *Connect* brings new tales from Iceland, a look at the 125th Deuce of August, and then we turn to fall activities. New language classes, concerts, webinars, and gatherings on-line and in-person. Options abound to renew or start a new Icelandic connection!



INLUS President, Doug Hanson, speaks at the Heritage program in the Mountain Community Center (Becky-Byerly Adams Photo)

INLUS at the Deuce of August

By Doug Hanson

This year marked the 125th Deuce of August celebration in Mountain, North Dakota, and I was honored to attend and see for myself why this is such an important and lasting event. Joining our partner league presidents from Iceland and Canada, I presented greetings from the INLUS at the Heritage Program and was privileged to participate in the amazing community parade. On my first visit to Mountain, I experienced a very warm welcome and renowned North Dakota hospitality.

Congratulations to the Icelandic Communities Association, an INLUS founding member, for a successful 2024

event and 125 years of preserving Icelandic traditions and heritage. Our local Icelandic organizations serve at the front lines of preserving our shared heritage and ICA exemplifies these efforts. The Icelandic Community is alive and well in North Dakota! Thanks to all the volunteers who keep these events and organizations going.

The INLUS wants to help preserve these efforts all across the United States. Please send us your events so we can publicize them on our Events Calendar. Member organizations can also take advantage of blog posts or webinars to highlight their activities.

Additionally, I encourage everyone to support local Icelandic events and organizations in your area.

Connect

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Snorri Program-Graduation Day

By: H. Dísa Guðjóns

The Snorri Program's primary purpose is to strengthen the bonds between the people of Iceland and those of Icelandic descent in North America. Having launched in 1999, it celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. Snorri participants come to Iceland from across North America for an extended period of time to experience Icelandic culture, learn of the country's history, and locate their ancestral homestead. Over time the Snorri program became so successful that two new types of programs were created: Snorri West and Snorri Plus. Snorri West creates an opportunity for young Icelanders to visit North America to learn of the Icelandic settlements in both the United States and Canada, while Snorri Plus brings together North Americans over the age of 30 to come to Iceland and learn of its history and connection to the Western world. Together, these programs strengthen the connection between North America and Iceland while preserving its history for future generations.



degrees is considered hot in Iceland), I had the privilege of attending the graduation ceremony of this year's Snorri participants and hearing of each participant's experience in the program. The common element for each person was gratitude. Gratitude for such a unique opportunity, for all the people and organizations that financially allowed them to participate in the program, and for the opportunity to meet their Icelandic relatives and build new

On a hot July evening (well, 57

One of the presentations (H. Dísa Guðjóns photo)

friendships.

While some Snorri participants were connected to people in Iceland through recent relations, others were connected from many generations ago. However distant the connection, the participants enjoyed researching their ancestral ties to Iceland and uncovering stories of how and why their ancestors left Iceland for hopes of a better life in the West. The pleasure each found in these genealogical projects also showed how many North Americans long to find their roots. While all are proud to be American or Canadian, growing up in a melting pot created an additional desire to connect to their ancestral history.

To learn more on how you can participate in one of the amazing Snorri Programs <u>click here</u>.

To find out more about your Icelandic ancestors connect with <u>Icelandic Roots</u> <u>here</u>.

The Icelandic National League of the United States is a proud sponsor of the Snorri Program. <u>For membership opportunities click here</u>.

Meditation on Family and Home

By Audrey Ledford, 2024 Snorri Participant

(From Seattle, WA, Audrey is a recent graduate from Georgetown University with a B.S. in Foreign Service and currently works as a teacher in Madrid, Spain. Audrey supplied the photos for this article.)

Family is probably one of the most complex words in spoken language. Each user bestows its meaning to anoint family exactly as they choose. For me, family meant small Christmas Day gatherings with about ten people. Myself and my two siblings, the only kids in our small tribe. Family was loosely connected to history, mentions of the family farm, of great grandmothers and distant heritage; Iceland occasionally mentioned in response to a genealogical inquiry. I couldn't imagine Iceland in my mind, it was merely a place where my great-great grandfather came from before he opened up a bakery in Seattle, my true homeland, and left Iceland behind him, along with our ancestral tongue and many Icelandic traditions. Home might be the second most complicated word in human language. For me, home stretched many miles from Seattle to San Diego to rural North Carolina to Washington DC. I couldn't even figure out how home felt in my body, let alone the bodies of my ancestral kin. Home gets even more complicated when systems of power intervene to change my ancestor's home to the land a different group of people called home for centuries prior.

