



Sigríður Peterson

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Bjarni Benediktsson – Stjórnámál – Forsætisráðherra – Bréf

Tekið af vef Borgarskjalasafnsins

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*Stjórnámálamaðurinn*

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Ste. 203-13629 Bentley Road,  
North Surrey, British Columbia,  
November 19, 1967.

Kæri Frændi minn, Dr. Benediktsson,  
I hang my head in shame at  
this late hour as I try to express my  
heartfelt thanks to you and your good  
wife, Frii Sigríður for your wonderful  
kindness and the gracious way in which  
you received me on my visit to Iceland  
last summer. My entire experience in  
my dear homeland was just one big  
moment of ecstasy.

Before I left Montreal, September 6, I wrote  
"thank-you" notes to all my cousins and  
the people from Sagraskógi who had  
been so very good to me. I put off writing  
to you till the last, because I wanted your  
letter to be special. - And what has happened?  
As always, whether it be in real life or  
literature, it is a known fact, that the  
more you dwell upon a thing the  
weaker the intent becomes. This  
happened to Hamlet as he thought of  
killing King Claudius!!

But really, life in Montreal, with Expo 67  
was filled with busy rounds of activities.  
People came and went. My son's home



was like a Grand<sup>2</sup> Hotel. For a few days we had 28 people at Eggert's house. He has six children of his own - then Dr. Bjarki Jakobsson and his wife Borga came from Neepawa, Manitoba, and they had 8 children. We had other visitors, including three from Reykjavik, who had been with Dr. Jakobson. They were: Ingvaldur Hannesdottir, Gudbjörg Þórunn and her son Emil, 12 years old. They were all a joy to have, but life was so full, you had "to go into the wilderness to meditate."

I wrote to Emma Sigurdson almost immediately after my return from Iceland, and gave her your message and the one from Maren. This was just in time, as Emma's sister-in-law, Sigríður Sigurdson, at Swan River Manitoba, passed away late in August or early September. I tried to phone Emma when I passed through Winnipeg, but spoke to her nephew.



Jimmy Forsythe<sup>3</sup> at Eriksdale, instead,  
and sent my wishes to his mother  
Annie and his aunt Emma. I  
also sent word with Gudbjörg Þórunn  
dóttir to Maren. I just had a letter  
from Gudbjörg, telling me of her  
return journey, and that she had  
got word to Maren, and phoned  
my cousin Guðrún Þorsteinsdóttir  
in Reykjavík.

Ísötti Frændi minn, ég get ekki  
komist orðum að því hvað það  
gladdi mig að fá gjöfina frá  
þér; <sup>seingjafna</sup> daginn <sup>sem ég fór</sup> í Reykjavík. Ég fór  
niður á torget, bara til að líta  
umhvervis bæinn, þar sem fólk  
hafði sínt mér svo mikkla  
alúft og ást. Þegar ég kem heim  
segir frænka mín að matar á  
bil hafi komið með böggul fyrir  
mig, og sé þessi böggull á borðinu.  
Ég opnaði hann og sá þá þessi tvö



lyfritaks bindi af ritgerðum, ræðum  
og blaðagreinum þínum í "Land  
og Lýt veldi." I looked at my cousin  
and said, "This is from Number 10 Downing  
Street, no less!" My emotions were  
mixed. I felt both humble and very  
proud to think you should show me  
this fine gesture. The kind and intimate  
words you wrote on the fly leaf of  
volume one, thrilled me. I thought  
of a eulogy the late American economist  
and financier, Bernard M. Baruch,  
delivered to the memory of a school teacher  
who had just died in New York. She had  
taught him when he was a small boy.  
On this occasion he carried with him a  
combined volume of "David Copperfield" and  
"Great Expectations" by Charles Dickens. On  
the fly leaf, these words were written:

"To Bernard M. Baruch, for general excellent  
and fine department. From Miss Katherine Blake,  
Mr. Baruch mentioned how this teacher had  
influenced his life and how much the book  
meant to him. Sometimes little things in life  
will inspire great men. They also affect the  
common man on the street at times."

