

THUMBPRINT TOGETHER

My name is Gudrun Helga Julia Sigurdson, but you may call me Helga. My heritage is Icelandic and gradually Canadian. My father, Sigurdur Holm Danielson came to Canada from Iceland in 1894 at age seventeen. His father was Daniel Sigurdsson. To further the identity confusion, my father switched his name to Sigurdur Danielson Holm as there were too many known as Danielson. My mother was an adventurer who came to Canada in 1902 at age 16 with an older sister. Mom and Dad met in Winnipeg and married in 1904. In 1906, they moved to Lundar, where they homesteaded near Sigurdur's family.

In 1920 on a farm east of Lundar, I came into the world on the seventh day of the seventh month at the seventh evening hour to a family with the 1922 birth of sister Lilja numbered seven children. Lundar has been my home for nearly one hundred and one years. Only two years were spent away. How has this stability in one pioneer community influenced my life and what have I learned through all the decades? What have I accomplished with my life and of what am I most proud?

My first two decades included moving into Lundar, excelling at school, participating in sports and community events. My artistic ability developed early as both my parents had creative talents. I worked in British Columbia on the Gold Coast and then returned for nurse training at St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg. Before completion, I contracted rheumatic fever which required some months of bed rest. This illness brought me home and on another path. However, the medical skills I learned stayed with me and were useful in caring for others.

The next decade brought Johann Straumfjord Sigurdson into my life. He was born on May 22, 1912 on a farm named Brekka also east of Lundar. His parents were Sigurdur Ingimundur Sigurdson and Asta Straumfjord Sigurdson. They and their families were pioneers from Iceland to Mikley (Hecla Island) in 1876. Unfortunately, Lake Winnipeg flooded in 1900-02. Many of the settlers left the island and all they had accomplished to start over again here.

On October 31, 1942, Johann Straumfjord Sigurdson (Joe) and I married in Winnipeg. Travel from Lundar was by train. Not many had vehicles. (My children are happy to know that I had winked at him and soon we started dating and dancing.) We began our married life at Brekka where Joe had established his mink ranch in 1930 and now had a herd of 150. He, too, had suffered a life altering setback in 1936 when he lost all but one male mink to botulism in the food and had to start again. In 1945, our lives changed again. Lundar became our home, our daughter, Linda, was born, the war had ended. Joe excelled at raising mink as did many others in this area. Silverflash Fur Farm, later Sigurdson Fur Farm Inc. would impact the world under the Canadian label Majestic Mink. Joe and I began creating our Thumbprint Together.

In the 50s, based on our Icelandic heritage and culture, we followed the path of literacy, education, care of community. We both are first generation Canadians and spoke fluent Icelandic. Our children later studied Icelandic language and literature at the University of Manitoba. Linda was followed by the birth of Sandra (1948), Johann (1950) and Lorenz (1957). Our family was complete and the Ammas and Afis nearby were loved and honoured. The children grew up understanding what it was to age.

During the 60s, 70s and 80s, the children left home for university, their own careers and families. Our parents aged and passed. My artistic talent and community involvement continued supported by Joe

and we worked together. We were each other's sounding board. I will begin with Joe's profession.

In 1920 there were only two fur farms in Manitoba. Lundar area mink ranching began in 1926 and grew to about 15 in number. In 1946, the first live mink show was held in Winnipeg. Joe entered six mink and won several prizes. The shows were annual events where Joe exhibited and honed his skills. Eventually, he judged and graded mink. He became an inspector of pelt bundles prior to the sales in Winnipeg and Montreal. He became President of the Manitoba Fur Breeders Association and in 1967, President of Canada Mink Breeders Association. He was also the representative at the International Mink Assoc. Conference for two years. In 1967- 8, we attended the World Fur Fair in Frankfurt, Germany. Joe was a mink rancher for over fifty years, attending as a delegate to annual conventions held in cities across Canada. In these years with a keen eye for colour and quality, he developed several of his own colour phases, including pearl, silverblu and a new sapphire mutation. Joe was recognized as the Sapphire King of Canada.