So I left for Iceland with the two most important, but confounding expressions on my mind: family and home. I wasn't searching for either,



The beach, a ten-minute drive from Gunnar's house at golden hour.

rather I decided to let go of expectations and be in a new place free of pressure to feel any extraordinary connection. Then I found myself on a farm in the Northeast, near miles from where my great-great grandfather lived. I grappled with big questions: How can the limits of family be decided across time and space? How can blood tie you to a homeland you've never seen before?

Out in Öxarfjörður, the lush grass meets soft brown cliffs with a view of snow-capped mountains from *Husavík* in the distance. Horses and sheep roam as the only evidence of wildlife other than the chirps and burps of the birds. The only contact I had with my host family was a brief phone call, the only images I held in my head came from Google Photos. In mutual nervousness and

anticipation my cousin Gunnar and his partner Margrét welcomed me into their home. (Continues on page 4)



Audrey Ledford enjoying the midnight sun in Reykjavík.

"How can blood tie you to a homeland you've never seen before?"



(Continued from page 3) Gunnar is my second cousin twice removed. His grandfather Vilhjálmur and my great-great-grandfather, Helgi, were halfbrothers. When their mother Gudrun came to take her five children to Canada, Gunnar's grandfather, then nine years old, refused and thus his family line are the only descendants of our shared great-greatgrandmother still in Iceland, still in the same general area, over a century later. After working as a farmer most of his life Gunnar started a farming equipment company with his brother. His partner Margrét is a patent lawyer working from home out of an office in Reykjavik. She and her 14-year-old daughter Lilja moved here 2 years ago. I only knew bits and pieces about my great-great grandfather and nothing about the other diversions on our family tree. Together, Gunnar and I filled in the gaps.



From afar, I found it difficult to grasp just how small the Icelandic community is. Immersed in the community, it's easy to tell that everyone is family, often literally, but always figuratively. Yes, everyone knows everyone, but what surprised me the most is the lengths they go to to support their neighbors and create a vibrant community of care. When a horse goes missing, everyone is out looking for him. They extend this close-knit familial energy to distant relatives. It appeared to me that Icelanders like to claim relatives, expanding the reach of their small island. Gunnar melted my insecurities about claiming Icelandic heritage by referring to me as his niece from Washington. They took time out of their schedules to take me around the Northeast,

seeing puffins by the hundreds on an empty cliffside, the breathtaking *Mývatn* Lake, and most importantly, Gunnar's mother's house.

Gunnar's mother Maren, now 90 years old, is a survivor. She lived through unimaginably hard conditions as a young girl of seven siblings fostered out to different farms. She reminded me of my own grandfather of seven siblings who persevered through childhood poverty to create an incredible life for my mother and myself. Unable to speak each other's language, Maren and I sat in comfortable silence knitting and eating cake, the silence of two women who are something more than strangers, connected by an invisible string. She showed me old family photos and presented me with a booklet containing all the information about the children of Guðrun, her grandmother. I pointed out my grandfather on the family tree. Her instant propensity to claim me as family warmed my heart. I had an instinct to fly her back home to Seattle to meet the family.

I found it easier to understand and contextualize family history by studying history, language, politics, etc. in Reykjavík before the homestay portion of the adventure. We attended daily Icelandic classes which helped me communicate in few words with Gunnar and Maren (Margrét and her daughter spoke perfect English). Our history lectures and historical museum visits helped me understand what life was like for my great-great grandfather in the absence of family lore. Utterly shocked by a visit to a turf house, I started to understand the daily struggle for survival our ancestors faced. The guide at the museum, a man perhaps in his 30s, said his grandmother was born in a turf house. This history is not as ancient as I thought. Until 1971, Iceland was considered a developing country by the UN's Development program. I read about the starvation of families around

View from the backyard of Gunnar's house of his mares and foals.

Gunnar, Maren and Audrey at Maren's home.



the North and East of Iceland after the 1875 volcanic eruption of Askja making the land untenable. I started to understand why, despite Helgi living with my grandfather until my grandfather was 24, he rarely spoke about his childhood in Iceland. Home is complicated.

