

IN MEMORIAM – SIGRÚN “RUNA” CUFFLING



It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Runa Cuffling, Fred Bjarnason’s amma, on January 20, 2010.

Born at Bífrost in Manitoba, Runa had lived in Victoria since 1988. She was a much loved member of the club and had been our Fjallkona in 1999.

THORRABLOT 2010, MARCH 6

Our annual feast will be held at Norway House. Food will be prepared by club members like last year, with appetizers and a cash bar, which we will be stocking better!

We will have more Icelandic food, some flown in specially, and \$5 tickets for entrance to the dance only after 9 pm.

1. Get a ticket.
2. Make a dessert (pönnukökur and skýr supplied).
3. Get ready for 5:30 – or 9 for the music.

Tickets for the dinner – \$30 for members and \$35 for non-members – are available now from:

Tom Benjamin: 250.475.2824 benjamin@islandnet.com

Virginia Guenther: 250.655.4864 vaguenther@shaw.ca

Vorna Butler: 250.721.3299 vornabutler@shaw.ca

\$5 tickets for the dance can be picked up at the door from 9 pm onwards.

Please contact any member of the board if you would like to volunteer for preparing and serving food, serving drinks or cleaning up.

We look forward to seeing you all there!

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

It’s time to renew your annual memberships, please use the enclosed form.

ALMANAK – 2010

Thorrablot March 6 5:30 pm Norway House
Beck Lectures March 1-3 UVic, see article on page 2

Genealogy meetings: first Sunday of every month at Fred Bjarnason’s home. Please call 250.507.6253 or email fred.bjarnason@gmail.com to confirm.

Library: the club’s collection of books, magazines and newspapers is kept at the home of Runa, Vince and Roxanne Pleshak. Anyone wanting to use the library should call Runa at 250.478.4778.

LÖGBERG-HEIMSKRINGLA – THE ICELANDIC COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Lögberg-Heimskringla, published 24 times a year, covers news about people and events from all over North America and from Iceland. The paper reflects the diversity of thousands of people whose heritage is Icelandic. Lögberg-Heimskringla is currently offering 3 month online only access trials. For further information send your name, phone number and email address to Audrey Kwasnica, 204.927.5642 audrey@lh-inc.ca. You can also take out an annual subscription or make a donation, see www.lh-inc.ca.

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<http://www.victoria.tc.ca/Community/Icelanders>
(case sensitive)

K. N. JULIUS

THE VICTORIA CONNECTION

by Virginia Guenther

On a recent visit with my cousin, Victor (Bruce) Lindal, I asked him what he remembered about our Great Uncle K.N. Julius. He recalled an incident that happened while he was visiting our Nana (Steinunn Sesselja Lindal nee Julius) at her home in Victoria on S Street when he was just six years old. He said: "It was 1936 and a telegram was delivered to the door. Nana read the telegram and then quietly retreated alone to the cellar. She stayed in the cellar for some time and upon returning was sad and red eyed and she told me that her brother Kristjan Niels Julius (K.N.) had died."



K.N. (Kain in Icelandic) was born Kristjan Niels Jonsson, better known in later life as the satirical Icelandic poet K.N. Julius. He was born on April 7, 1859 in Akureyri, Iceland. Akureyri, known as the Capital of the North, is a pretty town located on a fjord. It is interesting to note that K.N. was named after an Uncle, the well-known

Icelandic folk poet Niels Jonsson "Skaldi". K.N. and his siblings: Jon Julius Jonsson born 1857, Eleonora Valgerdur Jonsdottir born 1861, Steinunn Sesselja Jonsdottir born 1866, Kristinn Bjarni Jonsson born 1868 and Rosa Sigridur Jonsdottir born 1870, lived in the older part of town steps from the Atlantic Ocean. Their parents were Jon Jonsson and Thorunn Kristjansdottir. Thorunn died a week after her 42nd birthday and as the family means were limited Jon had to find foster homes for his children.

K.N. was 14 years old when his Mother died and was sent to live with his maternal Uncle, David Kristjansson at Jodisarstarir. He worked for his Uncle until he emigrated to Canada from Thvera near Akureyri in 1878 at the age of 19. His older brother Jon had already emigrated to Canada in 1876 and settled in Winnipeg where he quickly became well known as an ambitious entrepreneur and prominent community worker. In Canada Jon was continually referred to as Jon Julius and because this was easily pronounceable by English speakers, Jon adopted Julius as his surname – a custom later followed by all his siblings when they came to Canada.

K. N. first settled in Winnipeg, and then moved south to Duluth, Minnesota where he worked for some years before relocating to North Dakota in 1893. In the Fall of 1894 he settled in Mountain, North Dakota where he was resident for many years with the Geir family.

