

Borgarnes Museum

Borgarnes, Iceland. www.safnahus.is

Children Throughout a Century

Texts. English translation: Alexander Guðfinnsson



Bí bí og blaka: Chirping and flapping

Chirping and flapping,
The swans are quacking.

I pretend to sleep,
But I'll still stay awake.

Chirp chirp babbling,
The little kids rambling;
Along the mountain trails,
They try to find lambs.

Sveinbjörn Egilsson.

Álftir: Swans

Dragging waves

In darkened waters

Deep swimming swans

Quiet

Perhaps they will never sing

Ever again

Never for me

Again

Snorri Hjartarson.

Kvæðið um fuglana: The poem about the birds.

He is only a poet the one that understands the bird's song,

And it sounds brightest, in the baby's soul.

He never casts a shadow on the songs sacred mound.

He sings life into the carpenters work and the trees.

He is only a poet the one, that understands and finds,

That the creator has toys just like him

And collects them in an old toy chest

and makes all his little children glad with them.

Davíð Stefánsson.

Vorið góða, grænt og hlýtt: The gentle spring, green and warm

The gentle spring, green and warm,
Sows pleasure throughout the valley,
Everything is now as new,
the sheep, the cows and shepherds.

Rustling bushes, quacks in the air,
Witty sparrow singing,
But still my hearth can always never wait:
For going out shepherding

Heinrich Heine

Translated by Jónas Hallgrímsson in the years 1844-1845.
Original copy is kept in Árnastofnun in Konráðs museum.

Óskasteinar: wishing stones.

I found in the mountains, beautiful stones,
Hid them all, wanted to keep them as secrets.
Hid there in a cave all the lucky stones,
All of my wonderful wishing stones.

A while has passed since I last saw the stones
No longer remember any wish,
That they should fulfil in my lifetime,
This story will never tell of those wishes.

My little treasures I no longer miss,
Might they be found by a girl or a boy?
Silver bright crystals with green and grey
Golden red stones striped with purple.

Hildigunnur Halldórsdóttir.

Óhræsið: The wretch.

Alone in the mountains,
Far from the warmth of houses,
Out on rocky roads,
White with hairy toes,
Fights in helplessness,
Carries little hope,
Has no home,
Weather bitten ptarmigan.

Jónas Hallgrímsson.

Heiðlóarkvæði: Golden plover poem.

The little plover
Early in the sky “dirrindee”
Under the sun sings:
Praise the lord
Green is the country side
And beautiful is the horizon.

Jónas Hallgrímsson

Svanurinn minn syngur: My swan sings.

My swan sings.

Over the sun, they sound

His poems and dazzle

Holy angel choirs.

The flowers long past

Again redeem their life.

From frozen canyons

Waterfalls make their way.

My swan sings

A sun into hell.

Stops chilling winds.

Gladdens all that lives.

The heavy cliffs move,

The rocks join in the song.

Alone the wave moans,

Feels its power wining.

My swan sings

All the summer days:

Glides happier than before

A sun on the horizon.-

There is one though, that loved

Too much to rejoice;

Over the swans long travel

She bathes in tears.

Halla Eyjólfsdóttir from Laugarból.

Rústir: Ruins

Here the life is as before:

Colour in the grass, singing in the heath,
A shimmering straw, lakes here and there,
Peaks, that rise beyond the seas.-

The grassy hill here was greater than all the other,
My horns and shells lied there with ease.

My footprints are no longer traceable,
-But everything still touches a string in one's heart:
The rock still has its odd habits,
There still glitters dew on the flowers bloom.
-As I stand here at this creek,
My soul starts to leak into it.

Molding ruins close to the roof,
-Few now travel this road.
My youth will forever lie here,
With sorrow I look upon her grave.
A lonely swan flies past me,
-The flight is heavy, and its voice filled with grief.

Jóhannes úr Kötlum.

Krummi krúnkar úti: The raven, croaks.

The raven croaks outside,
Calling for his namesake.
I found a head of a ram,
A back bone and woollen skin.
Come now and crop some with me
Raven my namesake.

An old national stanza.



Dánir: Deceased.

Guðríður Árnadóttir from Borgum í Norðfirði, 19 winters, died the 30th of December.

Margrét Björnsdóttir (Lindargarði 1B) died the 27th of December, 66 years old.

Sigurbjartur Hróbjartsson, a carpenter, died last night from consumption, half-thirty.

Signý Jónsdóttir widow (Hverfisgötu 28) died the 30th of December.

There were also a few child deaths, including Thor Jensens (merchant) youngest daughter (Lovísa), who died on Christmas eve, only two years old.

Ref: The Icelandic paper Isafold. 35th year, 1908, the 4th of January.



Bara einn pottur: Just one pot.

Examples of shortages of fireproof cooking utensils were eminent until the 20th century. A source from the department of national traditions remembers visiting a home in Borgarnes where there was only one useable pot. The people there first cooked porridge till it was half cooked. Then it was poured in a bucket that was isolated from the cold, so that the porridge would keep boiling. While it boiled on, the people cut up some fish and potatoes and cooked in the big pot over a stone stove. That meant that the porridge was usually ready when the fish was.

Ref: The Icelandic National Museum, National Folklore department. Quoted from: Rebekka Þiðriksdóttir.

Að borða hesta: To eat horses.

Up until the 19th century, the church forbade the eating of horse meat. However, once there was a shortage of food, people often overlooked that.

Large debates were held about the subject in the mid-18th century, and in 1760 it was decided on a penalty against that kind of eating, unless there was a life on the line.

The church's ban was finally lifted on the 18th of September 1809; after Magnús Stephensen declared on behalf of the law that eating horse was recommended, especially when hungry.

Ref: Gunnar Sveinsson. 1962 Rökraeður Íslendinga fyrr á öldum um hrossakjötsát, Skírnir, page 14-44.

Skyr og Mýsa.

Note: Skyr is a thick, white drink, made from milk, much like yogurt but sour.

Mýsa is also made from milk and is a sour thin yellow liquid, not unlike white wine without the alcohol!

“Skyr” was eaten alone or with porridge almost daily in most farms, up until this very century and the “mýsa” that came from the skyr was a regular drink for ages.

Ref: Hallgerður Gísladóttir. 1999. Íslensk matarhefð, page 71.



Lært að lesa: Learning how to read.