I found a pocket of home in the magic of Icelandic landscapes. Originally, Iceland made me feel like I was on the moon or about to fall off the edge of the Earth. However, these feelings drove me to a deep spiritualism and gratitude for this land and every person who has come before me to lead me exactly where I am today. Walking on the untouched black sand beach or wading through the thick grass I began to feel at ease. I could see the beauty and the hardship my ancestors experienced and weigh them both equally in my hands. From the obvious high of galloping on an Icelandic horse to seeing dozens of humpback whales in a fjord, to the more mundane beauty of a dinner of lamb chops enjoyed outside on a sunny day and discussing life over coffee with Gunnar and Margrét, I began to fall in love with Iceland.

Through the Snorri program, I was able to live my Icelandic dream from academic engagement in Reykjavík to family life in the countryside to touring the landscapes with a group of incredible young people from North America. The program gave me everything I didn't know I needed. I found unexpected family in the group of Snorri participants (of which we are all related by 9 generations or so) as we were able to support each other through our shared experiences. I think I started to understand what my cousin from Seattle meant when she said in Iceland, "Family is family is family is family." We are all family here. I let myself uncomplicate the word and just bask in it instead. I started to uncover that maybe in life, you create pockets of home and pockets of family wherever you go. I feel so grateful to have this new home and family in my life.

I am beyond thankful for the Snorri Program, my host family Gunnar, Margrét, and Lilja, and of course, the INLUS for sponsoring me and being an integral supporter of this experience. The Snorri program is so important because we are the next generation of our connection to Icelandic heritage as it gets more distant. I hope anyone reading is encouraged to participate and support the program. Thank you for reading!



Whale watching in Huganes with Audrey's Snorri roommates from Reykjavík (L-R:) Carly, Maia, Codi, and Audrey.

Watch a video of another Snorri Participant's experience by clicking on the image:





Interested in displaying the traveling tapestry in your area?

Drop us a line at info@INLUS.org and we will connect you with Claudia Petursson



The church at *Oddi* with *Hekla* in the background

Touring Saga Country

By Dianne O'Konski

A year ago, the <u>INLUS hosted a presentation</u> by Claudia Petursson introducing us to the *Hvöllsvellir* embroidery group and their work to create a tapestry depicting scenes from Njal's Saga. Claudia and I met up in Reykjavík recently and took a road trip back to that part of Iceland.

As we approached the *Thórsá* bridge, Claudia suggested that we stop at *Urriðarfoss*. From the Highway 1 bridge, it looks like a river flowing down to the sea. But just a few hundred yards down river lies the waterfall that has more water flowing over it than any other waterfall in Iceland. Lesson learned – don't miss an opportunity to turn off the main highway!



Urriðarfoss

From there it is a short drive to *Oddi*, a rich and fertile farm nestled in the *Rangarvellir* area. It grew from a chieftain's farm to a major seat of culture and power. Here family member Sæmundur the Learned (or Wise) Sigfusson lived and his grandson Jón Loftsson grew up to become the most famous chieftain of his time. Snorri Sturluson also grew up here and later wrote the Heimskringla and Snorri's Edda. A church has been located here since the acceptance of Christianity. So much history and so many historical figures!

Across the road is the farm *Keldur*, mentioned in many sagas. The "farm" is 6000 hectares (14,826 acres). The "old farm" contains some of the oldest turf buildings in Iceland and is located between Mount *Hekla* and *Eyjafjallajökull*. The owners have planted a million trees on the property! A few hundred yards up and across the road sits Hótel Rangá, one of the few five-star hotels in Iceland.

There Claudia and I met with two of the Njal's Saga tapestry embroiderers and what a surprise they had for me. The traveling tapestry is on display in the hotel hallway leading to the restaurant! It will be there until it begins its journey through North America starting next year. A permanent home for the full tapestry (99.5 meters) is being designed, but very slowly.

I highly encourage visitors to Iceland to read the sagas and go exploring!

You never know what you will find.

Did You Know the INLUS has a Reading Group?

By Lauren Fields

The INLUS offers a Sunday evening Reading Group for those interested in taking their language learning in a more literary direction. The group meets for one hour a week on Sunday evenings to read Icelandic books together as a way to practice reading comprehension, pronunciation, and translation in a supportive, self-guided study. The group selected *Short*

Stories in Icelandic by Olly Richards as our first book in 2021, and then moved on to Árstíðir by Karítas Hrundar Pálsdóttir in 2022. The short-story format of Árstíðir, and Karítas' second book, Dagatal, is geared toward Icelandic language learners and also makes it easy for participants to drop in and out of the group as their schedules allow.