After settling in Lundar, Joe took an active interest in community affairs, serving as school trustee, volunteer fireman, member of the Lundar Agricultural Society and the Grettir Athletic Assoc. where he gave generously of his time when the arena was being built. From 1965 to 1980, as Reeve of the Municipality of Coldwell, he worked diligently for improvements in the village and rural areas. Joe was Vice-President of the Union of Manitoba Municipalities and was presented with an Honorary Life Membership for his work. He was director of the Interlake Judicial District and served on the Interlake Development Corporation (IDC). Enrolling in Dale Carnegie, he learned to make excellent speeches and presentations.

Upon reading the above paragraph of volunteerism, you may ask why he used his skills to help people. Joe had learned and understood the impact of activism. His Afi, Johann Eliasson Straumfjord, came to Ontario in 1874, explored possible settlement in Nova Scotia, back to Iceland in 1875 for his family, returning in 1876 and settling on Mikley (Hecla Island). He was a member of the Mikley Council and travelled to Gimli and elsewhere for meetings. Johann was a homeopathic doctor and is said to have brought the first generation of Hecla Island into the world on the family's island called Engey (now Goose Island). He possessed an entrepreneurial spirit which descended to the future generations and had the positive and enduring support of his wife, Kristbjorg. On the island she kept the home fires burning in his absence to attend Council meetings in Gimli, the centre of New Iceland.

Before continuing, let me name the diverse settlement communities existing around us: Lundar, Clarkleigh, Oak Point, Seamo, Lily Bay, Swan Creek, Vestfold, Otto, Markland, Minnewakan, Mary Hill, Gascon (The Quarry), North Star, Stony Hill, Lillesve, Helendale, Abbeville and Deerhorn. This land was home to the Indigenous and Metis with their distinct culture and history. A real Smorgasbord of Nations! United in purpose they stand.

The 60s to 80s were a great time of growth and progress in Canada. The IDC held its formative meeting in Lundar and Joe was vice-president for several years. He served as Chairman of the Task Force on sewer and water submitting briefs to the government resulting in a provincial sewer and water program for towns and farms. Lundar received a large financial government grant to assist with sewer installation in the town. Remember that our area is built on bedrock, 430 million years old. Would this be of what Joe is most proud? This program resulted in the building of new houses and businesses.

Joe was an executive member and President of the Manitoba Good Roads Assoc. and a director of Northern Woods and Water Route Assoc. At meetings, Joe would take every opportunity to promote the vacation merits of our area and the beach near Lundar. Ours was one of the first cottages(1961).

We met the annual cavalcade from Dawson Creek, BC, and hosted them to refreshments before they continued to Winnipeg. East Meadows Goose Sanctuary was a tourist attraction and provided a fitting symbol for the community. He thought a Giant Canada Goose with wings uplifted in flight would symbolize progress and eventually the ARDA Board, of which he was a member, erected a swiveling statue(1978) beside Hwy #6 for everyone to see. It is a weather vane and when facing south-east, we'll have rain. From the statue Joe conceived the idea of the well-known All Canada Goose Shoot (Oct 7,1977). After 45 years, it is still held annually in October by the BPO Elks. The hunt was registered and approved by the Manitoba Government and Game Branch. It is possibly the longest organized hunting-based fundraiser of a community in Canada.

My contribution to the Shoot was the trophy awarded annually. In ceramics, I fired and painted the Giant Canada Goose. I am proud to have many ceramic geese in homes around the world and a set on display at the entrance to the home of the President of Iceland.

Joe contributed much to the growth and development of the Lundar Community. The need for adequate provision for the elderly was fully realized by him and for many years he worked alone. When the nursing home was not possible the Lundar Senior Citizen Home was proceeded with in 1966, fully funded locally and administered by a local board of which he was Vice-President. Efforts to have a personal care facility in Lundar were renewed and as early as 1973 he attended District Health Planning Committee meetings. His concept of a free standing facility and not an extension of a hospital was eventually adopted as a provincial pilot project of a 20 bed personal care home attached to the Senior Citizen Home. Lundar's was the prototype and others followed. The Lundar Personal Care Home (1982) has celebrated 40 years. When Dr. Paulson retired, the need arose to attract another physician. The Lundar Development Corp. formed with Joe as President. With the generous donations of time and money from many local citizens the "Clinic" building became a reality and after a phone call to Australia, Dr. Neil Burnet became our next long-standing resident doctor.