“I’ll never forget it when I learned how to read. It was a great event. And what would have become of me to live all those long days of my life if Anna would not have made me sit next to her, using a knitting needle as a pointer and shown me this key to everything that I’ve loved doing since.

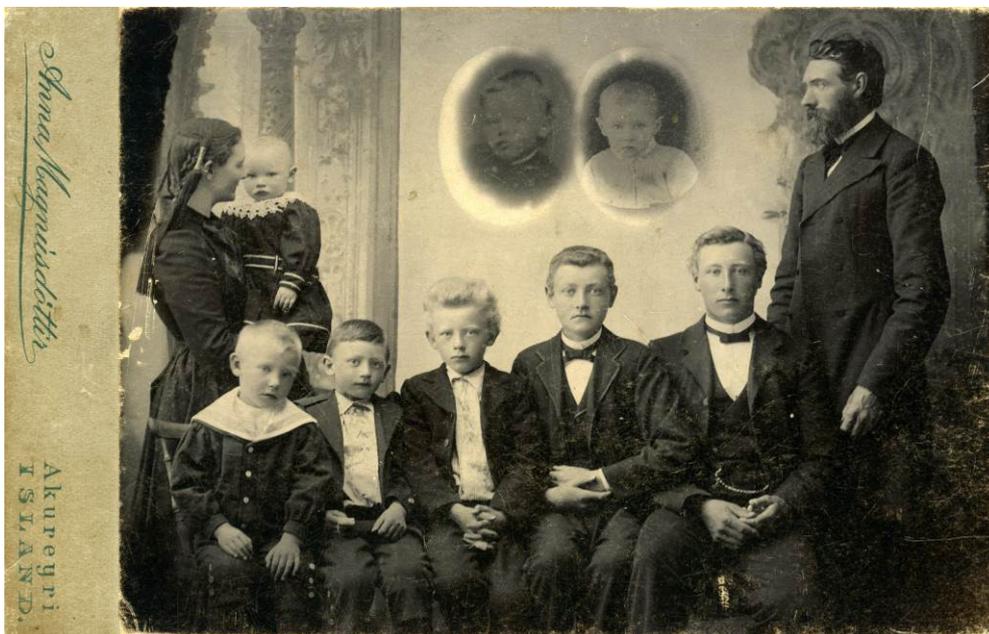
I learned from a book called “Stafrófskver Jóns Ólafssonar”. From that time on, I’ve liked Jón Ólafsson very much, and it didn’t make things worse that the traveling book seller gave me the book “litli barnavinurinn “. Back then, I was very afraid and shy of strangers, and thought it very uncomfortable to have to kiss the book seller, but I was tricked into believing that that was what I was supposed to do.

Ref: Málfríður Einarsdóttir. 1977. Samastaður í Tilverunni.

Við kálgarðinn: At the cabbage field.

“But today there were no horses there today. Only two sheep legs stood there, mulled and tied to the anvil close to us on the wall and ready to race. One of them stood higher on one side, like he was tired and favoured one side over the other. They were back legs of course; otherwise they couldn’t have been racehorses. Front legs were always fat mares, and no one raced on those.”

Ref: Halldóra Björnsson. Eitt er það land. Rvk 1955. Page 13-14.



Sumargestir: Summer guests.

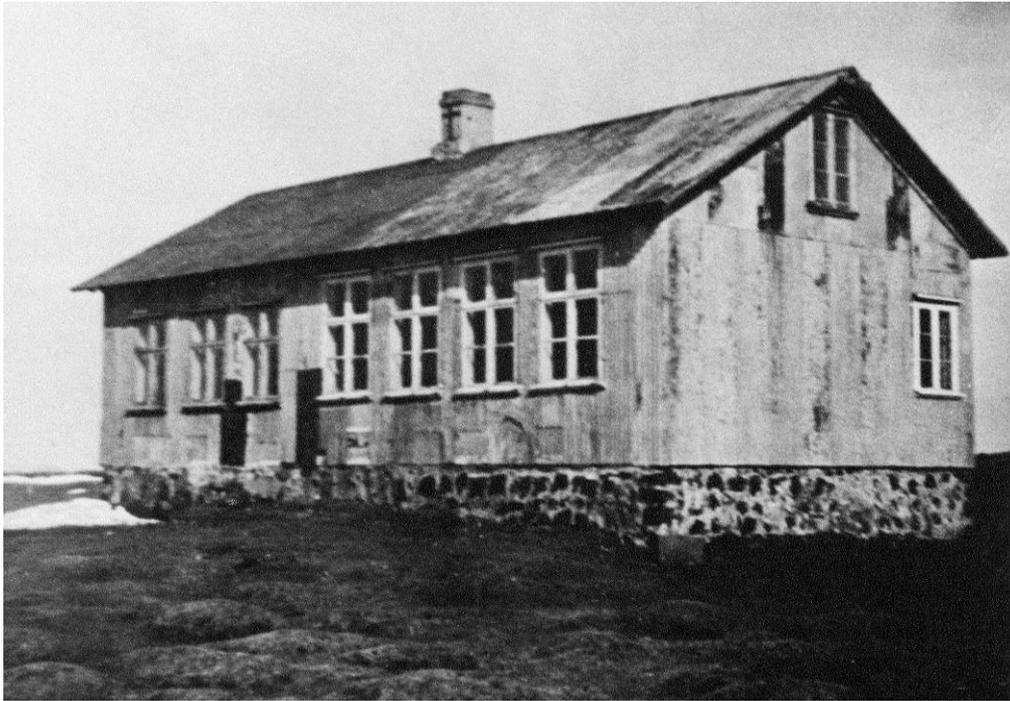
Thy great travellers,
Who lay thy course,
Over land and oceans wide!
We bid thee welcome
Once again
To thy vacation.
And since thy are here,
Then we know,
That spring will soon come again.

Tómas Guðmundsson.

Hvíti Dauðinn: White Death.

Tuberculosis (TB) caused great losses in Icelandic families. On the picture is Jónas Jónasson (born 1856) priest, writer and philosopher, with his wife, Þórunn Stefánsdóttir Ottesen, and children. Four out of the couple's eight children died of TB, along with three of their foster children.

From the left: Þórunn, holding Halldóra Sigurðardóttur which was the couples step daughter, next to Halldór, Stefán, Friðrik, Jónas, and Oddur Jónssynir. Pictures of the two kids dead at the time the picture was taken (Anna and Pétur) were added in. They were 2 years and 9 years old. (They died 1901 and 1902.)



