



EAGER STUDENTS PACKED THE HOUSE AT COLLEGE DAY REYKJAVIK IN APRIL 2013

# Newsletter Fulbright Commission Iceland



MAY 2013

## Our grantees are what it is all about

Message from Executive Director Belinda Theriault



Dear Fulbrighters and friends of Fulbright,

Time certainly flies. It has been six months since we sent the first issue of the new Fulbright Commission newsletter. I am happy to note that we received very positive feedback, especially from US alumni, many of whom had not been in contact with the Commission for years or even decades. Welcome back, one and all!

The current academic year is soon coming to an end. We have had a marvelous group of grantees this past year. Just to give you a very few examples of what they have been up to, Hafsteinn Dan Kristjánsson (law, Harvard) and Jón Andri Hjaltason (engineering, University of Minnesota) recently took part in Fulbright seminars on human rights issues, one in Atlanta and the other in Philadelphia. Katrín Hjördísardóttir (School of Visual Arts) was selected to participate on behalf of the SVA in the "Transmediation" video art program of the College Art Association's 101st Annual Conference. And Halldór Smárason (musical composition, Manhattan School of Music) debuted a musical composition at the Nordic Cool Festival in Washington, D.C. last March.

In the true Fulbright spirit, our US students have been engaging locally. To take only a few examples, Lindsay Huffhines (psychology, Reykjavik University) has volunteered at a local women's shelter, providing expertise and support, Patrick Frank (creative writing, University of Iceland) taught a creative writing workshop in the spring, Tenley Banik (geology, University of Iceland) has given talks on geology to various groups and Megan O'Brien (environmental studies, University Center of the West Fjords) has published a fantastic blog about Iceland and joined in all sorts of local activities, including the local volleyball team. I could go on and on about these grantees, but will stop here. I think you get the picture. – And the next academic year is looking just as good.

The newsletter gives you just a sampling of what is going on. Our latest annual report, which gives more detailed information, can be found on our website: [www.fulbright.is/](http://www.fulbright.is/). And don't forget to follow the Commission on Facebook for all the latest updates.

Have a wonderful summer!

*Belinda Theriault*

### INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE ALUMNI



**Inspire. Empower. Connect**

Have you joined the online community at [www.alumni.state.gov/](http://www.alumni.state.gov/)?

We want to urge all our former Fulbright grantees to join this network. Benefits include:

- Free access to a \$33 billion grants database
- Free access to over 20,000 publications
- Job search
- A connection to over 100,000 global alumni, where you can post news, search events and interact.

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## Fulbrighter Brings Little Free Library to Iceland

Larissa Kyzer is one of our American Fulbrighters, a professional librarian who lives in Brooklyn, New York. She has been studying Icelandic at the University of Iceland, with the goal of translating contemporary Icelandic literature into English. Despite her demanding studies, Larissa came up with an idea for a project that would have lasting impact in Reykjavik. She decided to bring the Little Free Library concept to Iceland. It seemed like a fairly uncomplicated idea, but it has taken quite a bit of work to get the idea off the ground and execute it. Larissa's project is now being realized with the first Little Free Library Reykjavik (LFLR) being set up at the end of May. We asked Larissa to answer a few questions for us.

### **What is the Free Little Library?**

This project began with one Little Free Library in Wisconsin in the United States, but has now become an international network, with over 5,000 branches in 36 countries all over the world. The library itself is a small, weatherproof house that is put in a public place and filled with books, so that anyone can come borrow and return them whenever they want. It's like the typical "take a book, leave a book," system, but it's better because instead of being a catch-all for discarded books and magazines that people don't want, it is instead a thoughtfully curated mini-library that brings together diverse communities of readers.

### **Tell us about your project to bring this to Iceland. Have you met any challenges?**

It has been a lot of work and presented some unexpected challenges, that's for sure! But I have had a great deal of support. I started by initiating a "crowd-sourcing" fundraiser with a new Icelandic organization called the Karolina Fund, which is a bit like Kickstarter in the US.

There was an amazing and pretty instantaneous show of support for LFLR. I was able to raise the full €860 needed for the project in just under two weeks. I received donations from people in Iceland and the US, as well as supporters in other countries

In addition to raising the money, I developed a website and Facebook page to help spread the word, arranged for the library kit to be sent to Iceland, and actually built the library (with the help of my partner Mark). I also contacted local literary organizations—like the Icelandic Literature Fund and the Reykjavik City Library—as well as publishers and authors to request book donations. Lastly, I have been working with the Reykjavik UNESCO City of Literature to find a good central location for the library when it is installed, and also to ensure that LFLR is added to the City of Literature's "literary map" of important and interesting literary locations around the city.

Getting the library mounted in such a way that it won't be knocked over in the gale-force winds here has been a major hurdle. But it is all coming together and I'm confident that I'll be able to see the library installed and circulating books before the end of May.

### **Why is this project important to you?**

Literature, particularly Icelandic literature, is important to me and libraries—of all shapes and sizes and purposes—are important to me, so the Little Free Library concept is one that I have been fond of for a long time. Creating such a library here in Iceland, however, has a particular resonance. I have gotten so much from Icelandic literature already, and I really wanted to do something myself which would make a lasting contribution to Iceland's literary landscape. I also wanted to find a useful way to introduce myself into the community here in Iceland, even in a small way.



*Larissa helping out at College Day Reykjavik*

See: [littlefreelibraryreykjavik.wordpress.com](http://littlefreelibraryreykjavik.wordpress.com)

It was important to me that this project be collaborative and something that would engage readers of all stripes, both in Iceland and in the US. I have met so many wonderful people in working on LFLR, from a local poet who volunteered to translate the website's basic library information into Icelandic to a librarian at the city library who helped me select interesting and unusual titles for inclusion in the collection. It has introduced me to the literary community here in Reykjavik in ways that I simply would not have imagined when I arrived.

Beyond myself, though, the community-building aspect of LFL can't be overstated. This project has the potential to connect readers: Icelandic speakers and immigrants, sci-fan fans and poetry enthusiasts, children and parents, residents and tourists or exchange students, and even people who had never heard of Iceland before this, but are now inspired to pick up works of Icelandic literature.

### **What has your Fulbright experience meant to you?**

My time here is just the beginning of what I hope will be a long and fruitful connection with Iceland, its culture, and people. I have been inspired to take on all sorts of new and related projects—I've started writing for the local English-language paper, I've blogged, I've published personal essays, spent lots of time in local pools, joined a sewing club, and have probably now seen more of Iceland than I have of the US. I have been inspired to be a better, more creative and culturally active version of myself here, and I believe that these positive changes will be lasting ones.

## College Day Reykjavik a huge success

The newly established College Fair Scandinavia was held in four Nordic capitals in April. The Fulbright Commission was the main organizer on the Icelandic side, with much-appreciated cooperation from the US Embassy and AMIS, as well the Commercial College of Iceland, which provided the venue. 17 US colleges and universities came to Reykjavik to meet up with hundreds of Icelandic students who are interested in studying in the US.

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