Bear with me as I continue with all of Joe's activities. You may ask, was he ever home? Yes, he had a very set schedule. Twelve noon was dinner. He was always on time. Then he rested until one o'clock. Was his mind ever still? I thought of him when I read this: Taking "naps" sounds so childish. I prefer to call them "Horizontal Life Pauses." Joe was good at telling stories, jokes and playing the violin and bass fiddle. He loved to sing and engage the children. We even took part in plays in the 30s and 40s.

Lundar residents today benefit from the work of many during this period. Joe served as chairman when the Western Interlake Planning District was established Aug. 1978 under the Planning Act. Three districts St. Laurent, Coldwell and Siglunes joined to formulate a development plan. He worked with the government veterinarian Dr. McPhedran in furthering the idea of veterinary clinics throughout Manitoba and with government aid procured a building from MacDonald airport to be used for these services. The result for Lundar and area is the Veterinary Animal Clinic (1972) now 50 years. I must mention that for years my father was called upon as the veterinarian. Though self-taught, he performed difficult operations on cattle with anaesthetics saving many for the farmers.

Joe didn't play much golf, but his future son-in-law and PhD did. Ted Heidrick, Joe and pilot son Joe flew over the land and designed the golf course utilizing the natural features. This was a community centennial project 1967 with my ceramic geese presented to winners of the Golf Course tournaments. Other efforts of many went towards achieving an airstrip for light planes to land and refuel. The two became known as "the fly-in golf course." The CNR Station and land were purchased to be used for a museum. It was my idea to turn it around to face Main St. Joe offered further service as a member of the Lundar Community Club and Vice-President of the Lundar Historical Society and also tried to maintain the honour and prestige of Municipality of Coldwell. He was Chairman of the Board of

Reference for the Dept. of Education and continued as a member for some years. My work with the LHS resulted in our history book, Wagons to Wings.

As you can see, Joe put his thumbprint on many developments. I have learned that the majority of people accept what is and learn to cope with it. A small majority think and ask the question “what if?” An even smaller number decide “to do” and enlist the help of others for it to become “done.” That was my husband. I was his sounding board and he listened to my ideas. Together the thumbprint was one.

Joe and I shared a common heritage. He served as President of the Icelandic League of North America and we both have been Presidents of the Lundar Chapter. He served as a director of the Icelandic Cultural Corp. Inc. of the Gimli Museum and of the Logberg Heimskringla newspaper. I was also involved with the INL chapter, the museum, newspaper and taught Icelandic language classes. Together we raised the Icelandic purebred dog, Snotra. Joe was honoured by Sigridur Petursdottir to learn that he had done much to preserve the quality of the breed and had colours no longer available in Iceland.

By writing this, I realize how much Lundar had been in our blood. We became Canadian and proudly acknowledged our citizenship. We loved to dance together and did so to celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary (1982) with a gathering in the Lundar Community Hall with its acknowledged quality dance floor no longer in use. Unfortunately, on November 3, 1985, I became a widow and at age 65 carried on alone. It has now been 37 years. I have included much of Joe's work so he is remembered. We supported each other, discussed together, argued together, planned together. As I list my accomplishments and volunteerism, he is in my thoughts and heart.

My first noted contribution was during the Lundar Diamond Jubilee (1947). My father built the wooden structure of the Dragon Head and Tail to which I applied papier-mache and then painted. They were attached to a boat in which Joe and I, dressed in Viking Age attire, joined the parade.

In 1987, Lundar celebrated its Centennial. Again, I used my creativity and painted the limited edition of the Centennial plate and the souvenir pins. I arranged for the Prairie Dog Central train to be in Lundar and provide rides. I sponsored the filming of the weekend and we produced the VHS video, valued by many.