Vinnutími í sveitum: Working hours in the country.

“It is still common for there to be 14-15 working hours in the country during harvesting, if you don’t count resting hours separately; Wake up at 5-6 AM in the morning and stop working at 10 PM in the evening, plus half an hour to eat during food breaks, except for lunch, when we rest for an hour. That’s usually when most of the workers take a nap.

Ref: The western Newspaper Lögberg in Canada the 1st of October 1908:4

Skór: Shoes.

There were some shoes made from whale and shark skin, but most were made from un-worked Icelandic cow skin, with thickness depending on how durable they had to be.

Those that worked outside got thicker shoes than those that worked inside. The shoes were continually falling apart, and it was the females’ job to patch them up. They were so low, that they got wet easily, hard in the summer, slippery on fields and froze in winter, with snow falling in them.

It was a huge change when the rubber shoes first came... 1913.

Ref: Guðmundur Þorsteinsson from Lundur: Horfnir starfshættir, Reykjavík 1975. Page 12 and 13.



Þrífín og myndarleg húsvön stúlka: A clean working girl wanted

A clean working girl wanted that can sew normal seams and can fix clothes nicely, can live with us from the 14th of May in a lovely home in Reykjavík. Nice pay can be had. More information is given at the papers office.

Ref: Kvinnablaðið 1901:8.



Eigum við að gefa börnunum okkar vasapeninga?: Should we give our children allowances?

Miss A. said she didn't give her kids allowances, since they had so many jobs that she paid them for.

The two oldest daughters took turns in fetching bread to the baker, and got a few cents for that every Saturday. Gunna, the nine year old, takes care of the flowers and the canary, and gets 20 cents for that every Saturday. Sigga puts the plates on the table and takes care of the lamps, and gets 35 cents for that every week.

Miss A said her goal was, to teach her children, that money didn't come by easy and it was up to them, weather they wanted to work for something to make their life more comfortable.

Ref: Kvennablaðið 1901:7

Piltur: A boy.

A boy, 16-18 years old, can apply now for driving a horse wagon.

A steady job.

Ref: Gosdrykkjaverksmiðjan Mímir.

Drengir: Boys.

We are looking for boys right now to carry newspapers. Well paid.

Ref: Morgunblaðið 1st of October 1919: page 4



“You can never let the children be disrespectful to the servants, and never let them increase the work for them, no matter what (for example, leaving dirty clothes in the kitchen, for the servant to clean, while it’s taking care of something else.) If the kids are grown up, then you should make them do it themselves, whether they want to or not. That way, they will take better care of their clothes, and neither dirty them or leave them about the house.”

Ref: Kvennablaðið 1901:9

Fréttapistill: Newsreport.

Akureyri the 15th of February 1908.

The elementary school in Akureyri. The new laws on education make the statement, that schools must have room for children from 10-14 years old, which makes the elementary school here way to small.

As it stands, this town has 150 children on that age, but if we look at the children’s population, we can expect a boost to this number in the following years to come.

The children that are now 8-10 are not fewer than the children of the age 10-14.

Ref: The western Newspaper Lögberg in Canada the 1st of October 1908:3



“After we got home, it was time for home school the next winter, where Unnur from Fróðastöðum was a teacher. She was a great teacher and taught us disciplined working and good ways of preparing for tests. That training was going to be a great help later.

Another thing about her teaching that was great, was that she made us kids sing and dance simple dances, thus training us in being social, which is very important in elementary school.

As we got closer to our confirmation, we were taught languages. You could go to a correspondence courses in Icelandic, English, Danish and German. Many kids benefitted from those teachings, and learned much.”

Ref: From an interview by Birna Konráðsdóttir, a news reporter at the Skessuhorn, with Magnús Sigurðsson from Gilsbakka, born in 1924.

Kort: Map.

When they teach geography, they probably show you big and colourful maps. They are probably even bigger than the big Europe map, that I often stared at, dazzled, in the living room of the sheriff on the farm next to us.

I wonder if I will ever find enough wool to buy a map like that.

Ref: Þórbergur Þórðarsson. 2001. Ofvitinn.

Magnús first started learning from books when his aunt Katrín started teaching him. But it's likely that his parent's taught him how to read. Katrín had much knowledge and was a great teacher. Under her soft guidance it was easy to take the first steps of learning.

The first year of school, she home schooled him. The second one started out by travelling with her to Hvítárbakka, where she taught, but there lived another one of his aunt, Ragnheiður. When you travelled to Hvítárbakka, you walked from Hamraendum to the ferry on Hvítá, next to the Hvítárbakka farm. Then you just called out that you needed a ferry, and someone came and picked you up.

Ref: From an interview by Birnu Konráðsdóttir, a news reporter at the Skessuhorn, with Magnús Sigurðsson from Gilsbakka, born in 1924.



Lifur: Liver

In the southern part of Iceland, there was the belief that babies shouldn't eat liver until they could speak.

Usually, they only got to eat liver after they could pronounce the letter L or the word Liver. Nowadays, liver is recommended for young babies, since it is very nutritious.

Ref: Hallgerður Gísladóttir. 1999. Íslensk matarhefð.



Vinna: Work.

It was hardest on the shepherd when it rained, since protective clothing was sparse. A nine year old child (the author of the book) had the following tasks: follow the herd to the turf, let them eat their fill, which often meant little rest, since the sheep were always moving, even though the task was called "sitting". It could be very hard not to lose count of the sheep, since there were no fences. The shepherd then had to bring them back home in the evening around milking, and then watch over them from milking until past midnight. It could also be hard to watch the time, with no clock handy. He had to pack lunch for the entire workday, which was from 9 AM to 1 AM.

Ref: Guðmundur Þorsteinsson from Lundur: Horfnir starfshættir, Reykjavík 1975. Page 25.

Barn og Hundur: A child and a dog.

Sometimes two children got to watch over the sheep together, but most shepherds were alone all day, although they often got to take the family dog with them. It was a great help with the sheep, but mostly helped in the solitude of shepherding. There would often grow a special bonding between a child and a dog after such a long time together.

Ref: Guðmundur Þorsteinsson from Lundur: Horfnir starfshættir, Reykjavík 1975. Page 25.



Skipalíkan eftir Þórð Jónsson frá Krossnesi: Shipmodule by Þórð Jónsson from Krossnesi.

