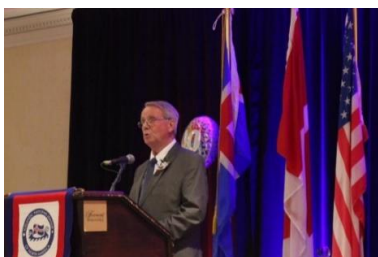


Statue of Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir, with her son Snorri on her shoulder. Statue at Glaumbær in Skagafjörður.



## MY SNORRI STORY

tells how the Snorri Program was founded and became a very important factor in strengthening the bonds between Iceland and descendants of Icelandic immigrants in North America.



Receiving “Strong is the Bond award” 2019

## ABSTRACT

**This personal story describes how the idea for founding the Snorri Program came about and the subsequent actions required to design such a program for young people of Icelandic descent in Canada and the United States, which commenced in 1999. – The two off springs of the original program are: Snorri West, founded in 2001 to provide Icelandic youth with the opportunity to visit Icelandic settlements in North America and the Snorri Plus, founded in 2003 for people older than 30, to visit Iceland. The pilot project, Snorri Deaf, began in 2018 and continued in 2019.**

## ALMAR GRÍMSSON

is a co-founder of the Snorri Program and former chairman of the board of directors of the Snorri Foundation as well as the former president of the Icelandic National League in Iceland. He is a honorary member of both the INL of Iceland and the INL of North America.

As of 2019, he is the first recipient of the INL’s “Strong is the Bond” award.



# **MY SNORRI STORY**

**by**

**ALMAR GRÍMSSON**

**Hafnarfjörður Iceland – September 2019**

# The Snorri Program – Almar’s story

## Preface by Eric Stefanson



The Snorri Program is well known and appreciated by people in both Iceland and North America. It is a wonderful program that has helped strengthen the ties between people of Icelandic descent in North America and in Iceland. Today one cannot think about the relationship between Iceland and North America without mentioning the Snorri Program. I am not about to outline all the benefits of the program as the many positive aspects have been mentioned time and time again over the past twenty years.

Instead I want to touch on why it is important to document the history of the Snorri Program. Why did it come into existence, how did it get started and who are the people responsible for making the program happen. These are important questions to answer for several reasons. Recording the history of the program provides a roadmap for others to follow and helps ensure that this excellent program continues for years to come. Such a history also allows us the opportunity to reflect and celebrate the success of the program and all that has been accomplished over the past twenty years. As well we all know that programs like this do not just happen. They require leadership, passion and commitment. Therefore it is important to thank and acknowledge the many people who helped create the Snorri Program.

When I think of who could best create a permanent record of the history of the Snorri Program the name that comes to mind is that of my good friend Almar Grimsson. Almar believed in the merits of such a program from the very beginning. He put his heart and soul into helping make the program a reality and then ensuring that it would be a success. In his Snorri Story, Almar provides us an inside look at the creation and evolution of the Snorri Program including the many people who helped make the program a success.

I believe life is all about relationships, but relationships do not just happen, you need to work at them. Relationships are the foundation from which we build and move forward. The Snorri Program has created and strengthened relationships not only for the participants but also for the many others who have supported the program. Having been involved since the beginning I have experienced this personally. Over time all kinds of benefits will flow as a result of the Snorri Program and the ties between people of Icelandic descent in North America and in Iceland will continue to grow, strengthen and prosper. My hope is that many others get the opportunity to be a part of this program in the years to come.

Winnipeg 20 September 2019

*Eric Stefanson*

## **Introduction**

The Snorri Program has now reached the milestone of having been in operation for twenty years. The following is intended to document how the Snorri Program was founded, and the first steps taken in the program's implementation in an effort to reinforce the cooperation between Iceland and the descendants of Icelandic immigrants in Canada and the United States.

This is a personal account as I see the events leading up to the „birth“ of the Snorri Program and how it became such a welcome novelty among the Icelandic Communities in North America. We who cofounded the program in Iceland had been made aware of the fact that members of chapters of the Icelandic National League in North America were dominantly people getting near retirement age or already retired. Hence there was a need for awareness amongst the younger generations to take an interest in their heritage and encourage them to be active in their communities.

It was my destiny to be present when the idea of creating such a program was first launched, and at the same time, it was my personal fortune to be responsive and eager to do my best to make it happen. This was totally unplanned and I often state the obvious that I was fortunate to be at the right place at the right time and collaborating with the right people.

### **Historical facts**

In the years after the Second World War, the connections between Icelanders and their relatives in North America took a great leap forward. The dramatically increased travel options, especially in the air, made it possible to travel long distances in a matter of a few days, instead of weeks and months as had been the situation during the great emigration from Iceland from the period of 1870-1914.

In the 1970's there were organized group tours both ways and among the pioneer organizers were Ted and Marjorie Arnason and Stefan J. and Olla Stefanson of Gimli. In Akureyri, Iceland, Árni Bjarnarson and Gísli Ólafsson played a strong role in the positive development in communication between families on both sides of the Atlantic. A few years later Bændaferðir – Icelandic Farm Holidays started offering group travels to Icelandic settlements in Canada and the United States and this was mostly through the initiative of Agnar Guðnason who designed and led a number of tours. In more recent years, Jónas Þór has taken over this role at Bændaferðir.

The Icelandic National League of Iceland – INL of Iceland (founded on December 1, 1939) was very active in the period after the war and arranged in the 1980's, a visit of youth from Iceland to Canada, and a reciprocal visit from Canada to Iceland. The main organizer of this tour was reverend Bragi Friðriksson who had served in Lundar and Gimli as well as serving on the board of the INL of North America. It can be said that this exchange was a precursor to the Snorri Program which began operation in 1999.

In 1990 the activities of the INL of Iceland dwindled, and for a few years it had practically ceased operations. In the mid 1990's, there were significant events that led to the start of a new era in the work of the organization.

Firstly, in 1995, a newly formed government in Iceland with Davíð Oddsson as Prime Minister, declared that it would give priority to increasing the cooperation between Iceland and Canada and the United States, with a special emphasis on the Icelandic heritage in North America.

Secondly, at the same time, Icelandair, Iceland's major air line, started actively looking into possibilities of flying to destinations in Canada in addition to the United States which the company had been serving for almost 50 years at that time. This resulted in the opening of the route between Keflavík, Iceland and Halifax, NS in Canada. It would take another several years before the „Blue Sky Policy“ of Canada would pave the way for the opening of other destinations in Canada.

Thirdly, the interest of the public in Iceland was considerably increased when author Böðvar Guðmundsson wrote the novel „Híbýli vindanna“ (Where the Winds Dwell), published in 1995. The novel described the life and destiny of emigrants from Iceland to North America and their descendants. The second part of this story, „Lífsins tré“ (The tree of life) was released two years later. These books became and still are widely read.