I know that my visit with you,  
and those well chosen words you  
wrote on the book gave me an



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inspiration, which I have not had since I lost my husband two years ago. My doctor said to me, "You should go to Iceland every year!"

When I returned from Montreal I felt like teaching again. I put in an application for substituting here in Surrey, and have been kept very busy - mostly in the high schools, or Secondary School - what you call Mentaskóli, I believe. My experience lies mostly at that level and in that field. Some days are rugged, but on the whole it is a joy to be back in the class room again. To know you, to speak to you, and to enjoy the fellowship of you and your fine wife, in your own home, was an inspiration, indeed!

I keep reading, "Land og Lýðveldi" in my spare time, and am learning so much therefrom of the more recent history of Iceland. For example I had no idea that the Danes had a design to trade Iceland in 1864, for Schleswig-Holstein to the Germans. How you people have managed to manoeuvre



Through strategies is <sup>b</sup>incredible. I keep thinking of the greatness of this small nation - The towering dead, like your father and others, who were trail blazers in throwing off the shackles that kept the nation in bondage. There is tremendous credit coming to you and your cabinet for the work you are doing. I could hear that people hold you in great respect. You surely must have given them good administration, or they would not have put you back into power for a third term. I hope I am correct in this figure.

I wish I could have met your brother Sveinn. I shall never forget that brief interlude at Hotel Borg, where we sat opposite each other and just stared at one another. *Er það mögulegt að við höfum geta séð áttarvop hvort með öðru?*

Where is your brother Petur? I have here a book from my Icelandic Library, called, "Minningar úr Menntaskóla". There is an article by you, written in a cultured and scholarly language, yet with a touch of precious wit! It is titled, "Minningar frá árunum 1920-1926"; and there is another by your brother Petur titled, "Fáein orð in hreinskilni." I have read these



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two articles over and over again. Your sense of humour is priceless! Just think! The Suffragettes made you their honorary president — and the Latin name you chose for your Secret Society had an altogether different shade of meaning from what you intended. Petur's humour is so rich that I have laughed and laughed — then laughed some more at his wording — the paradoxical event of — "svo að ég faldi mig á bak við öskur tunnu hjá Sigurði Eggerz!"

The contrast here gives impact to the imagination — the lowly ash can pitted against the greatness of the man who sat in the seats of the mighty and became Prime Minister of Iceland! Then there is the chase and the chastising, "upp á kvistherbergi kennarans." — The attic and the poor school teacher! Somehow or other I get involved in the whole thing. For over twenty years I have worked with young people, and know their tricks and triumph — their sorrows and defects.



I find the world has changed. I have lived too long. When I step into the classroom now and see the Beatniks, the Beatnik-type, the Monkeys and Harry Hippies, I wonder if we have gone back to the Stone Age. I carry on and try to understand an ever changing world.

I must tell you that after I saw you, I took the bus to Akureyri as I wanted to see more of the countryside. I was very fortunate. The weather was beautiful, bright and clear. We stopped at Misfandur, Bifrost to pick up passengers, Fornhvammur, Blönduós and Garmahöf. Ósnadalur var particularly impressive. I took a picture of Fraun Drangi through the bus window - this with my 35 mm. camera. It turned out splendidly!

Valgardur Stefánsson, and his sister, Sigríður frá Fagraskógi were at the bus station at Akureyri to meet me. I was invited to Valgardur's home for the evening meal. His son-in-law



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Dr. Frosti Sigurjónsson and family from Reykjavík were visiting at Valgardur's home, so he had quite a houseful. We had a delightful evening. Conversation was easy, as Valgardur and Sigríður remembered my parents and us the children so well. Dr. Sigurjónsson and his wife had gone to the U. S. A. the summer of 1966 - visited New York, Chicago and San Francisco. They could not come to Vancouver as the U. S. Air Strike was on, just at the time of their travel.