Here we have a homemade module of a four man ship, with sails. The module was made by Þórður in 1910, then 17 years old. But he was born 1893.

When he made the model, he was a worker in Bóndhóll in Borgarhreppur nearby Borgarnes. He used primitive tools, cutting it from barrel bits with a handsaw.

The ship was given to the museum by Jóhannes Magnús Þórðarson, and his wife, Guðný Grendal Magnúsdóttir, as a gift in 2006.



Ullarvinna: Working with wool.

As soon as possible, kids were given the task to prepare the wool for “combing”. At first the wool was worked with Icelandic “combs”, rake heads of sorts, but later got a newer type.

Later they were taught how to braid rope, “comb” the wool and nit. In the winter, kids were woken up with the adults for this task, especially while wool products were a big trade income for the nation. Kids were then each given a specific task for the entire day, like knitting 1 sock. The lighting for those tasks was often poor, with only regular fat being used and candles being reserved for the holidays. It was a big change when the oil lamps came, around 1900-1920.

Ref: Guðmundur Þorsteinsson from Lundur: Horfnir starfshættir, Reykjavík 1975. Page 144-149.

Vatnsburður: Water carrying.

Since there was no running water in houses, kids were often given the chore of carrying water in buckets from the nearest water source to the houses. It was a simple but hard chore, since the water was heavy, the nearest water source could be quite far away and you had to fetch water often each day. This chore was done no matter the weather”... and it wasn’t any easier when it was freezing outside, with ice collecting both on the out- and inside of the buckets, making them heavier and at the same time lowering their capacity, which meant even more trips... then the socks and the shoes would often freeze together, chilling ones feet to the core.”

What hungry men find sweet, sated men find bitter.

Ref: Guðmundur Þorsteinsson from Lundur: Horfnir starfshættir, Reykjavík 1975. Page 89-90.



It was customary for farmers who moved to the city to completely stop drinking milk for the rest of their lives. They were so relieved at getting out of the hell, that is the country, that city poets will never tire in describing as paradise, that many of them got sick just from seeing milk the first decades or two after getting out of the country side.

Ref: Halldór Laxness: Guðsgjafarpula, chapter 20.

Bændur og búskapur: Farmers and farming.

There they stood, in the hills and valleys, in water and mud, the thick sky over head, with the grass whining miserably from the scythe, the scythe getting heavier and heavier, the time refusing to pass, with the moments sticking to you like the wet clothes...

Ref: Halldór Laxness: Sjálfstætt fólk chapter 33.



Parents need children more than the children need the parents.

Ref: Halldór Laxness: Brekkukotsannáll chapter 1.



Taðburður: Compost carrying.

For a while, it was common for each booth in the barn to have a single small door, and thus kids and teenagers were often used to carry the feces out of each booth, and cut them into smaller pieces for handier drying, during shovelling.

Peat: Kids and teenagers were also used to catch the peat, when the adults threw them out of the “peat graves”.

Note: Peat, for those who don't know it, is a mixture of mud, feces and grass. Sometimes there were two kids catching, with one standing farther away from the grave, to stack the peat heap farther from the hole. In the peat heap, the peat was stacked up and left to dry in the sun. This could be a hard and messy job, with the peat wet and heavy, and little or no water resistant clothes available. Ref: Guðmundur Þorsteinsson from Lundur: Horfnir starfshættir, Reykjavík 1975. Page 72-76.

Daniel Bruun um hestamennsku Íslendinga: Daniel Bruun talks about Icelandic horse riding:

“I have even seen children horse riding during herding far away from the farms. The first time a child rides a horse it is usually on the mothers' horse in her lap. When the child grows a little, it is tied into the saddle. A four to five years old boy can ride alone, with skin spread on the saddle and the boys feet slid into the saddle loops, rather than the spores. These small boys travel with the parents, full of pride. The children aren't much older when they are sent to fetch horses into the farmland, when they're parents or others need them, and then the children ride the horses to the farm, and back into the farmland when the horses are no longer needed, often using every trick in the book to get the horse to run faster.”

Ref: Daniel Bruun: Íslenskt þjóðlíf í 1000 ár, Reykjavík 1987, page 392-393.



“But then, slowly, light comes to life in the darkness.

And this light, that has always been there to guide me since, is happiness in a particular subject. That subject was carpentering. “

Ref: From an interview with Þórður “the blind” Jónsson from Mófellsstaðir in the valley of Skorradalur nearby Borgarnes. Book: Góðar stundir. 1951- 269th version.

“My watch has no glass, and instead of numbers, it has bumps. By feeling it, I can tell the time. My measurer has a similar system. Instead of numbers, it has notches, and that way I can measure things, feel its width and height, just like a man that can see.”

Ref: From an interview with Þórður “the blind” Jónsson from Mófellsstaðir. Góðar stundir. 1951- 269th version.



When I looked upon my sweet Steina, sleeping so peacefully in the middle of this terrible world, I think she was three years old then, it came upon me, that the carpenter that made the world, if he exists, must truly be incredible.

Ref: Halldór Laxness: Paradísarheimt, chapter 17.



Þungur sauður: Heavy lamb.

The heaviest lamb that has been slaughtered in the slaughterhouse this fall, came from reverent Jón Thorstensen on Þingvöllum.

The body was 68 pounds.

They are often heavy, those sheep from Þingvallarsveit.

Ref: Morgunblaðið, 2nd of November 1913:3



Hvítárbrúin vígð: The bridge over Hvítá opened:

The new bridge over Hvítá will be opened today. Many travelled to Borgarnes along the southern part of Iceland yesterday, to be there during this great event.

Ref: Morgunblaðið 1st of November 1928: page 4.



Milli tektar og tvítugs: Between confirmation and twenties

It is often said about the age of a youngster that it is between confirmation and the twenty's. That isn't really a very accurate description, since you can say that a youngster on that age is a new man each year, at least according to wisdom and growth.

But with this, it is meant that the teenager has confirmed his belief, but hasn't fully turned into an adult.

Ref: From Arnastofnun.is



1930–1940

The era began with the depression falling upon Europe and America, causing unemployment, bankruptcy, shortage and inflation, destroying the currency.

Markets closed to export and world trading decreased. Icelandic people mostly sold salted fish, but also wool. People lived here in great poverty and bitterness, with trouble being common to their lives.

In 1931, the situation in Reykjavík was turning very serious, with unemployment and sore poverty. The hunger made itself hard to miss and gave no rest. The church began a help program, with 13000 meals being given out over the winter.