Fourthly, the remarkable pioneering work of Valgeir Þorvaldsson and his family resulted in the founding of the Icelandic Emigration Center in Hofsós in North Iceland. The emigration center was inaugurated in July 1996 in the presence of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, president of Iceland. The center opened its doors in the refurbished Coop Store in Hofsós and in a matter of only a few years Valgeir and family, with the help of volunteers from North America, raised an additional two buildings designed in the same old style as a preserved storage building by the harbour.

After 16 years in office, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was succeeded as president of Iceland by Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson who took the oath of office on August 1, 1996. In July of 1997, President Ólafur Ragnar and his wife Guðrún Katrín Þorbergsdóttir visited a number of Icelandic settlements in the United States and Canada. News from these visits were very well covered in the news media in Iceland and in that sense added to the increasing knowledge and awareness of the public about the history of emigration from Iceland to North America.

On the longer term, the daily Morgunblaðið increased its coverage of news including interviews and documentary articles. Journalist Steinþór Guðbjartsson played a very important role in this development. On the other side of the Atlantic, Lögberg Heimskringla also started focussing more on strengthening the relationship and hired Steinþór as its editor for almost 2 years between 2004-2005. This resulted in a new look and broader coverage of news from the various Icelandic settlements in North America.

On the day of Leifur Eiríksson on October 9, 1997, the minister of foreign affairs in Iceland, Halldór Ásgrímsson announced that he would initiate the revitalization of the INL of Iceland which as stated above, had been inactive for a few years. The minister appointed a provisional board which would prepare for the formal holding of an Annual General Meeting with a subsequent election of a new board.

The initiative of the minister on the government's behalf, was first and foremost for the purpose of strengthening the Non-Governmental activities under the leadership of interested individuals. This would be mutually supportive of government and NGO activities.

Minister Halldór Ásgrímsson's adviser, Atli Ásmundsson was during this process, and in the number of years to follow, a brilliant organizer and supporter of these developments and through his almost 10 years of service (2003-2013) as Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg he together with his wife Þrúður, were the strongest supporters of all the arrangements made in furthering the Snorri Program.

Through the above developments, there was a solid foundation for the Snorri Program and 20 years later is a good time to reflect and document the story of the Snorri Program. The board of the Snorri Foundation issued a 10 years anniversary magazine in 2008 and as this is being written, there is a 20 years celebratory publication under way.

In writing this personal story it is only my intention to document in detail how I as a part of the story of Snorri have lived to see the program become a most welcome and indeed highly valued and recognized tool in strengthening the bond between the people of Iceland and descendants of Icelandic immigrants in the United States and Canada.

I am solely responsible for every word written in this story and would highly appreciate comments about the text and of any inaccuracies found.

## **From idea to implementation**

### **1997**

#### **August**

The Nordic Association of Iceland (NA) was founded in 1922 and had sister organizations in the four other Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden). Together they formed the „Confederation of the Norden Associations (FNF)“ with the joint objective to disseminate knowledge of the other Nordic countries' languages, culture, history and society. Its initiatives encourage closer co-operation at a grassroots level between the Nordic countries, across Europe and throughout the world.

In 1995, NA was faced with serious financial difficulties and subsequently went through a fundamental reorganization under the leadership of a task force of volunteers headed by Úlfur Sigurmundsson who had recently returned from his post as Trade commissioner for Iceland in New York. Sigurlín Sveinbjarnardóttir was appointed managing director of NA at this time of refinancing and restructuring. I was a member of the task force being then president of a large local chapter in Hafnarfjörður my hometown.

The idea for the Snorri Program emerged from an informal meeting in the beginning of August 1997 amongst the members of the task force and staff of the Nordic Association of Iceland (NA). Present at the meeting were; myself (then member of the task force of NA), Úlfur Sigurmundsson (acting treasurer of NA), Kristín Kvaran (then member of the task force of NA), Sigurlín Sveinbjarnardóttir (managing director of NA) and Óðinn Albertsson (newly appointed manager of the Nordic youth exchange program „Nordjobb“).

In this informal discussion, one of the topics discussed over a cup of coffee and „kleinur“, were the visits of President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson and his wife Guðrún Katrín to Icelandic settlements in Canada and the United States. News from these visits had been very prominently covered in the media in Iceland; radio, TV as well as newspapers. We were all impressed with this positive development in strengthening the ties between Iceland and people of Icelandic descent in North America. Óðinn posed the simple question; „Why don't we design a program for young people of Icelandic descent similar to Nordjobb?“ That program had been a collaborative youth exchange program between the Nordic countries for several years.



**Almar with Óðinn Albertsson**

We looked at each other, nodded in agreement that this was an idea worth exploring and decided to propose the idea at the next board meeting of the NA. The board unanimously decided to put the matter on the agenda of the biannual convention of the Nordic Clubs, working under the umbrella of the Nordic Association of Iceland.

### **September**

The convention involving all the clubs within the NA was held in September. NA was well underway in restoring its activities and a new leadership was elected with Kristín Kvaran as president and me as vice-president.

One of the new items proposed was to look into the feasibility of starting a youth exchange program for young people in North America of Icelandic descent with the working title "Vesturfaraverkefnið" (The Emigrant program). After thorough discussion the proposal was unanimously adopted.

After the closure of the convention, there was a special ceremony to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Nordic Association of Iceland. President Ólafur Ragnar was present at this ceremony. This novel idea was announced and the president having recently returned from his visits in North America instantly applauded the initiative.

### **October - December**

To follow up this resolution, the board of NA decided to ask for advice from the most knowledgeable people to get feedback about the feasibility of such a program and advice on its practical application.



**The advisory board. From left to right: Ingvi S. Ingvarsson – Kristín Kvaran – Haraldur Bessason  
Vigdís Finnbogadóttir – Úlfur Sigurmundsson – Almar Grímsson: - Absent: Einar Benediktsson**



The members of the advisory board were Vigdís Finnbogadóttir former (1980-1996) president of Iceland, Haraldur Bessason, Dean of the University of Akureyri (former professor of the Department of Icelandic at the University of Manitoba), Ambassador Einar Benediktsson, Managing director of the Millennium commission of Iceland and Ingvi S. Ingvarsson former ambassador of Iceland to the United States and also accredited to Canada.

Úlfur Sigurmundsson, Sigurlín Sveinbjarnardóttir and I coordinated the work of the committee and Kristín Kvaran president of NA, and Óðinn Albertsson program manager of Nordjobb had a considerable part in its deliberations. Kristín Sif Sigurðardóttir the deputy of Einar Benediktsson attended a few meetings on his behalf.

The advisory committee strongly recommended establishing a program modelled by Nordjobb for young people age 18-25 and after some deliberation it was recommended to name it the Snorri Program. This idea was to commemorate Snorri Þorfinnsson, the first European child born in North America. Another idea which was considered was to name it “Ömmuverkefnið” – The Amma program” in anticipation that the grandmothers of the young people would be the greatest supporters in giving their grandchildren an opportunity to connect with their Icelandic roots.