In early 2024, prior to starting *Dagatal*, we turned our attention to reading a collection of hundred-year-old postcards found by three Reading Group members, depicting a window into the lives of early Icelandic settlers in the United States.

Reading Group members come from all over North America and include

participants with and without Icelandic heritage. As we've learned together, we also learn about each other and that has inspired some members to meet up with each other when traveling (for an example of this see page 8).



We still have a fair amount of *Dagatal* to finish but welcome thoughts on what our next book should be!

KARÍTAS HRUNDAR PÁLSDÓTTIR

ÁRSTÍÐIR

SÖGUR Á ETNEÖLDU MÁLT

So join the INLUS and join us one Sunday! We meet via Zoom at 8pm Eastern time (5pm Pacific time). All ages and skill levels are welcome! Currently the Reading Group is on its summer break but will resume after Labor Day. If you'd like to learn more or join us one week, please contact info@inlus.org.





INLUS member Rikki has created an additional online opportunity to practice using your Icelandic language skills.

Details at:

Icelandic Practice Groups Online and in Person - Icelandic Association of Chicago (icelandchicago.org)



Know of an event in your area that would be of interest to the INLUS community?

Send news, photos and stories to:

info@inlus.org



INLUS Reading Group members Lauren Fields and Ian Hefele met for the first time in real life in May 2024 after four years of knowing each other only through weekly virtual meetings of the Reading Group and INLUS language classes by Zoom. Ian was traveling for work to a conference in Washington D.C., near where Lauren lives. The two met for dinner at Chercher (Ethiopian food as unfortunately there are not many Icelandic food options in D.C.), and then walked down to the National Mall to see the monuments lit up at night.

Snorri Internship Program

David Johnson should just about be home in the United States about the time this newsletter gets published. David was the United States selectee this summer in the Snorri Program Internship Program. *The what?*!



The Snorri Internship Program is one of several cultural awareness and exchange-type programs under the umbrella of the Snorri Program. You can find out about the entire scope of programs at <u>www.snorri.is</u>. The Snorri Internship Program is an annual program for the past ten years where one US and one Canadian citizen are selected to volunteer for the summer at the Iceland Emigration Centre (<u>www.hofsos.is</u>) in *Hofsós, Skagafjörður*, Iceland for the summer. In order to qualify, one must have completed either the Snorri Program (for young adults under 30) or the Snorri Plus Program (for people over 30).

David Johnson enjoys the sun in Iceland one afternoon

David describes his experience this summer as amazing. "I came to Hofsós already with a love and skill set for genealogy and knowledge of

the story of the Icelanders who emigrated away from Iceland between 1850 and the start of World War 1 in 1914. What I didn't expect was the mental shift needed to relocate for 3 months from a big US city to a very small northern Icelandic village of 170 people. Learning to be still and not having a huge "to do" list to accomplish daily was a beautiful reframing of life. The highlight each day was meeting wonderful people from all around the world who are also moved by the story this museum tells."

The INLUS hosted a webinar this past July with David, Maddy (his Canadian Intern Colleague) and Mallory, the museum's lead who relocated to Iceland

full-time from Minnesota several years ago. You can find this webinar, as well as all our other webinars at <u>https://inlus.org/community/webinars/</u>.

We encourage you to grab a cup of coffee, sit back and relax, and enjoy hearing about the 2024 Snorri Internship Program or choose any of our other interesting webinars available to anyone, anytime on this webpage.

Learn Icelandic with the INLUS

Join with several hundred others who are learning Icelandic through the series of live, on-line Icelandic language classes David Johnson and Birna Sigurbjörnsdóttir have developed. Registration is now open for the next round of classes set to begin the week of October 7th and running six weeks through the week of November 11th.

Descriptions of the four levels of classes can be found at <u>https://inlus.org/</u> <u>travel-culture/icelandic-language/language-classes-oct-2024/</u>.

Classes are conducted live each week, but they are also recorded so students that might want to go over a class one more time or must miss a class can stay with the program. Even if you know a little bit of Icelandic, the Basic 1.0 level class provides a very good foundation to the mechanics of the Icelandic language -- things that are necessary to realize about the language but are often overlooked in early level classes.