Ref: Brynja Baldursdóttir and Hallfríður Ingimundardóttir. 2007. Tíminn er eins og vatnið.

Lóan: The plover.

The Plover is here
To drive away the snow,
To sing away the boredom;
That it can do.

She has told me,
That soon the whimbrel will come,
Sun in the valley
And flowers on the turf.

She has told me
Of my sins,
I sleep too much
And don't work at all.

She has told me
To wake up and work
And hopeful now greet
The summer.

Páll Ólafsson.



Breytingar: Changes.

New diet.

With new storage ways, first canning and later freezing, took the baton from the old storage ways and changed the diet.

Daily cooking on hot stone stoves ended, but instead there were small corners in the “Baðstofa” with tiny stoves, called kitchens, and when new houses were built instead of the “Baðstofa” there were often included special places for kitchens where the family ate together with forks and knives and sat at a table.

Thus, the ways of eating also changed in the first decades of the 20th century. Before, most country folks ate they’re portions from bowls and special “askur” with spoons or pocketknives on the bed.

Ref: Hallgerður Gísladóttir. 1999. Íslensk matarhefð.



Entrance to cottage/ baðstofa

Krossgötur: Crossroads.

When you sit on crossroads, elves will come from all directions, group around you and ask you to come with them, but you must not. Then the elves will promise you gold, silk, food, drink and all sorts of treasure, but you must not heed them. Elves that wear the guise of your loved ones will come and ask you, beg you, to join them and all sorts of tricks are used, but you must not go with them. But when the sun rises, you should stand up and say: "Thank god, that day has risen once again." Then all the elves will disappear, but all that they promised you will be left behind, for you to take.

Ref: Þjóðsagnabókin.1971.

Kolurúm: Kolas bed.

Not far from the farm, in the direction of Kolugil, there are great canyons, called Kolugljúfur. In these canyons, there is said to have lived a large woman, named Kola, which the canyons are named after.

At the front of the hollow, or on the canyons side, there are two thin rock formations, called Bríkur, and a small gorge between them, but from them the river runs into Víðidalsá, that runs through the canyons. When Kola wanted a meal, she just reached down from the gorge, into the river, to catch herself some salmon.

Ref: Þjóðsagnabókin. 1971.

Hreinlæti í húsnæði: Cleanliness of living quarters.

There are many fascinating descriptions about how travellers saw us Icelanders in our grass topped buildings, which they often thought weren't fit for wild animals: "it can astound a traveller, that peeks inside the foul, happy less dumps, that these folks live in, is that they aren't eaten by snails or dead from arthritis. Fish guts and smoke mixed with the green mould on the walls, with roots crawling from the ceiling, and water covering the floor. The earth is both over and under, and daylight has a hard time shining through the tiny windows." Let it be known that most travellers that came to Iceland were rich, and not used to poverty.

Ref: Símon Jón Jóhannsson: Bernskan, líf og leikir barna fyrr og nú. 1990. Page 18-19.

Síra Hávarður: Reverant Hávarður.

It was said, that an elf king lived in Dyr Mountains, but a bishop in Blábjörg, and the reverent Hávarður always had to row bareheaded, when he sailed through there.

Ref: Þjóðsagnabókin. 1971. 1:43

Skemmtanir: Entertainment.

In the darkness, with the poor lighting in the "baðstofa", there often was someone that could read, and was given the task of reading for the others, that were working the wool. Later on, when it was common for children to know how to read, they were often given this task.

Ref: Guðmundur Þorsteinsson from Lundur: Horfnir starfshættir, Reykjavík 1975. Page 142.

Lilja

It is said that Lilja possessed the power to turn back ghosts. It was said by an old lady that lived on a farm, where Lilja once lived, that sang of her every evening. But the folks just made fun of this, and didn't learn a thing.

When the old lady died, the farm became haunted. Sometimes one could hear, spoken in a dim voice "sing about Lilja". But no one could, and the farm was forsaken.

Ref: Icelandic folklore museum. 2000.

Baðstofan á Úlfsstöðum: The "Baðstofa" at Úlfsstaðir.

Note: Baðstofa is a type of living quarter. It was usually the sleeping quarter, eating quarter, living room and sometimes cooking quarter of the house, making it the largest and warmest room. There sometimes slept and lived up to 14 people in that type of room.

The Baðstofa just inside this corridor was taken apart at Úlfsstaðir in Hálsasveit in Borgarfjörður, 30 years ago. Thanks to Kristján Eldjárn, then an antique guarder, each board was marked and stored here, in Byggðasafn Borgarfjarðar. Here it has been kept until now, even if it wasn't complete. When it was rebuilt, small changes had to be made to the locations of windows and entrances. Unnsteinn Elíasson, the man who rebuilt it, made sure that whole boards weren't damaged, but rather added new ones, and restored the ones he didn't use. The items inside come from various directions, and aren't all the exact types of items that the original room had.

It hasn't been confirmed yet when this *baðstofa* was built, but not later than 1890. People lived in it up to 1940, when the family moved to a stone house instead. That house burned down January 1st in 1952, thus giving this *baðstofa* around 6 months of population, while the stone house was rebuilt. You could thus say that it was last inhabited the summer of 1952.

Ref: Magnús Kolbeinsson: Engjafang 2005. With help from Elsa, Ragnhildur and Steingerður Þorsteinssdaughters who were partly raised in this house.

Þá hló marbendill: And then the merman laughed.

A farmer once netted a sea dwarf that called himself Marbendill, with a big head and long hands, but looking like a seal from waist down.

Ref: Þjóðsagnabókin. 1971. 1: 170



Vetrardagur: Winter day.

After an ice laid path, walks a short man,
with a small boy holding his hand.
They don't say much,
and walk slowly down the hill.

If you have ever seen our store keeper,
you will know him, when you go to heaven,
even if you were just 6 years old when he died.
Few people in the store, store keepers hand on a red haired head
- and cookies in your hand
for a moment.- Your fosters stare

And you put away the gifts
Not saying a thing
without saying thanks.

After an ice laid path walk two short men
holding hands up the hill.

Jón úr Vör



Sendiferðir: Deliveries.

... Children and teenagers were used quite generously in delivering between farms. Back then, the messages weren't written down, so the children had to memorize them, and couldn't leave until the one that sent the message was certain that the child had got it right. Little by little, the deliveries got harder and harder as the children aged and could travel greater distances.