Later on in the evening I went to Hotel Edda, where I had made arrangements to meet Gísli Guðmundsson from Reykjavík. He spent ten years in Himmeþing - 1928-1938, and stayed with my husband's people. Gísli has tried many things. At this time he was taking the Hóppferð of Iceland who had come from Seattle.



to stop over night at Blönduós, thence to Akureyri and Myvatn. He wanted me to come along with him, but since I was on my own, I had my own itinerary, and I wanted to go on the "Krakningablið" along Eyjafjörð to Fagraskeið, Mötunellir, where my parents were married and where I was Christened, and to Glaumba.

The following day, I was invited again to Valgardur's for the mid-day meal. Then Audriin, Dr. Frost's wife, took her aunt Sigríður, her sister Valgerður, and myself to Fagraskeiðs, Mötunellir, Kamthóli (where I was born) and Glaumba.

Magnús Stefánsson and his wife at Fagraskeiði, were most hospitable. Magnús is a very handsome kindly and a quiet man of unusual charm. I am sure he looks like his uncle the late poet, David Stefánsson frá Fagraskeiði. Hafna mín and I went down to the seashore and



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she showed me a post, bleached  
and weather beaten, that had stood  
there for years. She said to me "Ser  
átti hann fatir þinn mög spor".  
I took a picture of it, which turned  
out very well. It shows the fjörður  
and the Svalbardströnd with its  
snow capped mountains on the  
other side.

In the evening Sigríður took me to  
her son's place at Glasiba, David  
Guðmundson and his wife Sigríður.  
They gave me a very warm reception  
and after the evening meal David  
drove his mother and me back  
to Akureyri, later that evening.

When I came back to my room at  
Hotel Edda, the girl at the desk brought  
me tea on a tray and was so very  
friendly and said "Ert þú Sigríður Eggertsdóttir  
frá Kamhóli?" I told her I was,  
and begged her to sit down for  
a little chat. We spoke for two hours.  
Her grandfather, Magnús Þorsteinsson  
had followed my parents at Kamhóli,  
but I don't think they stayed there  
long. The girl was Jóhanna Sigrún Þorsteinsdóttir.



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She had obviously mentioned me to her parents the night before, and they asked her to make enquiries about who I was. Johanna is a delightful young girl - speaks very good English and has but one year left to graduate from Akureyrar Menntaskóli. I asked her about her English course, and found that it is geared very much to the same course as I have taught in Secondary Schools here in Canada - novels such as "Pride and Prejudice", by Jane Austen; poems such as "Some Thoughts from Abroad" by Browning, with an enrichment of works from the Twentieth Century writers.

I flew back to Reykjavik the following day, after Sigríður Stefánsson, and her niece, Ragnheiður (Þóra's daughter) took me through the poet's house on Bjarkarstíg. It was indeed a privilege and extremely



impressive - but how I wish I could have met David Stefánsson frá Fagraskógi, while he was still alive! His spirit seemed to abide in the dwelling, and I seemed to be aware of his nearness. He had an unusual collection of art of all types - by Bölu Hjálmar, Sólva Helgson and others. I remember my parents speaking about these, somewhat eccentric artists - particularly Sólva, who my mother said had me a type of flakingur. They lived in an era when no help was available to stimulate their genius.

The day I left Akureyri was beautiful, sunny and warm. The temperature was about 70°F. As I walked out from the airport to the plane, a soft warm breeze played about my face. The place was so inviting, and I was so in harmony with my surroundings at Hotel Edda, I felt I could dwell there for the rest of my days. I realized it was a Dormitory, which the government



wisely turns into<sup>14</sup> a hotel during the tourist season.

I boarded the plane, and as I was borne aloft I beheld Eyjafjörður in all its glory - No wonder my father missed "at sigla inn Eyjafjört." I beheld the city below, in its jewel of a setting, nestling there by the fjörður. The impressive church stood out like a statue upon a pedestal. Then I was carried over the mountains, chiselled, funnelled and grooved, snow-clad and chill, turning into glaciers farther on. When I arrived in Reykjavík, it was raining - just like Vancouver! Isunnar met me at the airport. All were very anxious to hear about my "ferðina norður." I was so inspired, I don't think I ever spoke Icelandic so fluently. I had kept notes and written everything down. I had gone to the place of my birth, and as I arrived at what used to be