Because Birna encourages students in the more advanced classes to spend a little time speaking, in a fear-free, supportive environment, the Basic 1.5, Basic 2.0 and Basic 2.5 classes are limited to just ten students each. The Basic 1.0 class is not limited at this time, but we like to keep that class to 25 students or less. Registration has been open for a few weeks so prior students can sign-up for their next level classes, so don't delay if you'd like to take any of these classes.

Once registered, you'll receive a confirmation email. Beyond that, your instructors will reach out to you a week or so before classes begin with logistics information for each class, including the Zoom link for your live class, a link to a shared on-line folder where course material and video recordings of classes will be placed, and the ability to access a private, closed Facebook page each class will have to facilitate dialogue and community building during and after the class.

\$60 is all it costs to take one of these classes. No grades or exams given...just a whole lot of low-pressure learning and building friendships with fellow learners. That comes to just \$10/class for a lot of good learning. If you have questions, please email David Johnson at <u>david@inlus.org.</u>

Passionate About Icelandic Culture?

So are we! Join us in the quest to celebrate Icelandic culture whether in Iceland or North America. Become a member of the INLUS or renew your membership and let's celebrate together!

<u>Click Here to Join!</u>

Icelandic Folksong Tradition is the topic of the next INLUS Webinar on Thursday Sept 18, 2024.

Caitlin Vitale– Sullivan will share her research in this field. Find the link on the

INLUS event calendar

Explore the nearly 50 videos in our growing library.

With topics ranging from Sagas, Volcanoes, Travel to Yule Lads, Making Mead or Chocolate Icelandic Easter Eggs or finding your next book about Iceland, there is a video topic for everyone!

<u>Webinars – Icelandic</u> <u>National League</u> <u>(inlus.org)</u>



Kristín Jónína Taylor Concert in Minneapolis

By Dianne O'Konski (plus two photos)

Not a dry eye in the crowd. I attended a piano concert by Dr. Kristín Jónína Taylor at theHjemkomst Center in Moorhead, MN as part of their annual Scandinavian Festival last year.

Her concert featured a tour of Nordic music with Sibelius' Finlandia as the final piece. Her



Dr. Kristín Jónína Taylor

introduction and interpretation of the music was extremely powerful.

Dr. Kristín Jónína Taylor is an Icelandic-American pianist who has been enthusiastically received for her multitude of performances of Nordic piano works. She has performed widely in the U.S. and internationally. Kristín studied piano as a foreign student in Iceland when she was 16, and went on to study music in the U.S. and Europe. Her list of accomplishments and awards is long. Kristin received two Fulbright grants to study the music of Jón Nordal in Iceland.

She is a Steinway Artist and was inducted into the 2021 Steinway Teacher Hall of Fame.

Dr. Taylor will showcase her vocal and piano talents in a concert on October 6, 2024 at 1:30 PM at Mindekirken, the Norwegian Memorial Church. She will be performing music by Páll Ísólfson, Thorkell Sigurbjörnsson, and Mist Thorkellsdóttir.

Joining her will be Jim Reilly who will perform music by Icelandic-Canadian composer S. K. Hall and traditional Icelandic art songs. He is tenor, pianist, and composer who has performed throughout the U.S. and Europe. He has composed a bilingual liturgy that will be premiered at Mindekirken on Sunday, October 13, at 11:00 AM.



The Icelandic Sounds concert is part of the Leif Eriksson International Festival (www.leifmn.org) and is co-sponsored by the Minneapolis-St. Paul Alumni Chapter of Mu Phi Epsilon, a professional music fraternity. LEIF offers a variety of events held at Mindekirken, Norway House, and the Danish American Center in Minneapolis. The festival runs October 5-20, 2024.

Jim Reilly

The Snorris Are Coming

Mark Petursson noticed a big change in his local Icelandic club: some of the newest club members are also some of the youngest.

Mark is the president of the Leif Eiriksson Icelandic Club of Calgary (LEIC) and the vice-president of the Icelandic National League of North America.

He learned about the power of the Snorri Program when several Snorri Alums wanted to join the club and volunteered for some key positions.

For example, Natalie Wirth is LEIC's vice president (2024) and co-director of Snorri West (2024). She is a Snorri Program alumna (2008) and has previously been involved with the past Calgary Snorri West visits in 2013, 2017, and 2024.