In 1987, the Sun Dial was unveiled in the Memorial Park. It was created by Richard Osen who researched how time was told before clocks. He cast the hands of a man and woman and inserted two gnomon between the fingers. It was astronomically positioned to tell time by looking at the numbers on the fingers. A few years later, Richard cast the plaque for the front of the Sun Dial naming all the settlement districts. Richard also created Islendingadagsklukka (1989), the bell and its holder in Gimli Park. I was Fjallkona in 1988 and Richard said I was his inspiration. The bell, unveiled by Iceland President Vigdis Finnbogadottir, was Linda's project for the 100th Islendingadagurinn.

May 2012, the land where my family home had been was gifted by my family, my siblings and the Hal Sigurdson family for the Lundar Holmgardur Heritage Park. Again, Richard Osen was consulted on park development. Though he worked on the design and the plans still exist, Coldwell in Bloom went with a simpler plan. I am happy to have this gathering place across from the Pauline Johnson Library on which I also worked at acquiring. Lundar District in pioneer years had three reading societies. Joe and I felt that a village needs to have a library and a church. Our children benefitted.

So much of our story is also that of Lundar and District throughout the decades. Dear Readers, do you have more understanding of our community? I will quicken the pace.

My unified Thumbprint:

!987 – Lundar Personal Care Home Guild – founding member, President of Guild for 25 years

resigning in 2019 at age 99, Centennial Room.

1950s – 4-H Club – sewing instructor for 6 years

1979 plus - Lundar Museum – Committee member – coordinated displays

Lundar Community Resources Council Inc. – Charter member

Lundar Agriculture Society – Women's Division, Director and President – 50 years

Lundar Christian Women's Club – member 25 years – created monthly decorations and hand drew
name tags

Lundar Lutheran Church – created ceramic confirmation cups for 30 years. Gifted Board Room table
in memory of Joe.

Senior Citizen Co-op – Board member 20 years.

New Horizon Club

Fitness Club

Gimli Museum – original member

Icelandic Festival Inc. - Celebrity Concerts co-ordinator, Fjallkona 1988

Logberg Heimskringla – Board member for many years.

Two of my accomplishments, ceramics and the book, Wagons to Wings, fill me with pride. In 1972, I began ceramic classes in Winnipeg with instructor Elva Jonasson and purchased a kiln. My mother was living with us and this was something I could do from home. I became proficient in handcrafting ceramic pieces, modelling and painting original designs. In April 1977, I won the gold statue Athena Award for Excellence at the Ceramic Art Assoc. of Manitoba show for a TV lamp with an original cut-out design of eagles and mountains. At the annual shows, I received many creativity and judges' awards. One entry was so perfect it was almost disqualified. The judges thought it was a decal. I remained an Assoc. member for many years and taught ceramics classes.

As a member of the Lundar Historical Society, I worked for more than five years with Violet Olson and Thelma Sigurdson as editors to publish Wagons to Wings, History of Lundar and Districts, 1872 – 1980. This Society had dedicated members who realized the book's archival importance. Area descendants can research their family stories and learn of their progress through the years. Besides being editor, I named this book and designed and drew the cover. Now out of print, the book may be read online. digitalcollections.lib.umanitoba.ca

Also proud to have received -

2020 Manitoba 150 Medal

2016 Nellie McClung Foundation Trailblazer Award. Also member of the Jon Sigurdsson
Chapter IODE who received a Group Award.

For Joe and me, our children were our greatest gift and of whom we were the most proud. We maintained that there was a stability and closeness raising a family in a small town like Lundar and with being part of a larger community-family, sharing its joys and sorrows. Joe and I had regular summer visits from our grandchildren who had the run of Main St. and the Bake Shop. They felt loved. Though our children and their families are dispersed, Lundar is still their Homeland, Heartland.

My comment for the future generations: I learned with Joe that progress is the result of interaction with other people. In the Dance of Life, one person will lead and the other follow, but that may reverse. With practise, the Dance becomes graceful. Learn to trust each other as you work together. Volunteer. Life is learning how to age, how to let people go at the end of life, how to celebrate and honour them. Gley-mér-ei. Forget-me-not.