K.N. became well known as a poet of the people, sometimes likened to Scotland's Robbie Burns and was much loved by those who knew him. As a teenager, my Father, Jacob Asgier Victor Lindal, visited his Uncle K.N. in North Dakota. Father too loved his Uncle and was ecstatic when K.N. gave him a copy of his book of poetry, entitled *Kvidlingar*, which was published in 1920. I now have this book of poetry. Nana received a larger anthology called *Kvaedi og Kvidlingar* which was published in Iceland posthumously in 1945. This book was given to Joseph Christstein Harper Lindal and later inherited by his son Victor (Bruce) Lindal. Many of my Nana's descendants still reside in Victoria and all are aware of our famous relative, the Icelandic Poet Laureate, K.N. Julius.

UPCOMING BECK LECTURES – MARCH by Trish Baer

Dr. Jón Karl Helgason is Assistant Professor of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Iceland. Helgason is a scholar, translator, radio producer, editor and novelist. His scholarly fields of interest include the post-medieval reception of the Icelandic sagas and 20th-century Icelandic cultural history. His books include the scholarly work *Hetjan og höfundurinn* (1998), translations into Icelandic of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1997) and Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy* (1999), the novel *Næsturgalinn* (1998), and *The Rewriting of Njáls Saga: Translation, Politics and Icelandic Sagas* (1999). His latest book, a biography of cultural patron Ragnar Jónsson (1904-1984), was nominated for the Icelandic Literary Prize in 2009.

"Visual Translations of Njáls Saga"

Monday, 1 March, 10:00 a.m.

Fine Arts, Room 104

"Bloody Runes: Uncanny Elements in Egils Saga"

Tuesday, 2 March, 7:30 p.m.

Clearihue Building, Room A206

"Dead Poets' Society: Nationalism, Literature, and Cultural Saints"

Wednesday, 3 March, 11:30 a.m.

Clearihue Building, Room A204

The Richard and Margaret
Beck Lectures on
Icelandic Literature



BECK LECTURE REPORTS

STURLA GUNNARSSON SCREENS *BEOWULF AND GRENDEL* AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

by Jasmine Johnston

Icelandic-Canadian film director Sturla Gunnarsson visited the University of Victoria as a Beck Trust Lecturer on January 14 and 15, 2010.

On Thursday evening, Sturla screened his film *Beowulf and Grendel* at the university cinema, followed by a question and answer period.

There were numerous questions for the director. He addressed a variety of topics, including writing the script, historicization of the poem, casting, character development, set and costume design, the landscape of Iceland, and his own experiences of Iceland.

When asked about the script, Sturla told the story of collaborating with Andrew Berzins. They had worked well together on a previous project, and so met again to discuss possible future projects. After covering many options, they looked at one another and asked what they really wanted to do. Berzins said he had always wanted to write a film version of *Beowulf*. Sturla replied that he had always wanted to make a film in Iceland.

Together Berzins and Sturla created a story which took *Beowulf* back to its postulated pagan roots, conceiving a world where monsters were actually competing humanoid species such as *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis* or *Homo gigantus*. Much of their inspiration for Grendel was drawn from legends and stories of the Sasquatch. Sturla stated that they tried to reconstruct, in creative but realistic ways, how the historicized events of their script would become campfire tales, and then legend.

Sturla then answered questions about Gerald Butler, Ingvar Eggert Sigurðsson and Sarah Polley. The process of casting Butler was in part a matter of hitting it off, which in turn, Sturla stated, contributed to the successful financing of the project, a matter of international cooperation between Canada, Iceland and the UK.

Ingvar, a well-known actor in Iceland, contributed a great deal to the development of Grendel's look and behaviour, working with prosthetic designers to generate distinctive movements and features. In the end, said Sturla, Grendel's look was quite natural, with only a few prosthetic enhancements, none of them computer-generated.

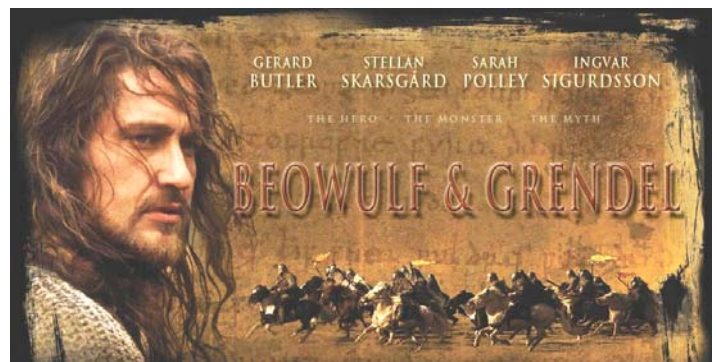
Sarah Polley's role as the pagan witch Selma served to anchor the film in a pagan worldview, as well as emphasize and examine the nature of kinship.