Ref: Guðmundur Þorsteinsson from Lundur: Horfnir starfshættir, Reykjavík 1975. Page 136.

1939–1945

In the year 1939, World War II began when a German army attacked Poland in the beginning of September, and soon all of Europe was at war. The 10th of May in 1940, a British platoon colonized in Reykjavík. Thus began the British military occupation in Iceland, and later U.S.A. occupation in 1941.

Now there came a great era for unemployed Icelanders. Lots of work began around the army, since they needed houses, proper roads, bridges and airports.

Population problems in Reykjavik now became much greater. People were living everywhere, and apartments were built by Reykjavik that would later on become a sort of poverty districts.

Ref: Brynja Baldursdóttir and Hallfríður Ingimundardóttir. 2007. Tíminn er eins og vatnið. Page 69.



1944

The 17th of June 1944, it was formally declared that Iceland was now an independent democracy.

A great celebration was held in Þingvellir, and even though it was raining, people didn't care.

There was also a celebration in Hrafnseyri at Arnarfjörður, the birth place of Jón Sigurðsson, (the man who made the independence from Denmark possible.)

The democracy's first president was Sveinn Björnsson.

Ref: Brynja Baldursdóttir and Hallfríður Ingimundardóttir. 2007. Tíminn er eins og vatnið. Page 71.

Participation in social life began early. When you were thirteen, you could join the youth association: Brúin.

“The youth association here did a good work, and had stations on both side of the river. It was a society of abstinence and culture.

Books were bought for the book club by the youth association and there were a lot of good singers. I was once a director in the youth association and, for a short duration, part of the youth association board. Out of all the youth associations I’ve worked in, I’ve worked the longest in Brúin, and it’s probably the one I like the best.

Ref: From an interview by Birna Konráðsdóttir, news reporter, with Magnús Sigurðsson from farm Gilsbakki nearby Borgarnes, born in 1924.

It’s beautiful and necessary to work, since it gives the hearth peace and happiness, and it usually gives you something to live on. And if you work all your life, properly and with honour, then it can occur that you can afford to pay for your funeral when the time comes.

Ref: Halldór Laxness: Salka Valka. Þú vínviður hreini, chapter 10.



Hermann: Soldiers.

I often get to tag along with dad, in the pickup truck, when he drives goods to the platform, for the foreign men. Dad says they're soldiers.

They speak a very strange language, which I don't understand, and wear green suits. They have hats, which look like boats, but some wear helmets. They are very nice to me, and give me lots of candy. They have a lot of candy and cigarettes.

Ref: Ómar Ragnarsson: Heitirðu Ómar? - Memories from childhood. Reykjavik 1991. Pages 14-15.

“American soldiers lived for three years in a barrack above the hayfield, and there we learned how to speak English. They were there to keep an eye on planes, came in 1942 and left 1945.

In 1939, Danish men doing geometric studies, lived in Gilsbakka over the summer, and then you could practice the Danish. My classmates asked later weather I had ever lived in Denmark!”

Ref: From an interview by Birna Konráðsdóttir, news reporter, with Magnús Sigurðsson from farm Gilsbakki nearby Borgarnes, born in 1924.



Um matrósarfötin og önnur fín föt: About the sailors outfit, and other fine clothes.

When you're outside in shorts, you're always falling down and scraping your knee. It hurts so badly when there is sand in the scrapes.

You cry, and go inside to mommy, and it always hurts so badly when she cleans the scrapes. Last time, when I fell down and scraped my knee, I didn't go to mommy. And now the scrape's healed, but it still has some black stuff in it.

Ref: Ómar Ragnarsson: Heitirðu Ómar? - Memories from childhood. Reykjavik 1991. Pages 30-33.



Leikir í braggahverfinu: Games near the barracks.

The lake was a playing field, kinder garden, swimming pool and even a nursing home for the Thulekamps children. They built a shed by the lake, a small pier into the puddle, played on it with toy ships, and the big boys even built rafts, rowing with two by fours between the banks.

Ref: Einar Kárason: Þar sem djöflaeyjan rís, Reykjavík 1986, pages 39-40.



Græjur: Gadgets

Everything was coming from the army base in town. Karólína, fortune-teller, now had an electric mixer, an electric can opener, a cream whipper, a potato peeler, an egg boiler and an orange squeezer next to the kosaka guns. One day, a vacuum machine the size of an oil barrel came into the house, the house that had no floors only the ground to stand on. Then there were radios and furniture; giant sofas, divans, easy chairs, chromed dining room set and a double bed, split in two with a night table. Gógó even ordered gardening tools from a price list, clippers, hoses and lawn mower, and gave the family. “No yard.” Then, twice a week, there was a trunk load of canned food, crackers, packet soups and candy. All of this stuff was filling Minnakot 7c until the seams were bursting.

Ref: Einar Kárason: Þar sem djöflaeyjan rís, Reykjavík 1986, page 25.

Í sveitinni: At the farm.

These folks are clearly not rich, because everyone is wearing worn, lousy clothes, made from wool, and there is a peculiar smell, a kind of farm smell, that can't be found in Reykjavik, except for Þórarins á Melnum's little house at Ásvallagata. And here, there is no car. No farmer's car, you know, one of those that can go anywhere.

Ref: Ómar Ragnarsson: Heitirðu Ómar? - Memories from childhood. Reykjavik 1991. Page 46.

Í sveit: Living in the farmlands.

This fall, I will be six years old, and get to go with Palla to stay on a farm, east to Hólmasel in Flóa. We take a bus east of Selfoss, then a milk truck and then a horse carriage, since there is no road to Hólmasel, just a path.

I sit in the horse carriage and bounce with my cloth bag. I think this is going to be a great adventure, but I still find bouncing in the horse carriage uncomfortable.

Ref: Ómar Ragnarsson: Heitirðu Ómar? - Memories from childhood. Reykjavik 1991. Page 46.



There are seeds, which got the sentence
To fall to the earth, and never become flowers.
Just like ships, those never reach the shore,
And bountiful lands, that sink beneath the waves,
And hope that has lost its wings,
And lips, that can never kiss,
And lovers, that can never meet,
And dreams, that can never come true.

There are poems, that both live and die,
And small children, that never become men.

Davíð Stefánsson 1895-1964.



Braggar: Barracks.