Kambhall, I <sup>13</sup>didn't know whether  
to laugh or cry. I had travelled  
thousands of miles to see a few  
jagged tufts of turf. Two mountain  
slides had snagged the place down  
and destroyed the dwelling and the  
"tún" that my parents had tailed to  
level like a carpet. Now it was  
strewn with rock and debris, and  
the earth was all pock marked and  
scarred. However, the brook was  
running clear, and I took a picture  
of it. As a little tot, I fell into it  
and was almost drowned. Magnús  
was so kind during my visit to  
these ruins. He asked me if I  
would not rest myself on one  
of the turf tufts, and he took a  
snapshot of me. I have not  
heard from him. He has an exceptional  
collection of "forngrípi", mostly from earlier  
days at Fagrabkogi and from his great grand-  
parents at Hofi, who were my father's foster  
parents. Perhaps he has put my snapshot  
in his antique shop.



Life has many facets. When I returned from Akureyri, I mentioned to my relatives that my trip had been wonderful - scenery beautiful and the people kind beyond words, but I felt there was a missing chapter in the life of my parents in Iceland. They were wonderful parents in every way - highly intelligent, extremely industrious, believing in fine principles - the dignity of the individual and the essence of man. Their morals were strict - and rightly so. We, their children had a good upbringing. My father would not live in a log cabin, but built us a frame dwelling almost immediately as a pioneer. We had good clothes and lots to eat. We had desire to learn and forged ahead on our own.

Times must have been very hard in Iceland at the time of their departure for Canada. Leifurinn Stefánsson frá Fagurshöfnum, widow of Jón Magnússon, skáld, called for me one day at Ljísheimar #3, and took me to Hotel Borg for hot chocolate and Danish pastry. We had a delightful day together. She is very interested in art, and



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we went to Listsýning Hallveigarstata, I  
enjoyed it very much. I had been  
to the <sup>"Gjött minn af Patrík"</sup> National Museum, and seen  
the works of such artists there as;  
Nína Samundson's <sup>Deýjandi</sup> Cleopatra, which I thought  
was splendid. We walked about and she showed  
me the statue "móðir með barn", by the same  
sculptress. While I mentioned art, I found the  
statue by Línar Jónsson, Þorfinnur Kásefni  
a masterpiece, as is <sup>the</sup> "Hillegu maðurinn". Many  
pieces of art attracted my attention; "Frá  
Þingvöllum" and "Langspil sleigir á  
pians," by Johannes Karval were both  
splendid, I thought. One that I found  
very interesting was by Ferro (Guðm.  
Guðmundson). It was a type of surrealism  
I thought - there was the heaven and sea  
- eyes - animal heads - birds - <sup>all</sup> ~~put~~  
<sup>supposed</sup> ~~put~~ one upon the other, ~~but~~  
the all seeing eye was prominent. Then  
the crowning thing was the title: -  
Elshugi Þrömsins! It fascinated me.  
Anyway, I was going to tell you that  
on this occasion that Guðrún Stefánsdóttir  
called for me, she handed me a poem  
she had written on a well chosen card  
which <sup>had</sup> a picture of turf houses, titled "The Old Farm".



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Here is the poem:

"Föðurlandit fagnar komu þinni,  
Þem först á hartunda árum lengst  
Fyrstu spörin áttu á alltjóðinni  
Og ert þú hennar velkomnasti gestur."  
I was thrilled at her fine gesture, and  
this one stanza reveals to me a  
great meaning.

I had a letter from her sister  
Sigríður recently. She mentions my  
father again. When he was not stýri  
maður á "Henning" for Jakob Hafstein  
á Husavík - this he did for 9 years -  
he would fish on a boat belonging  
to Stefán frá Fagraskógi. My father  
owned a boat in partnership with  
another man, but the terms, when  
he rented Kambhóll, was that he  
give up his own boat and use  
Stefán's on shares. This obviously  
was the custom. Sigríður says in  
her letter: "Þegar faðir þinn og aðrir  
voru að leggja út á sjóinn, fóru  
þeir oftast með línum af stöð í miðbergi