As this was happening within the Nordic Association, the Icelandic National League of Iceland (INL of Iceland) had been revitalized on October 9<sup>th</sup>, Leifur Eiríksson day.<sup>a</sup> I had been designated by the NA board to oversee further developments of the program and one day I ran into Steinn Logi Björnsson in downtown Reykjavik. Steinn Logi, who had been designated president of the revitalized INL of Iceland, informed me that the new board had discussed the need for sensitizing young people of Icelandic descent in North America to become more involved in efforts to preserve their Icelandic heritage.

I could in turn inform Steinn Logi about the developments within the Nordic Association and it is obvious that the timing of this “casual” meeting was perfect. After a short intensive round of discussions, the Nordic Association and INL of Iceland decided to join forces to establish the Snorri Program. The basic idea was to give young people of Icelandic descent the opportunity to embark on a six-week adventure and discover their Icelandic roots.

The Nordic Association also offered space for a staff member of INL of Iceland and Reynir Gunnlaugsson was hired as the manager of INL of Iceland.

## **1998**

### **January – March.**

The formulation, presentation and financing of the program was discussed thoroughly by a team consisting of myself, Kristín Kvaran, Sigurlín Sveinbjarnardóttir, Steinn Logi Björnsson, Úlfur Sigurmundsson as well as Óðinn Albertsson and Reynir Gunnlaugsson.

Meetings were held with the Millennium Commission of Iceland to seek financial contributions to start the program. Although at this point the two associations planned to absorb all costs for the preparatory work and management of the inaugural year, it had been specifically proposed that those participating in the program would be given a grant to cover a good deal of their costs of participation.

The Millennium Commission of Iceland informed us of a planned meeting of the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) to be held in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN in connection with the opening of a new air link of Icelandair between Iceland and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Óðinn, Reynir and I travelled to Hofsós to meet with Valgeir Þorvaldsson about the potential collaboration between the Snorri Program and the newly established Icelandic Emigration Center. The outcome was very positive and to this day all groups of Snorris visiting Iceland enjoy a two day stay at Hofsós as an integral part of the program.

Other promotional meetings were held with staff of ministries, municipalities and private companies to make them aware of the hopefully forthcoming Snorri Program

## April

The meeting of the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) was held in Minneapolis/St. Paul from the 8-10<sup>th</sup> of April in 1998. It was attended by many US members of the IACC. There was also a large delegation from Manitoba, Canada, led by Eric Stefanson, then minister of finance in Manitoba, Neil Bardal Consul General of Iceland in Winnipeg and David Gislason chairman of the Millennium 125 committee of Manitoba. Among other members in the delegation were Kristjan Stefanson federal judge, Tim Samson chairman of the board of the Canada Iceland Foundation, Ernest Stefanson, chairman of the Betel Foundation in Gimli, Irvin Olafson, chair of the United Icelandic Appeal (UIA) in Gimli and his son Eric Olafson.

Prime Minister Davíð Oddsson was the head of the Icelandic delegation and among others present were: Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, then ambassador of Iceland to the United States and also accredited to Canada, Einar Benediktsson, managing director of the Millennium Commission of Iceland who had been instrumental in preparing for and arranging the meeting with the leadership of IACC. There were also a number of representatives from Icelandair present among them Hörður Sigurgestsson, chairman of Icelandair, Sigurður Helgason CEO of Icelandair and Steinn Logi Björnsson, then director of the marketing dept. of Icelandair.

On the agenda of IACC's meeting was the presentation of the proposed Snorri Program and it was my duty to make this presentation together with Steinn Logi who also attended in his capacity as president of the INL of Iceland.

The only written material distributed was a one page handout, which was a short description of the proposed Snorri Program which would give young people of Icelandic descent, age 18-25 years old, the opportunity to visit Iceland on a 6 week educational program to learn about Iceland, the land of their ancestors who emigrated to North America and to get to know their relatives and people their own age.

The presentation was extremely well received, and it was duly noted and applauded when Eric Stefanson said: „*This is something we have to do!!*“. Eric, who already then had been appointed to the provisional board of the INL of Iceland, instantly became the prime supporter of the Snorri Program, and together with Ernest Stefanson, Irvin Olafson and others, he founded the Snorri West program in 2001.



**Eric Stefanson and Almar comparing notes**

## **May-July**

Having this massive support from the meeting in Minneapolis/St. Paul, the Snorri team in Iceland started preparations for the promotion of the program in the US and Canada and an information pamphlet was produced.

The Millennium Commission of Iceland decided to give a generous grant to help launch the program and the outlook for establishing the program in 1999 was very good.

The provisional board of the INL of Iceland had decided to visit Gimli on the occasion of Islandingadagurinn – the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba. It was also decided that I would accompany them on behalf of the Nordic Association. The new Snorri brochure was in our luggage intended for distribution at the festival.

## **August**

Islandingadagurinn – the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba is held annually on the weekend of the first Monday in August. A great number of visitors (30-40 thousand) come to the small town of Gimli for this occasion to celebrate Icelandic heritage in North America. Accordingly, there is ample opportunity to meet people, and visit one on one or in smaller groups.

Most of the participants from Manitoba who had attended the IACC meeting in Minneapolis/St. Paul had obviously spread the word of the program and Ernest Stefanson, a lifelong Gimli resident, escorted my wife Anna Björk and me from house to house to introduce us to the community. This led me to Susie Erickson-Jacobson, then president of the festival.

Susie was enthusiastic, and in her presidential address on the main stage of Gimli Park, she incorporated a paragraph about the Snorri Program, declaring that it would be launched in 1999. She stated that in her opinion, this would be one of the greatest contributions towards strengthening the bond between Iceland and descendants of Icelandic immigrants in North America. This was the first public announcement about the launching of the Snorri Program and it is fair to say that Susie's anticipation of the success of the Snorri Program was fully realized.

## **September – December**

It was now evident that the program could begin in the summer of 1999, provided that there would be a sufficient number of applications. The work for preparing the announcement and launch of the program was very intensive. The new pamphlet and other information was sent to the Icelandic embassy in Washington DC, Consulates in both the US and Canada and through other channels like the Icelandic National league of North America.

The deadline for applications was set for February 1, 1999 and we set a goal of receiving a group of fifteen participants.

## **1999**

### **January – May**

Reynir Gunnlaugsson and I were invited to visit Manitoba in March to become better acquainted with the organizations and Icelandic circles in this settlement area in North America. The visit was very well organized by Neil Bardal and Tim Samson.

At this time, it was also decided by the Icelandic government to appoint Svavar Gestsson as the Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg. This was yet another token of the firm policy of the government to further strengthen the bonds between Iceland and descendants of Icelandic immigrants in North America.

Svavar was thus the first diplomat from Iceland to serve on this post, and although the millennium celebrations were a major task for the new Consul General and his wife Guðrún Ágústsdóttir, the presence of an Icelandic diplomat in Winnipeg was not a temporary arrangement, as it has remained since then.