In the war years, people were flooding the capital, because everyone could get work at the army, including raising barracks. Giant neighbourhoods of barracks flooded over the gravel beds.

But the biggest neighbourhoods were much more than some temporary tents. These were powerful bases, with ammo and supply storages, air defence systems, and underground networks. They also had prisons, food courts, movie theatres, clubs and shops. But in the barracks, there lived only soldiers. The Icelandic workers lived in anything that they could find, from basements to tents.

Ref: Einar Kárason: Þar sem djöflaeyjan rís, Reykjavík 1986, pages 15-16.

Baslið: Trouble.

Þórgunnur was a sick widow with four kids, her husband had been one of the fishermen shot down in the war, and she had no one, except for her father, an old widower that found it shameful that his only daughter would want live in an American barrack. Þórgunnur had to live alone in the cold and leaky barrack and try and provide for herself and her kids by working in with fish, when her health allowed, and there were job opportunities. And her kids were those barrack kids on the street...

Ref: Einar Kárason: Þar sem djöflaeyjan rís, Reykjavík 1986, page 27.



Rætur: Roots.

I walk the flower gardens of a city
And the flowers watch me
With colourful, foreign eyes
And their smell is always new.

In the distance sits a pale blue Forget-me-not
On the clothes of a small child

Because wood cranesbills, mountain avens and saxifrages
Were the flowers of my youth.

And their roots
Will always be mine.

Þuríður Guðmundsdóttir.



Búðarvísur: Shopsongs.

At the shop owner by the counter

Smilingly looked Stína:

“I want to buy some cloth

For a dress for my dolly.”

“And which colour do you want, honey,” he asked

“For your dollies dress?”

“Red, of course, yes very red”

Stína said with enthusiasm.

He left with a smile, and cut the cloth.

“What does it cost?” asked Stína.

“A peck on the cheek” he answered, “is the cost of the cloth

For a dress for your dolly.”

The store echoed with laughter,

As Stína answered happily:

“Mom will soon come to town

And pay up my debt.”

Jón Thoroddsen

1940–1970

In the year 1940, there were around 121.579 people living in Iceland. As the year passed, there were around 225 thousand soldiers in Iceland and 75% of them lived in Reykjavík and the surrounding country side. After those two worlds collided, the American and the Icelandic one, there was no turning back the evolution. In 1950, Icelanders were around 143.000, with around 56 thousand living in Reykjavik.

Changes in the Icelandic social life are great, with something new always coming along. There is now hot spring water in most house pipes, but there are still a few with only coal or oil heating. A new Ölfusár bridge was opened at the end of 1945, and can be counted as a great change of traveling mode. In 1947, the first new trawler came, the first of thirty two built for Iceland.

Ref: Brynja Baldursdóttir and Hallfríður Ingimundardóttir. 2007. Tíminn er eins og vatnið.



Karfa frá Blindravinnustofunni: A basket made by the blind people society.

The blind folk job centre was created in 1941 and is run by the blind folk association. From the beginning, it has been a huge part in work associated matters for blind or partially blind people in Iceland. The goal is to give blind and partially blind people work, training and retraining for new jobs.

Ref: www.blindravinnustofan.is

“The sight, which I was given until the age of ten weeks, has been swallowed by the years and I have no recollection of it. From there on, my sight got so bad, that I never saw another thing, neither big nor small.”

Ref: From an interview with Þórður “the blind” Jónsson from Mófellsstaðir. Góðar stundir. 1951- 269th version.



I often feel like children have multiple uses of life, compared to us grownups.

Ref: Halldór Laxness: Paradísarheimt, 2.kafli.

1960–1970

In the year 1963, a great underwater volcano erupted close to Vestmannaeyjar and soon, an island was formed that was given the name Surtsey. Named after the giant in the northern mythology, that waits in the south with a flaming sword. Another sudden growth can also be named, but that is the aluminium plant that was constructed in Straumsvík, and began its work in 1969.

Icelanders got a miss world beauty queen, Guðrún Bjarnadóttir, and that was considered a great success.

Icelanders were glad over the Danish decision to give back the scrolls that had been kept in Denmark for centuries.

Right handed traffic was made legal in 1968, the 26th of May.

Ref: Brynja Baldursdóttir and Hallfríður Ingimundardóttir. 2007. Tíminn er eins og vatnið.

Barnasjúkdómar, hvernig lækna skuli: Babies illnesses and how to cure them.

In thousands of homes, Baby's Own Tablets is the only medicine that is used when babies get sick. The mothers that always have this medicine at hand can be as secure as if they had a doctor at the house.

Baby's Own Tablets cure all sorts of stomach sickness and constipation, cold, as well as killing worms and making teething painless. Mothers have the boards psychiatrists guarantee that this medicine contains no sleeping medicine or poisoned soothing materials.

- Sold at every pharmacy or through mail, for 25c each case, from Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brockville, Ontario.

Ref: The western Newspaper Lögberg in Canada the 1st of October 1908:3

Ég bið að heilsa!: I say hello!

Now the south breaths sweet winds,
In the sea all the small waves rise
And flock home to the fair land of ice,
To the motherlands beaches and hills.

O! And give my family my greetings in thy fair voice
Over hills and fjords in the lords' love and peace;
Kiss for me, waves, the fishing boat.
Blow, you winds, warmly on fair cheeks.

Fair spring bearer, the trusty bird that flies
With feather flapping over high trackless roads
To a summer walleye to sing thy songs!

Especially greet, if you see
An angel with a wool hat and sweater
Sparrow my friend, that is my girl.

Jónas Hallgrímsson. Fjölnir 7th year, 1844.



Um daginn og veginn úr Rauðasandshreppi: Along the way from Rauðisandur.

...But a shadow still lies over most built communities here, it is based on the fact, that this region isn't scheduled to get electricity in the near future, and it is said that it may never happen. To say that is basically to threaten the people that live here a huge impairment to their life style, if it keeps on living here.

It is clear for every inhabitant in this country, that it's useless, completely useless, to talk about living a normal modern life, without electricity.

Ref: A chapter from Þórður Jónsson news report, written the first of January 1966. Morgunblaðið. 8th of January 1966: 18.

But children will get used to it, because they have to. If mom has to go out for a bit, then the little brother has to sit still, next to the little sisters crib, even if he's only 3 years old, while the older sister, that's only 6, has to watch the pot, or bake bread for lunch.