Því mig minnir þeir réru stundum  
 á haustin og jafnvel að vetrinum.  
 My father was foreman <sup>or skipper</sup> on "Griseyama"  
 his last year in Iceland. This  
 ship was a sister ship of "Hennung", <sup>both</sup>  
<sup>ships</sup> <sup>both</sup> <sup>built</sup> <sup>by</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>same</sup> <sup>ship</sup> <sup>builder</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>Norway</sup>. <sup>Þetta</sup>  
 belonged to Höfner's (spelling?) Verzlun.  
 Kristján Sigurðsson var Verzlunartjóni  
 frá Akureyri <sup>for this company</sup>. My father had all  
 in readiness to go on "Griseyama"  
 to sea again, the spring we left  
 for Canada, <sup>1906</sup> his brother Stefán,  
 who had been in Winnipeg and  
 my mother's brother Jónundur, who  
 was already in Canada, urged  
 my parents to leave Iceland — to  
 try for a better lot. Times were not  
 easy in a new land, but I know  
 things were difficult in Iceland.  
 My mother was a marvellous <sup>at Hambóli</sup>  
 woman — ran the little farm <sup>while</sup>  
 father was at sea. She had 3 cows  
 and 40 sheep. I have got all this  
 information from my oldest brother



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Eignarbjörn, who remembers things so well and has always loved Iceland its history and literature. He could name all the members of your cabinet. I just called him on the phone and he told me Jakob Hafstein's grandson was in your cabinet. I checked my notes and see that he is Johann Hafstein, son of Julius Hafstein, síslurnadur á Húsavík. He is married to Ragnheiður Thors, daughter of Olafur Thors, and is dómsmála og Kirkjumála Ráðgjafi. I wrote down the names as I was introduced to these fine people in the receiving line with you and your wife. It was all such a wonderful privilege.

Perhaps I better cut this long letter a bit short. I hope to go to Ottawa at Easter time to see David's family - he is my younger son. Then I'll go to Boston Massachusetts, U. S. A. where my older son Eggert is taking his Ph. D. at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



He is going to Africa Dec. 15<sup>21</sup> and returning Jan. 8. He is employed as a consultant on transportation for a British firm - Has his Hotel reservation in Nairobi, Kenya Colony, Africa. He will go for 8 weeks next summer, to Tanzania and Uganda. The Canadian National Railways are paying him a returning fee and they fly him from Boston to Montreal and back for a spell of 3-4 days a month. His work load is very heavy. He hopes to go to Iceland and write his Thesis on some facet of Iceland's Fishing Industry. I will spend much of the summer down east and about three weeks in Winnipeg. I am debating if I should plan a European tour with a side trip to Iceland. I would just love it. No harm done to Dream.

It has been so satisfying to chat with you thus on paper. I hope



I have not <sup>22</sup>wearyed you too much.  
I just want you to know I am  
proud of my Illugastada atterni —  
I think it has a meaning. I agree  
with John Buchan in his book  
"The Path of the King." — "God never  
allows waste. There is no waste of spirit.  
Blood drawn from kings, it never knew,  
will be royal again. Some rays of  
greatness always cling to it." — And  
so, — I have hopes for future generations.

I must tell you that the pictures  
of you and Petur that accompany  
the articles mentioned earlier in this  
letter, are exceptionally good. You  
two look so handsome and charming.

My cousin Sigurbjörn Eyford at  
Hay River, North West Territories has  
sustained a stroke, but is mobile. His  
daughter Lily and her son Vernon came  
to Expo 67 and stayed with us in Montreal.

Under separate cover I am sending  
you a Christmas Card, and also a  
Calendar, that will arrive later.

Again my heartfelt thanks!

Fin enlag, Franka,

Sigríður Peterson



Afterthought.

I should explain why I have written this letter in such a mixture of English and Icelandic. There are two reasons:

① I wanted test my powers at Icelandic, which are very weak. My vocabulary is limited and my spelling may not be correct.

② Where I have used quotations or expressions from Icelandic, I have done this on purpose. They may become idiomatic and lose their true meaning, as any language becomes mutilated in translation.