The numbers of applications for the Snorri Program in 1999 were 19, and all of them were strong candidates. It was therefore decided that they would all be accepted.

### **June – August**

The pioneer group of 1999 came in the latter half of June and stayed for 6 weeks until early August. The first week they were in Reykjavik being briefed and visiting institutions to give them insight into the history of Iceland, language and modern Icelandic society. The next four weeks they stayed with their respective relatives in various parts of the country. The last week the participants met again in Reykjavík and embarked on a weeklong adventure tour to the Icelandic countryside including two days stay at the Icelandic Emigration Center at Hofsóss.

In the communities where participants were placed, companies (private or community) gave the young people work. They were indeed important sponsors, paying directly to the program a certain sum equivalent to the salary they would pay the local workers. This arrangement was necessary because it was impossible to obtain a work permit for the participants. Therefore, they were regarded formally as interns and the program paid them per diems as a reward for their work.

Icelandair decided from the beginning to sponsor the program by offering favorable fares to participants from and to all their destinations in North America. They have continued being a major sponsor of the Snorri, Snorri plus and Snorri West and most recently Snorri Deaf through all the years the programs have been running.

The program management in 1999 was in the hands of Reynir Gunnlaugsson on behalf of INL of Iceland, and Sigurlín Sveinbjarnardóttir and Óðinn Albertsson for NA, supervised by Kristín Kvaran, myself and Úlfur Sigurmundsson from NA and Steinn Logi Björnsson for INL of Iceland.

A young lady, Margrét Pétursdóttir was hired to do administrative work including website design and to be the guide for the group on the adventure tour but otherwise the day to day management and arrangements were overseen by the management team. The evaluation provided by the participants was overall very positive and encouraging. However, they were in agreement that the one week in the beginning of the stay was too short to be adequately educated and informed. They also wanted more time to build the group dynamics.



Margrét Pétursdóttir and Tanya Hoffort  
Snorri of 1999 met 20 years later in July 2019

This was fully accepted and since the year 2000 the program has remained unchanged in structure with the two first week in Reykjavik, the next three weeks with families and working in the communities and the final week for the adventure tour ending with graduation.

### **September – December.**

In September 1999, there was a change in leadership of the Nordic Association. Kristín Kvaran who had served for 2 years as chairman of the board was replaced by Sigurlín Sveinbjarnardóttir who had been the managing director of NA. Óðinn Albertsson was appointed managing director.

The INL of Iceland held its first convention and AGM after the revitalization in 1997. A large delegation from North Dakota headed by Curtis Olafson and Magnus Olafson were guests of the convention which was very stimulating and enjoyable.

Markús Örn Antonsson, CEO of RUV – the Icelandic Broadcasting Company was elected new president of INL of Iceland replacing Steinn Logi Björnsson who had served for two years in the interim period of revitalization of the organization. Markús had served as member of the interim board.

I was elected vice president of INL Iceland and completed my term as vice-president of NA in 2001. For a while I served in a dual position between the collaborating partners in the Snorri Program.

The leaders of the INL of Iceland and Nordic Association, Markús Örn and Sigurlín signed a memorandum for the establishment of the Snorri Foundation a non-profit organization to manage the Snorri Program. I was nominated chairman of the Snorri Program and Úlfur Sigurmundsson vice chairman.

## **2000**

### **January – May**

After the successful first year the number one priority was to pledge for contributions to continue the program. The costs for the work of the staff of the Nordic Association were absorbed by NA and the grant from the Millennium commission was only used for grants to lower the costs of each participant.

Decode Genetics Inc. announced that they would give a substantial contribution to secure running the program for 2000-2001. The founder and CEO of Decode, Dr. Kári Stefansson came to Manitoba and gave the Toast to Canada at Islendingadagurinn in 2000. Eric Stefansson, who was a great supporter and initiator of the Snorri Program from the very beginning, gave the Toast to Iceland at this occasion.

Having secured funding for 2000-2001, the next step was to hire a program manager and in March of 2000, Ásta Sól Kristjánsdóttir began working for the program. Ásta Sól had a very good background and excellent qualifications for taking on this very important role.



Ásta Sól and Almar in the early days

During her 19 years of service with the Snorri Program, Ásta Sól demonstrated a clear understanding of the program's goals and was dedicated to making the participants feel the significance of exploring their roots in the land of their ancestors.

The program's contents were changed in accordance with the experience from the first year and therefore, the first two weeks the group stayed in Reykjavik for adjustment, education, information and building group dynamics. Three weeks were spent with families and the final week was the adventure tour.

### **June – August**

The group in the year 2000 was comprised of 13 participants and the outcome was very good.

I attended the August the Deuce festival in Mountain ND and made a presentation about the program. After the visit of a delegation from ND to Iceland in November 1999, news had obviously spread about the Snorri Program and one of the participants in 2000 was the North Dakotan Gwennie Byrd (married Byron). On the occasion of the 10 years anniversary of the Snorri Program, Gwennie was recognized at August the Deuce in 2009 as the ND pioneer.



Gwennie recognized in Mountain ND

I also attended the Islendingadagurinn in Gimli where there was a special celebration on the occasion of the millennial year. President Ólafur Ragnar was a guest of honor and there were a number of guests from Iceland in his entourage.

### **September – December**

Having completed the second year with great success, the way forward seemed open, but in the years to come there were great efforts needed to secure funding for the longer term rather than securing the program year by year.

It was rewarding to note that numerous host families around the country were willing to host the participants, and municipalities and private companies gave them an opportunity to work alongside with Icelandic youth in their summer jobs.

Icelandair was willing to continue with their favorable fares for the participants and the Emigration Center at Hofsós would continue to open their doors for the Snorri Program.



## 2001

The group of 2001 comprised of 12 participants, all highly motivated. As in year 2000 the graduation took place at the emigration center at Hofsfós. In following years and until present that ceremony takes place on the last day of the groups stay in Iceland.



Colleen Howard receives her certificate

**Snorri West founded.** One of the recommendations of the advisory committee in 1998 was to have a reciprocal arrangement so Icelandic youth could visit the Icelandic settlements in North America and learn firsthand about the history of the mass emigration from Iceland, to meet relatives and get to know young people their age in the settlements.

After discussions with representatives of the INL of North America and other interested parties, the Snorri West program was founded in Manitoba. A Snorri West committee was founded by the initiative of Eric Stefanson as Chair. Other members and founders were Irvin Olafson, Ernest Stefanson, Barry Arnason, Robert Arnason and Harley Jonasson. The Snorri West program was funded through donations received from a number of key individuals as well as contributions from the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba and the Province of Manitoba.

The length of the stay was decided at 6 weeks, to mirror the Snorri Program in Iceland but was later shortened to 4 weeks. Wanda Anderson was the program manager of Snorri West for the 10 years Snorri West Manitoba was in existence. In the early years the maximum was set at 8 participants and then subsequently adjusted to a maximum of 4 in 2008.