Daddy can't wait for the food. It's just that simple. The idea of the work and the necessity gets stuck in the children's mind and never leaves there.

Ref: Kvinnablaðið 1901:9.



Sáúð þið hana systur mina: Did you see my sister.

Did you see my sister?

Sitting over lambs and spinning wool?

I used to have pretty toys.

Those are now all broken or lost.

Ref: Jónas Hallgrímsson.

1970–1980

Hippies had been rather prominent in the United States from 1965 and the effect their culture had started showing up in Iceland as well as other western countries...

They had some influence and you could say that it was thanks to them that the Vietnam War ended in 1975.

... Computers didn't become common property until the nineties. A shadow fell over the Icelandic community with an oil depression that made its appearance in the eighties. A huge inflation erupted and wasn't put down until the beginning of the tenth decade.

Icelandic scholars and workers flocked to the dreamland, Sweden, where the welfare system had no comparison.

Ref: Brynja Baldursdóttir and Hallfríður Ingimundardóttir. 2007. Tíminn er eins og vatnið.



Fyrsti borgarinn var stúlka: The first citizen was a girl.

Ten minutes after the church bells had rung and most were happily celebrating the New Year, Kolbrún Þorvaldsdóttir and Guðmundur Helgi Gíslason, Laugarteig 58, were celebrating the birth of their first child. According to our findings, this is the first new citizen to look upon the world on this New Year.

The birth took place in the Reykjavík Birthing home at Eiríksgötu... It's a girl, said the mother, took the little baby out of the crib and cradled it in her arms...

- Actually, the husband wanted a boy, said Kolbrún. Isn't that what most men want?

Ref: Morgunblaðið 3.january 1965: page 3.



Hvað er plast? What is plastic?

Plastic is an organic matter, made from natural molecules. You can truthfully say that plastic belongs to the modern era, since the oldest records of it aren't older than 100 years old.

Various well known plastic products today haven't got more than 50 years behind them, so the time span of plastic in the human history has still barely begun.

Ref: <http://www.saeplast.is/dalvik/forsida/>

Upphaf 7. áratugarins: The beginning of the seventies

... What was happening? How did it all start?

When did teenagers become a special group, with their own fashion and music?

When did the spirit change, and love and peace become factors?

Ref: Brynja Baldursdóttir and Hallfríður Ingimundardóttir. 2007. Tíminn er eins og vatnið.



Franskar: Fries.

I sometimes got to run out there, a six or seven years old boy, when dad was coming home for dinner, to buy fries, who were a great treat back then and not for everyone to buy. Fries were even considered such a treasure that if we had leftovers, then mom would run along the corridors of our apartment building to see if anyone wanted some.

Ref: Haraldur Jónsson: Hugrenningar

“There weren’t a lot of things in this world that I liked more than when Bessi Bjarnason brought his Skoda to the Hvítárskálinn and sold grandpa some liquorice for the city folk to buy. I was open mouthed and stunned as I stared at this man that talked with the voices of Jónatan the robber and Mickey the fox, but still not quite.”

Ref: Haraldur Jónsson: Hugrenningar



Nafnlausí Actionkarlinn: The nameless Action man.

“My Action man had a beard and, truth be told, I thought he looked ugly. Actually, they sold beardless versions in the stores, and I really wanted one. But my parents thought it was unnecessary to buy another one for me, so I was stuck with beardy. Finally, I decided to do something about it. So I shaved, or scratched, his beard off. Now I had the ugliest action man on the face of the planet. And instead of being the hero, he was the bad guy in my games. But a bad guy with a sense of clothing, since my mother kept making outfits for him.”

Ref: Haraldur Jónsson: Hugrenningar



Munurinn á borginni og sveitinni: The difference between the country and the city.

“Later, as I was walking from Hvítárvellir to Hvítárskáli, where I lived, with some eggs. Midway home, I suddenly needed to pee, but remembered dad’s scolding. As one could guess, as soon as I got home, I ran in, but couldn’t hold it any longer. I peed in my pants and dropped all the eggs, which shattered on the floor. As I stood there crying, dad asked why I didn’t just pee on the way. “You said it wasn’t allowed” I bawled. Then my dad told me that it was only like that in the city.”

“And there the difference between the city and the country became clear to me...”

Ref: Haraldur Jónsson: Hugrenningar

Unglingarnir: Teenagers.

Here’s how it’s been said: first there was nothing and then there was rock. Or: first there were just kids and adults. Then there was rock and then there was something called a teenager.

Of course it isn’t this simple. Of course there have always been zit covered, problematic youngsters. It’s just that it wasn’t considered a special group until rock came along.

Ref: Gunnar Lárus Hjálmarsson. 2001. Eru ekki allir í stuði? Page 8.



What equals to your breath?
How all the joy my head used to love
Has turned soundless and empty
To the wonder of that voice.

Ref: Halldór Laxness: Silfurtúnglið.

There are few things on the face of the earth as wondrous as sleeping children.

Ref: Halldór Laxness: Salka Valka. Fuglinn í fjörunni.

1985–2000

And the world continues to shrink in peoples' minds, as the technology gets better and better...

... Little Iceland got into the world news in October 1986, and was on everyone's mind for a short time. The American president, Ronald Regan, and the leader of the Soviet Union, Michael Gorbatsjov, met in Reykjavík for two October days and spoke of worldly matters, such as the great number of nuclear weapons being brought down...

The Berlin wall was broken in 1989 and after that the Soviet Union broke apart, leaving many new countries, such as Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and a few others, leaving the world in need of new maps. But the cold war was formally over.

Ref: Brynja Baldursdóttir and Hallfríður Ingimundardóttir. 2007. Tíminn er eins og vatnið.



“New studies confirm that children are losing the ability to play in a regular fashion since they are given way too many toys. Children who have a lot of toys play less than children with fewer toys. This especially applies to children under five years of age.”

Ref: Skólavarðan. 1st year 8th magazine. October 2001:9



1990–2000

With the society changing fast, everything else changes too. People are living fast and striving to get as much as they can in the shortest time span possible.

The divorce rate is rising fast. Increased rate of drug use, robberies, murders and all kinds of violence is rising just as fast. Racism and foreigner hatred are getting more prominent, feuds rise up, and are often solved with weapons...

In the year 2000, 60% of the nation lives in Reykjavik or around 150.000.

Ref: Brynja Baldursdóttir and Hallfríður Ingimundardóttir. 2007. Tíminn er eins og vatnið.