"I was pleased to be asked to join the board of the LEIC this year. Growing up, my Icelandic heritage has always been important to me and I think being a part of the Snorri program helped solidify that. When I moved to Calgary after being on Snorri, I looked to join the local Icelandic club. The LEIC was very welcoming to me, and I have attended many events and programs. I am happy to be able to give back by volunteering."

Maddy Garneau produces the LEIC's newsletter. She is a Snorri Program alumna (2023) and was the Snorri Program Intern this summer.

"I had grown up in the Icelandic Club in Calgary and had always acknowledged my Icelandic heritage as a part of my identity," Maddy said.

"It did not become a prominent part of my identity until I participated in Snorri in 2023. Meeting relatives, seeing the country and getting in touch with my family's past drew me closer," she said.

"I decided I wanted to contribute more to the club upon my return to give back after the club helped fund part of my Snorri trip," she said. "When the Club executives invited me on to the board I decided I could not turn down

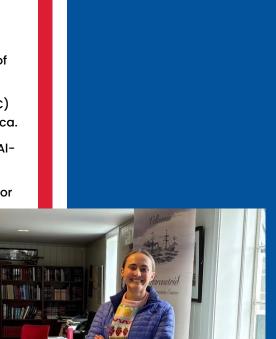


the opportunity."

Jack Plumley helps with club publicity by sending LEIC news articles to the Lögberg-Heimskringla newspaper. He is a Snorri Program alumnus (2022) and was also a Snorri Alumni Intern (2023). In addition to his duties for LEIC, Jack heads up the podcast productions at Icelandic Roots.

The enthusiasm and

energy these younger leaders bring pleases Mark Petursson, who sees the Snorri Program as a key ingredient in building club leaders of the future.



Maddy Garneau, 2024 Snorri Intern at the Icelandic Emigration Centre in Hofsos The Parade





A 24813

Mountain, DD 1878 Vikur Vidalin Gardar Peters Hallson Fjalla Thingballa 1-6 Brown MB

Vikur Church



NOV. 7, 2013

The Heritage Program



L to R: Master of Ceremonies, ICA President Curtis Olafson, Pála Hallgrímsdóttir, President Icelandic National League of Iceland, Gwen Morgan, President, INLNA, Doug Hanson, President INLUS, Sunna Furstenau, President Icelandic Roots, Vilhjálmur Wiium, Consul General of Iceland in Winnipeg, Guðrún Hafsteinsdóttir, Iceland Minister of Justice and Keynote Speaker, Jeannie Isfeld Entenza, Iceland Honorary Consul to North Dakota and Minnesota Thanks to Becky-Byerly Adams for sharing her photos.

Local Club News-Upcoming

Events

Icelandic Association of Colorado is planning on its first event being a Christmas meet-up this December.

Planned for Dec 15th 2-4pm location TBD.

There will be coffee, cakes, and more goodies to munch on. Christmas crafts for the kids, and Bingo for all ages.

More details will be sent/posted as it gets closer to the date.

For details or to get on the email list for the Icelandic Association of Colorado, send us an email at <u>icelandcolorado@gmail.com</u>

Learn Icelandic in the Seattle area - **Icelandic Club of Greater Seattle** is offering two sessions of their popular Icelandic and Culture 101 classes starting Sept. 11 or Oct. 16.

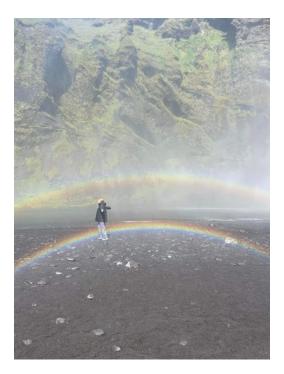
They also offer a more in-depth Icelandic Language Foundations for Beginners starting on Sept. 11.

More information at: Events | Iceland | Seattle (icelandseattle.com)



October INLUS Webinar

Oct. 9: Zachary Melton will be our special guest. He is a post-doctoral student at the University of Iceland whose PhD thesis was on Vikings and their portrayal in the West. He is researching Western Icelandic women who went to Iceland before WWII and has discovered interesting facts he will share.



Audrey Ledford, author of "Meditation on Family and Home," caught in a double rainbow at Skógafoss.

<u>www.INLUS.org</u> <u>info@inlus.org</u> 2843 27th St S Fargo ND 58103