**The Snorri Alumni Association (SAA).** During the Islendingadagurinn in Gimli there was a reunion of a few of the Snorris already graduated in the first three groups. They were enthusiastic about making their own alumni association to keep contact within the group of Snorris and to work towards promoting and supporting the Snorri Program. Tricia Signý McKay Snorri of 2001 became the first president of the Snorri Alumni and led the SAA into becoming an efficient forum for maintain the contacts between Snorri Participants.



Tricia Signý KcKay

It was decided by the board of the Snorri Program that a representative of the SAA would take part in the deliberations of the board as a full member. Tricia was the first to assume this responsibility and late Shawn Ross Bryant Snorri of 2000 served during his stay as student of Icelandic at the University of Iceland in 2003-2006.

The funding of the scholarships and management costs was a critical issue. No new private sponsor was found so there were discussions with officials of the government to find ways of securing funding for the coming years. In Alþingi – The parliament, there proved to be a broad consensus for allocating a contribution to the program for in the financial bill 2002.

The main contact within the Ministry for foreign affairs was Atli Ásmundsson who in 2003 was appointed Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg and served in that position for almost 10 years. Atli was as earlier referred to, instrumental in revitalizing the INL of Iceland and a great spokesman for founding the Snorri Program. Throughout his service for the government and beyond, he was an invaluable supporter of the program.

Markús Örn Antonsson and I attended the convention of the INL of North America in New Westminster B.C., along with Eiður Guðnason who was succeeding Svavar Gestsson as Consul General in Winnipeg and ambassador Hjálmar W. Hannesson who was about to open a new embassy of Iceland in Ottawa. Both Hjálmar and Eiður became very firm supporters and facilitators of the Snorri Programs.

## 2002

Alþingi – The parliament provided an allocation for securing the work of the Snorri Program for one year. I must say that at this point there was not unanimous support in parliament for allocating public funds over the financial law to safeguard the program. Therefore, we the spokesmen for the program had quite a number of informational meetings with committees in the Parliament and with administrators. However, in the end, the government firm in its policies to strengthen the connections with people in the Icelandic settlements in North America, put its support firmly behind securing the Snorri Program

This year the "Vesturfaramiðstöð Austurlands / East Iceland Emigration Center“ was founded by the city council of Vopnafjörður. A great number of emigrants left from this area mainly due to a great volcanic eruption in 1875 in Askja. Cathy Josephson who was born and raised in Minneota, Minnesota had moved to Iceland and settled in Vopnafjörður. Through her connections in North America, she was designated a member of the first board for the center and serves now as chair. The volunteers of the center have stepped forward when guests and/or relatives arrive, and especially when family ties are involved, providing genealogical services.

The incorporation of the Snorri Program as a nonprofit organization was made public on October 17, 2002. The first board under the provision of the statutes was appointed with me as chairman and Úlfur Sigurmundsson as vicechairman. Úlfur and I had from the start of the program de facto been in those positions as appointees of the INL of Iceland and the Nordic Association. The INL of North America was invited to appoint a board member and Harley Jonasson assumed that responsibility.



The board of the Snorri Foundation in 2004 :

From left: Úlfur Sigurmundsson and Gylfi Gunnarsson for NA –  
Shawn Bryant for SAA, Almar Grímsson Chairman and Wincie Jóhannsdóttir for INL Iceland  
Absent; Kent Lárus Björnsson (INL Iceland) and Harley Jonasson INL of NA.



The INL of North America held its annual convention in Minneapolis, MN in April of 2002. This was the first time the convention of the organization was held in the United States and there was a record attendance. At the meeting, an outline for a new, shorter version of the program for age 30 and older, called Snorri Plus was presented by me and program manager Ásta Sól who originally came up with the idea of launching a program for individuals over 30 years of age. There was a standing ovation when this was announced, clearly indicating the great interest by everyone not qualifying for the Snorri Program, due to age restrictions, to have an option to come to Iceland under the banner of the Snorri Program.



Snorri 2002 group with “mascot” Kjartan Almar (center)

## 2003

The first group of 8 in the Snorri Plus program completed the two weeks program. One of the participants, Runa Bjarnason of Golden, B.C. also participated in the Snorri Program in the first year in 1999 and became thus a dual pioneer.



Visiting Runa Bjarnason and family in Golden BC



Snorri Plus group 2004 at Þingvellir

In November 2003, I was elected president of the INL of Iceland to succeed Markús Örn Antonsson who served from 1999-2003. I held this position until 2011 when Halldór Árnason succeeded me. Halldór also succeeded me as chairman of the board of the Snorri Program.



Almar and Halldór at time of succession May 2011

## Epilogue

The beginning of and the first 5 years of the Snorri Program were a very dynamic and challenging period, where I embarked on a new chapter in my life. This was indeed a major life changing experience. I have been encouraged to document this process as best I could, highlighting important events and details. It is very rewarding and gratifying to see that the hopes and aspirations we who were in the forefront had, when the program was conceptualized and launched, were truly valid and that the program has become such a great success.

I am deeply grateful to all those who supported the program in the beginning and onwards. I have made a list of those who came vividly to my mind when writing this story of the first five years of the Snorri Program, but such a list will never be complete. I point out that the list, which is published as an Annex to this document, is mostly limited to the first pioneering years of the Snorri Program. In this list I include also the board members that served with me and special thanks go to program manager Ásta Sól Kristjánsdóttir who served with me during the most challenging early period of the program.

It is obvious that in the over 20 years history of the Program, there are numerous others who have become true friends and supporters of the Programs. I will give special mention to the great contributions of the Canada Iceland Foundation and its president Tim Samson.

Staff of Íslendingabók have been very helpful in finding in Iceland living relatives of the Snorri participants. This service has been invaluable. Later Icelandic Roots and Sunna Pam Furstenau have become a strong force in securing the ongoing management of the program, both by providing genealogical services and giving generous grants to individuals participating in the program.

I am in particular very grateful to those who have participated in the Snorri Programs. Many of them are close friends and have done me the honor of calling me their surrogate „Afi“, which is truly among the greatest honors I have been given through my lifetime.

One of the young Snorris, Tricia Signy McKay passed away in November of 2018. I as well as so many others treasure her memory. Tricia was the first president of the Snorri Alumni Association when the association was founded in 2001.

Many of the Snorri Plus participants have also become dear friends, but obviously they can hardly bestow me the title of „Afi“.

I thank all those that gave me guidance while working on the manuscript and in particular the following: *Óðinn Albertsson, Sigurlín Sveinbjarnardóttir, Steinn Logi Björnsson, Halldór Árnason and Eric Stefansson.*



*Jóel Fridfinnsson* edited the manuscript and I am deeply indebted to him for that outstanding service.