Set and costume design were based on one key concept: "gems in the mud." All the costumes follow a palate drawn from the landscape, and while realistic in their practicality and making, are also specific to creative conceptions of each character. The earthy colours are in counterpoint with flashes of finery in ornaments and weaponry. The Geatish court, Sturla stated, is intended to be more formal, while the Danish tribe is intended to look rough.

A member of the audience asked Sturla what Iceland means to him. He replied that it was the place he was born and lived in until the age of seven, the place where he learned his first language, Icelandic, and the place he first dreamed. He stated that images of Iceland's landscape stayed with him, which is why he wanted to return to that landscape through the filming of *Beowulf and Grendel*.

The tone of the audience was enthusiastic and engaged; not only were students, faculty and community members in attendance, but also a large first-year English literature class, comprised of undergraduate students from many disciplines. Their questions were diverse, ranging from issues of historical research to film festivals, from pagan practices to sea hag caves. At a question from one student the audience learned that the long poles lifted up around the great hall Heorot are "cow-scares," a concept created by the set designers, where cows' heads are put on poles to scare off enemies.



STURLA GUNNARSSON LECTURES ON *BEOWULF AND GRENDEL* AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

by Jasmine Johnston

Icelandic-Canadian film director Sturla Gunnarsson visited the University of Victoria as a Beck Trust Lecturer on January 14 and 15, 2010.

On Friday morning, Sturla gave a lecture entitled “*Beowulf and Grendel*: The Director’s Take.” He addressed questions such as--where did the idea of the film come from? what were its goals? what influences shaped the project? what were the difficulties of the filming? how was it received? and, looking back five years later, how does he judge the film?

After screening the film the night previous, Sturla focussed on showing clips from *Wrath of Gods*, which documents the making of *Beowulf and Grendel*, including the many challenges which arose during the film’s production. Financing was complex, shooting was delayed into Iceland’s autumn and winter, the Viking ship was cumbersome and leaky, wind-storms destroyed several base camps, stunt riders engaged in drunken antics in the surf, and a volcano erupted.

Through these clips, Sturla built up a sense of the Icelandic landscape as one of the most powerful influences on the project. The feel of Iceland is a major influence on Sturla’s creative process, while the Scandinavian look of the landscape, though not precisely that of Sweden and Denmark, generates a powerful visual analogue for the elements at play in the poem *Beowulf*--earth, fire, water, ice, wind, and stone.

Tribalism was another influence on the film. The project was developed during the resurgence of tribalism in the world, including conflict in Sarajevo and Iraq. *Beowulf* arrives at Heorot with a job to do: to kill the monster. In the course of his quest, he comes to realize that Grendel is not a monster, but an equally sentient being with language, kin, a code of honour, and feelings. This is why, said Sturla, the film is called *Beowulf and Grendel*: their relationship emerges as one which is reciprocal, though tragic.

Analogue filming techniques were maintained throughout the making of the film. Thus, Sturla explained, images received by the brain while watching the film remain tangible, obeying the laws of nature. He feels that the film’s reception was positive due in part to this “feel” of realism, a realism achieved through the Icelandic landscape and non-digital special effects.

By using stunt coordinators and prosthetics technicians and avoiding digital special effects, the actors used their bodies and voices to tell the story, “let[ting] the actor act within his skin.” Sturla also described how the actors’ performances



were affected by the landscape and weather, which was intensely stormy throughout shooting. This natural look and feel combined with the challenging weather conditions drew the actors--and the crew--into a level of performative intensity which could not have been otherwise achieved.

Looking back, Sturla reflected on the place *Beowulf and Grendel* holds in his own work and the work of film-makers in Canada. He stated that the poem spoke to him as an immigrant, while the script became a metaphor for kinship and the power of language and story. Sturla encouraged Canadian students entering film studies to open their horizons, be adventurous, and above all, unshakably confident, focussed, and good listeners. He encouraged writers to “get on a plane,” to encounter and build into their writing sense-memories of the places they write about.

In addition to answering questions at the end of his lecture, Sturla read his project proposal, commented on the complexities of international film funding, and affirmed that the film is intended to show that “life is complicated, and morality ambiguous.”

The lecture concluded with an enthusiastic round of applause for Sturla, and several members of the audience gathered around afterwards for further questions and conversation.