

**REPORT FROM ICELAND**  
**A Passion for Vikings and Dried Fish**  
**BY PEGGY NAHAS FOSTER, BELLINGHAM, WASH.**

From the day I first chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in 1983, I had one impossible goal that could not be forgotten or ignored. With each campaign, each Byakuren movement, each daimoku chart I filled, I renewed my goal — to return to Iceland.

In 1979, fresh out of high school and eager for adventure, I set off on a monthlong trek through Iceland. I had worked several jobs during high school and saved for my trip. I took private lessons in the Icelandic language and studied every book I could on Iceland's history, the Viking Age and Norse mythology.

English poet W.H. Auden once wrote, "Few people take an interest in Iceland, but in those few, the interest is passionate." I am passionate about Iceland.

My Icelandic pen pal since 1978, Sigurdur Thordarsson, and his wife, Anna Lisa Sigurdjondottir, for whom I named my daughter, encouraged me year after year to return. A burning desire to do kosen-rufu in Iceland consumed me. I received guidance and was advised to accomplish kosen-rufu in my own community first. This gave me direction and courage to achieve my goals.

In 1994, teachers at a local elementary school here were discussing how to introduce Vikings to their students. My husband, Dennis, a school custodian, suggested they ask me. He was thrilled that I would have someone to talk to about Vikings besides him! I am now known as the Viking Lady and have been invited back every year since to educate fifth graders about the voyages of the Norsemen, culminating with a Viking feast and Norse myths. I prepare for months, starting of course with daimoku, so that I can touch the hearts of the students. I want my passion to be theirs.

I was so certain that 1997 was my year to return to Iceland that I haunted travel agencies for months looking for the best ticket prices. I contacted SGI-Iceland members and told them I was coming, even before I had the money to buy an airline ticket! The wonderful members in Iceland said they would chant for our safe arrival.

Two days after our March 1997 women's division meeting, I received a settlement check as a result of carpal tunnel surgery. Without hesitation or even a call to my husband, I purchased three non-refundable round-trip tickets. We were going to Iceland!

Iceland is a fascinating destination. The landscape can change in minutes from twisted lava columns to lush green mountains and plains filled with frolicking lambs. There are hot springs everywhere. Reykjavik, the capital city, is incredibly clean. There are no pollutants to destroy the pure air and water of Iceland. Heat and electricity are all geothermally generated, and because of the island's position in the North Atlantic, the pollution from North America and Europe passes it by. Iceland has almost no crime, and young children are safe wherever they want to play.

Iceland is also one of Europe's most expensive countries to visit. I was fortunate to have good friends in Iceland with whom we could stay, but for my presentations as the Viking Lady, I needed to buy enough dried fish to feed an army of children and find authentic accessories for my husband's and my costumes. I wanted to have great photos (my camera was broken) and video (I had no video camera), and I had no money saved. The disability check paid only for our tickets and passports.

I chanted money virtually out of the woodwork. I called out fortune from 10,000 miles afar in every form. My wonderful boss even gave me a bonus for my trip when he heard me trying to pick up some extra secretarial work. And my parents gave us cash gifts as well. Then, two days before our departure, my husband received a large inheritance check for the

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Subject: World Tribune 01/09/98 n.3173 p.8 WT980109p08  
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Keywords: Dried Experiences Features Fish Iceland Passion Practice Report Special Vikings

sale of a house and property that we had been chanting about for five years. Twelve hours before our flight, Dennis and I paid off some bills and bought a video camera. We would have no financial worries during our holiday, and no hardships later because of the trip.

On July 9, 1997, I returned home to Iceland.

SGI-Iceland member Fjola Jonsdottir arranged for us to attend two gongyo meetings. Doing gongyo with these intrepid members of the far north was like riding the Norse god Odin's eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, across the sky.

*Kosen-rufu* isn't just an expression to SGI-Iceland. The members there are working to make Iceland the Buddha's land. A month before our arrival, SGI-Iceland members were invited by the Asatru Movement (those who worship the old Norse gods) to a celebration at Thingvellir, the parliament of the Vikings. Thingvellir is a great rift in the earth and is actually part of the North Atlantic trench stretching up from the waters like two giant hands trying to separate the island. It was here in the year 1000 C.E. that Iceland became the first and only country ever to accept Christianity through a democratic process as opposed to force and bloodshed. Iceland is 98 percent Lutheran. The remaining 2 percent consists of members of other Christian faiths, Soka Gakkai Buddhists (74 of them), Thai Buddhists, and Baha'i, Islam and Asatru practitioners.

At the Asatru gathering, a plan was developed to petition the Icelandic government for a dialogue on several topics of interest to Iceland's non-Christians. This small group of mixed faiths, spearheaded by SGI-Iceland, is planning a gathering at Thingvellir in the year 2000 to meet with the Icelandic government.

Their goals for this momentous dialogue are: 1) To change the government-controlled curriculum to allow comparative religions to be taught. Currently only the history of Christianity is being taught until university level. And 2) For the government of Iceland to permit more freedom of choice to the non-Christian faiths by allowing them to build places of worship.

Over all, our trip was filled with magic. My 5-year-old daughter was a jewel the entire trip (serious proof that daimoku works), the National Museum of Iceland admitted us an hour before opening so that I would have unobstructed views of the exhibits for photos and video, and my friend Siggi arranged for a local to show us the Viking ruins near Olafsvik, where my favorite character from the sagas, Thorgunna, once lived.

Two days after we arrived, it rained a hard, heavy rain for 15 hours. I told Siggi and his wife, Anna Lisa, that I would chant for the sun to shine. At 2:00 a.m. I did a resounding gongyo to bring out the sun. The next five days, as we traveled through western Iceland and the Snaefulsjokull peninsula, were bright, sunny and clear. We saw two glaciers that looked like diamonds shining in the sun. The weather reports indicated rain, yet we had golden light cast upon us well into the late hours of the night. The midnight sun is an awesome sight.

I challenged my Rubenesque physique and successfully rode an Icelandic pony for two hours through moss-covered and flower-strewn lava fields. And I climbed the holy mountain of Thor, Helgafell. Without the push/pull of abundant daimoku, I doubt I would have had the courage to face either trial.

I am determined to stand in support of SGI-Iceland at Thingvellir in the year 2000. At the same time, because I know that *kosen-rufu* starts at home, I am single-mindedly yearning to fulfill my mission, whether it be in my family, my district, my community — or on a sub-Arctic island in the North Atlantic.

*P.S. I telephoned Fjola Jonsdottir on Dec. 29: She told me that SGI-Iceland now has a community center!*

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