Hafnarfjörður Iceland, 30th September 2019

**Almar Grímsson**

## Almars Snorri story

### Annex:

### **Initiators and benefactors of the Snorri Program**

When the Snorri Program was being founded and started its activities there were several individuals who put their passion and energy into supporting the programs development and implementation. It is important to document their outstanding contributions.

In the list that here follows I name those individuals that I recall having initiated and given support during the phases of preparing for and running the Snorri Programs for the years up to and including 2003. There is a number of other benefactors that have followed up and deserve to be applauded for their contribution.

### **The presidents of Iceland.**



#### **Vigdís Finnbogadóttir**

was elected president of Iceland in 1980 and served for 16 years. During her term in office she visited many Icelandic settlements in Canada and the United States. In 1997 she was invited to take part in an advisory committee to look into the feasibility of a program for young people of Icelandic descent in North America. Vigdís as well as other members of the advisory committee applauded the initiative and during discussion about the name of the program she mention the appropriateness of naming it „The Amma program“ to honor the Icelandic emigrant grandmothers who would love to see their grandchildren connecting with Iceland and learning about their heritage. There was though consensus in naming it „The Snorri Program“, in the name of Snorri Þorfinnsson the first European child born in North America.



### **Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson**

was elected president of Iceland in 1996 and already the year after he and his late wife **Guðrún Katrín Þorbergsdóttir** visited a number of Icelandic settlements in the United States and Canada. This tour was very well covered in Icelandic news media and was an inspiration to the founding of the Snorri Program. When the Nordic Association of Iceland proclaimed that it would promote

such an idea, president Ólafur Ragnar instantly applauded this initiative. He showed his appreciation and great support throughout his term in office by hosting receptions for most of the Snorri groups that came from the first inaugural year 1999 until end of his term 31 July 2016.



### **Guðni Th. Jóhannesson**

was elected president of Iceland in 2016. Just a few weeks after Guðni took office he hosted a reception for the Snorri Plus group of 2016. He has admirably followed the tradition of his predecessors and is tireless in showing his appreciation of the Snorri Program. His recent visit with his wife **Eliza Reid**, to Winnipeg to celebrate the 100 years since the founding of the Icelandic National League of

North America, is a token of the presidential couple's firm support.

## Advisory committee 1997/98

In addition to president **Vigdís Finnbogadóttir** the following served on the advisory committee:



### **Haraldur Bessason**

former professor of the Icelandic department of the University of Manitoba. He was a great spokesman for the establishment of the Snorri Program. Haraldur passed away in 2009.



### **Einar Benediktsson**

was ambassador of Iceland to The United States and coaccredited Canada. In 1997 he was appointed managing director of the Millennium Commission of Iceland. He saw the potential of the Snorri Program by his initiative the commission decided to support starting the program in 1999.



### **Ingvi S. Ingvarsson**

was ambassador of Iceland to States and co-accredited Canada from 1986-1991.

## Other initiators and supporters from 1997 – 2003

### **A: Government**



#### **Davíð Oddsson**

was Prime Minister of the government of Iceland formed in 1995 which in its manifesto declared that it would work with all interested parties to strengthen the relations between Iceland and descendants of Icelandic immigrants in North America. Davíð was from the start a strong supporter of the Snorri Programs and has continued his advocacy beyond his service in government.



**Halldór Ásgrímsson** was the Minister for foreign affairs in the government of Iceland formed in 1995. He and prime minister Davíð realized that a strong Non- Governmental organization was needed to be mutually supportive with government activities to strengthen the bonds between Iceland and the Icelandic

communities in North America. On the day of Leifur Eiríksson 9 October 1997, he decided to appoint an interim board of INL of Iceland which had been inactive for a few years. Halldór passed away in 2015.



**Geir H. Haarde** was the Minister of finance in government of Iceland from 1998-2005. He played a very important role in supporting the Snorri Program to be allocated funds for securing its continuation. Geir was throughout his service in public offices a strong advocate for the program. He was minister for foreign affairs from 2005-2006 when he became the prime minister of Iceland a post he

served until 2009. He was ambassador of Iceland to the United States from 2015 – 2019. In all these capacities he was an invaluable supporter of the Snorri programs.





### **Atli Ásmundsson**

was adviser to the Minister for Foreign affairs, Halldór Ásgrímsson from 1995 – 2002. Atli played a key role when the minister decided to revitalize the Icelandic National League of Iceland in 1997. During his time in the Ministry, Atli was instrumental in paving the way for the Snorri Program within the government and the Alþingi. As of 1 January 2003, Atli took office as Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg and throughout his almost 10 years of service there, he to facilitated and promoted the program vigorously together with his wife **Prúður Helgadóttir**. Atli was awarded an honorary lifetime membership of INL of Iceland in 2013.



**Svavar Gestsson** became in 1999 the first diplomat sent from Iceland to be Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg. Svavar was together with his wife **Guðrún Ágústsdóttir** and still is a strong supporter and promotor of the Snorri Program After his service in diplomacy being the ambassador of Iceland to Sweden and later Denmark, Svavar joined the board of directors of the INL of Iceland

and became the first chairman of the Honorary Council of the organization. Svavar was awarded an honorary lifetime membership of INL of Iceland in 2018.



**Hjálmar W. Hannesson** became in 2001 the first ambassador of Iceland to Canada with residence in Ottawa. Before that the ambassadors of Iceland to the United States were accredited to Canada residing in Washington DC. Hjálmar later served as Permanent Representative to the UN in New York and ambassador of Iceland to the United States. His last posting was as Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg. Hjálmar was president of the Icelandic National League of Iceland from 2016-2018 and has always been together with his wife **Anna Birgis** a firm supporter of the Snorri Program.



### **Eiður Guðnason**

succeeded Svavar Gestsson in 2001 as Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg. In this capacity, Eiður, together with his wife **Eygló Haraldsdóttir**, supported strongly the Snorri Program, also when he returned to Iceland after serving as ambassador of Iceland to China. He then became the focal point in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for the relations with people of Icelandic descent in Canada and the United States. Eygló and Eiður have both very untimely passed away.



**Pétur Ásgeirsson** was director of the office for administration and finance in the Ministry for Foreign affairs and in that capacity he was the focal point for activities related to the INL of Iceland and the Snorri Program. Pétur later served as Consul General in Greenland and currently he is the ambassador of Iceland to Canada.



### **Halldór Árnason**

was director of administration at the Prime ministers Office from 2002 and for a while permanent secretary of the ministry for education and culture until he went to work in the private sector at the SA – the confederation of Icelandic Enterprise. In 2010 Halldór succeeded Almar Grímsson as chairman of the board of the Snorri Program and in 2011 he succeeded Almar as president of INL of Iceland.



## **B: Initiators in North America**

### **Manitoba:**



#### **Eric Stefanson**

was minister of finance and later minister of health in the government of Manitoba until 1999. Eric was the first individual in North America to applaud the Snorri Program at a meeting of the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce. (IACC) in Minneapolis/St. Paul in April 1998. Eric has ever since then been a firm supporter of the Snorri Program and was the initiator of starting the Snorri West program in Manitoba in 2001 and the chairman of the board of that program for the duration of Snorri West

Brothers Eric and Kris Manitoba. Eric was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 2000. He received a special recognition for his support to the Snorri Program in 2007 and was awarded an honorary lifetime membership of INL of Iceland in 2016.

**Kristjan (Kris) Fredric Stefanson** participated in the meeting of the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce. (IACC) in Minneapolis/St. Paul in April 1998 where the program was first introduced. Kris was very active in his community in strengthening the bonds between Iceland and Canada and a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning. Kris passed away in 2016.



#### **Jón Timothy (Tim) Samson**

was president of the Canada Iceland Foundation. He also participated in the meeting of the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce. (IACC) in Minneapolis/St. Paul in April 1998. When the announcement was made that the Snorri Program would start in the summer of 1999, he got a board decision that the Foundation would give each participant a grant. This practice has continued through all twenty years. Tim was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 2000 and a special recognition for his support

to the Snorri Program in 2007.



### **Neil Ofeigur Bardal**

was honorary consul General of Iceland in Winnipeg for many years until he was succeeded in 1999 by Svavar Gestsson. He participated in the meeting of the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce. (IACC) in Minneapolis/St. Paul in April 1998 where the program was first introduced. Neil was tireless in promoting the program until his untimely death in 2010. Neil was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 2000 and honorary lifetime membership of INL of Iceland in 2007.



**Susie Erickson- Jacobson** was president of Islandingadagurinn, the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba in 1998 and in her presidential speech at the festival she gave the first public announcement that the Snorri program would start in 1999.



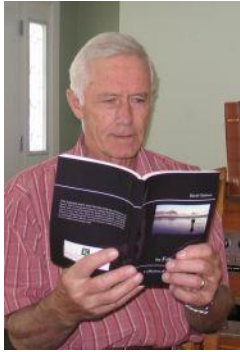
### **Stefan J. Stefanson**

was a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning and played an important part in greeting and guiding the Snorri West participants in Manitoba. Stefan was very active in all things Icelandic throughout his lifetime. He together with his wife Olla and with Ted and Marjorie Arnason operated Viking Travel Inc, which in the 1970's, organized a great number of group tours from Canada to Iceland, and also received and guided many groups from Iceland. Stefan died in 2008 at the age of 92. He was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 1993 and honorary lifetime membership of INL of Iceland in 2004.



### **Ernest Stefanson**

participated in the meeting of the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce. (IACC) in Minneapolis/St. Paul in April 1998 where the program was first introduced. Also was a cofounder of the Snorri West program in 2001 and together with his wife **Claire Gillis** a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning.



### **David Gíslason**

participated in the meeting of the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce. (IACC) in Minneapolis/St. Paul in April 1998 where the program was first introduced. He was chair of the Millennium 125 committee of Manitoba and a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning. David was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 2000 and honorary lifetime membership of INL of Iceland in 2007.



### **Irvin Olafson**

participated in the meeting of the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce. (IACC) in Minneapolis/St. Paul in April 1998 where the program was first introduced. He was a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning and was a cofounder of the Snorri West program in 2001. Irvin was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 2000.



### **Wanda Anderson**

was the program manager of Snorri West from the very beginning of the program in 2001 and served for all 10 years the program was active in Manitoba. Wanda received a special recognition for his support to the Snorri Program in 2010. She was Fjallkona of Manitoba in 2018.



### **Barry Arnason**

was a cofounder of the Snorri West program and a generous host to the young people from Iceland participating in the program.



### **Robert Arnason**

was a cofounder of the Snorri West program and president of the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba – Islendingadagurinn 2008-2009.



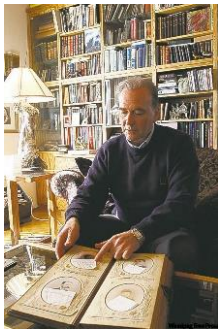
### **Harley Jonasson**

was president of the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba – Islendingadagurinn 2000-2001 and a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning. Harley was a member of the board of the Snorri Program from 2001-2005



### **Timothy (Tim) G. Arnason**

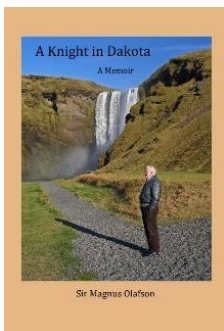
was president of the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba – Islendingadagurinn 2002-2003 and a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning.



### **Nelson Gerrard**

was a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the beginning and during his presence at the Icelandic Emigration Center in Hofsos he inspired the Snorri participants by his superb knowledge about the Icelandic Heritage in North America. He was also much involved in the program of the Snorri West participants in Manitoba. Irwin was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 2000.

## **North Dakota**



### **Magnus Olafson**

was during his lifetime, very active in strengthening the bonds between Iceland and the Icelandic Communities in North Dakota. He was a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning. Magnus was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 1999 and honorary lifetime membership of INL of Iceland in 2005. He published in 2013 his memoirs entitled „*A Knight in Dakota*”. Magnus passed away in 2015



### **Loretta Bernhoft**

is Honorary Consul for Iceland in North Dakota. She has throughout her lifetime been heavily involved in preserving the Icelandic heritage in the Icelandic settlements in North Dakota. She has from the outset been a firm supporter of the Snorri Program and has been in the forefront, with her husband **Wayne Bernhoft**, of welcoming Icelandic visitors to North Dakota.



### **Curtis Olafson**

has for a number of years been in the forefront of the Icelandic Communities Association (ICA) in North Dakota. He led a group visit to Iceland in November of 1999, the year the Icelandic Communities in North Dakota celebrated the 100th August the Deuce festival. Curtis has together with his wife **Björk Eiríksdóttir Olafson**, been a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning. They have also been in the forefront of welcoming Icelandic visitors to North Dakota.



### **Pamela (Sunna) Olafson Furstenau**

got involved in the work of the Icelandic Communities Association in North Dakota 20 years ago and has become a strong pillar, together with her husband **Jeff Furstenau** in strengthening the bonds between Iceland and Icelandic settlements all over North America both through her work in the Icelandic National League of North America and Icelandic Roots. Sunna received honorary lifetime membership of INL of Iceland in 2018 and was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 2018.



### **John H. Johnson**

was a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning. He was always prepared to meet Icelandic visitors to Gardar and Mountain ND and tell them about the history of the Icelandic settlements in North Dakota in particular about his close relative Stephan G. Stephanson who lived in Gardar 1880-1889. John and his family took the initiative of raising a memorial for Stephan G. At the site of the poet's farm at Gardar.





## **Leslie Geir**

was a firm supporter of the Snorri Program from the very beginning. Leslie has always been prepared to meet Icelandic groups including Snorri West participants visiting Gardar and Mountain ND. He would always be present at the site of the Thingvalla church and cemetery and at the memorial of poet KN Julius. KN lived and worked on the Geir farm where Leslie is farming now.

## **Minnesota**



## **Örn Arnar**

was Consul General for Iceland in Minnesota and from the outset a firm supporter of the INL of Iceland Snorri Program duly supported by his wife **Margrét (Maddy) Arnar**. Maddy sadly passed away very recently in September 2019.

## **British Columbia**



## **Heather Alda Ireland**

was Consul General for Iceland in British Columbia and from the outset a firm supporter of the Snorri Program duly supported by her husband **William (Bill) Ireland**. Heather was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 2000.

## **Ontario**



**Gail Einarson McCleerey** was president of the Icelandic National League of North America 2008-2010 and honorary consul for Iceland in Toronto. She was from the outset a strong supporter of the Snorri Program and instrumental in furthering the Snorri West program from 2011 under the auspices of INL of North America. Gail was awarded the Order of the Falcon in 2000 and honorary lifetime membership of INL of Iceland in 2014.

## **C: The Nordic Association of Iceland:**



### **Óðinn Albertsson**

was the project manager at the Nordic Association of Iceland, for Nordjobb a youth exchange program between the Nordic Countries. At an informal meeting in August 1997 he launched the idea for a similar program for youth of Icelandic descent in North America. He was managing director of the Nordic Association from 1999 – 2008 following closely the management of the Snorri Program during that period.



### **Kristín S. Kvaran**

was president of the Nordic Association when the Snorri Program was conceptualized in 1997 and launched in 1999. She worked with the advisory committee which proposed the implementation of the program. Kristín passed away in 2006.



### **Sigurlín Sveinbjarnardóttir**

was managing director of the Nordic Association when the Snorri Program was conceptualized in 1997 and launched in 1999. She succeeded then Kristín Kvaran as president of the Association. She worked with the advisory committee which proposed the implementation of the program.



### **Úlfur Sigurmundsson**

was a board member of the Nordic Association in 1997 and worked with the advisory committee which proposed the implementation of the program. Úlfur served since 1999 continuously as member of the board of the Snorri Program as vice chairman until he resigned in 2017 for health reasons.



### **Gylfi Gunnarsson**

was the accountant of the Nordic Association and was from the outset a strong supporter of the Snorri Program. He also served on the board of the Snorri Foundation from 2003 – 2006. Gylfi passed away in 2011.

## **D: Þjóðræknisfélag Íslendinga – Icelandic National League of Iceland**



### **Steinn Logi Björnsson**

was president of the interim board of Icelandic National League (INL) of Iceland which served from 1997-1999. Steinn Logi took an active part in the forming and launching of the Snorri Program and continued to be a great supporter during his time at Icelandair and beyond that e.g. as the CEO of Síminn which has also sponsored the program. He worked with the advisory committee which proposed the implementation of the program.



### **Markús Örn Antonsson**

was member of the interim board of Icelandic National League (INL) of Iceland from 1997-1999. He succeeded Steinn Logi Björnsson as president of INL of Iceland and served from 1999-2003. Markús Örn signed in 1999 the first agreement between INL of Iceland and the Nordic Association to create the Snorri Foundation. Markús was mayor of Reykjavík from 1991-1994 and served as ambassador of Iceland to Canada from 2005-2008.



### **Almar Grímsson**

was vice president of the Nordic Association 1997-1999 when the Snorri Program was conceptualized and started operation. Almar participated in the work of the advisory committee which proposed the implementation of the program and was chosen to chair the program in 1999 and continued through 2010 except for 2003-2004 when he took a leave of absence. He was the vice president of INL of Iceland 1999 -2003 and its president from 2003 – 2011. Almar is an honorary lifetime member of the Icelandic National League of North America (2011) and the Icelandic National League of Iceland (2013). He was the first recipient of INL of North America award “Strong is the Bond – “Römm er sú taug” in 2019.



### **Hans Indriðason**

was a board member of the INL of Iceland from 2000 – 2004 and also member of the board of director of the Snorri Foundation in 2002-2004.





### **Róbert Trausti Árnason**

was board member of INL of Iceland 2002 -2004 and served as chair of the board of the Snorri Foundation 2003-2004



### **Wincie Jóhannsdóttir**

was board member of INL of Iceland 2003 -2010 and also served on the board of the Snorri Foundation from 2004 -2010. As staff member of the Icelandic Emigration Center at Hofsós she also played an important role in educating the participants in the Snorri Programs.



### **Kent Lárus Björnsson**

was board member of INL of Iceland 2003 -2010 and also served on the board of the Snorri Foundation from 2003 -2010. In later years Kent has been a very popular driver of the Snorri groups.



### **Ágústa Porkelsdóttir**

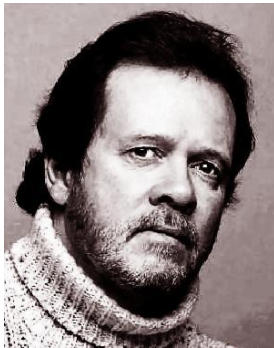
was a board member of the INL of Iceland from 2000 – 2004 and a cofounder of the "Vesturfaramiðstöð Austurlands / East Iceland Emigration Center.

## D: Other initiators/supporters in Iceland



### **Valgeir Þorvaldsson**

is director of the Icelandic Emigration Center at Hofsóss from the outset a firm supporter of the Snorri Program duly supported by his wife **Guðrún Þorvaldsdóttir**. Valgeir and Guðrún have from the start of the Snorri program arranged the very important educational visits of both the Snorri and Snorri Plus programs to Hofsóss towards the end of their stay.



### **Steinþór Guðbjartsson**

is a journalist of Morgunblaðið (and editor of Lögberg Heimskringla 2004-2005). He has written numerous articles and taken many interviews which have been invaluable in promoting both the Snorri Programs as well as the work of the INL on both sides of the Atlantic.



### **Cathy Josephson**

was a cofounder of the "Vesturfaramiðstöð Austurlands / East Iceland Emigration Center. She played an important role in welcoming the Snorri Participants who had roots in Vopnafjörður and were placed there with families.

## E: Program Management



**Reynir Gunnlaugsson** was manager of the INL of Iceland 1998-2000 and acted as program manager of the Snorri Program in 1999 and until Ásta Sól Kristjánsdóttir was recruited in March 2000.



### **Margrét Pétursdóttir**

was assistant to the program manager of the pioneer group in 1999 and was the tour leader in the adventure tour at the end of the stay.



### **Ásta Sól Kristjánsdóttir**

was program manager of the Snorri Program from 2000, the second year of operation. Ásta Sól served for 19 years except during two maternity leaves 2010 when



**Alexía Björg Jóhannsdóttir** served as program manager

and in 2014 when



**Ástrós Signýjardóttir** stepped in as program manager.

Before and during her maternity leaves, **Ásta Sól** made an excellent briefing manual and assistance to Alexía and Ástrós.

She also acted as managing director for INL Iceland from 2006.