

As she stared out the window at the dark skies, Kristy's reflection mirrored disappointment. Thinking out loud Kristy said, "If only the rain would stop! Wouldn't you know it? It waited all week just to storm on Saturday. Now we can't go anywhere."

Kristy's mother called from the kitchen twice before she heard her. "I thought you might like to go to the attic and look for some costumes for your school play." Lingered at the window Kristy answered without her usual enthusiasm, "Okay".

Kristy's school was having a special pioneer days program. Knowing Great-grandma's trunks were stored in the attic, she had volunteered to look for suitable pioneer costumes. In a tryout on Monday she would be competing with two other girls for the role of the pioneer girl.

Holding the ladder in place, Kristy's mother told her how to open the trap door entrance to the attic. She gave her a flashlight and explained where the light chain was located. "Call me when you are ready to come down".

No one had been in the attic for years. Everything was dusty and smelled old. Eerie light from a small rainstreaked window made the attic spooky. Kristy was in a hurry to accomplish her mission and get back downstairs.

With flashlight in hand, Kristy pulled the light chain and some of the shadows disappeared. She opened the first trunk. The squeaky hinges coupled with the rain on the roof gave Kristy a start. If she hadn't lived in the house all of her life, she would have believed the attic was inhabited by ghosts. Now more than ever she was determined to hurry.

The first trunk was full of bric-a-brac. Kristy dropped the lid and quickly climbed over it so she could reach the other trunk. This one had two leather straps that needed to be unbuckled. They were stubborn but finally opened. The lock was sprung and the lid was ajar.

Kristy was surprised to find all the fancy lace neatly folded. There were colorful doilies and scarves. She eagerly lifted them aside. A small black notebook fell to the floor unnoticed.

Underneath the fancywork there was a knitted wool shawl. Kristy draped the shawl over her shoulders. She wished there was a mirror in the attic. She decided this would be good for a pioneer costume. Next came aprons and housedresses. Kristy chose two of each.

A large box at the bottom of the trunk contained Great-grandmas's Icelandic national costume. Kristy recognized

this dress from pictures she had seen of Iceland. Such a beautiful filigree silver belt! Even a cap with a tassel attached by a silver tube! This seemed more like an elegant princess dress than a pioneer costume.

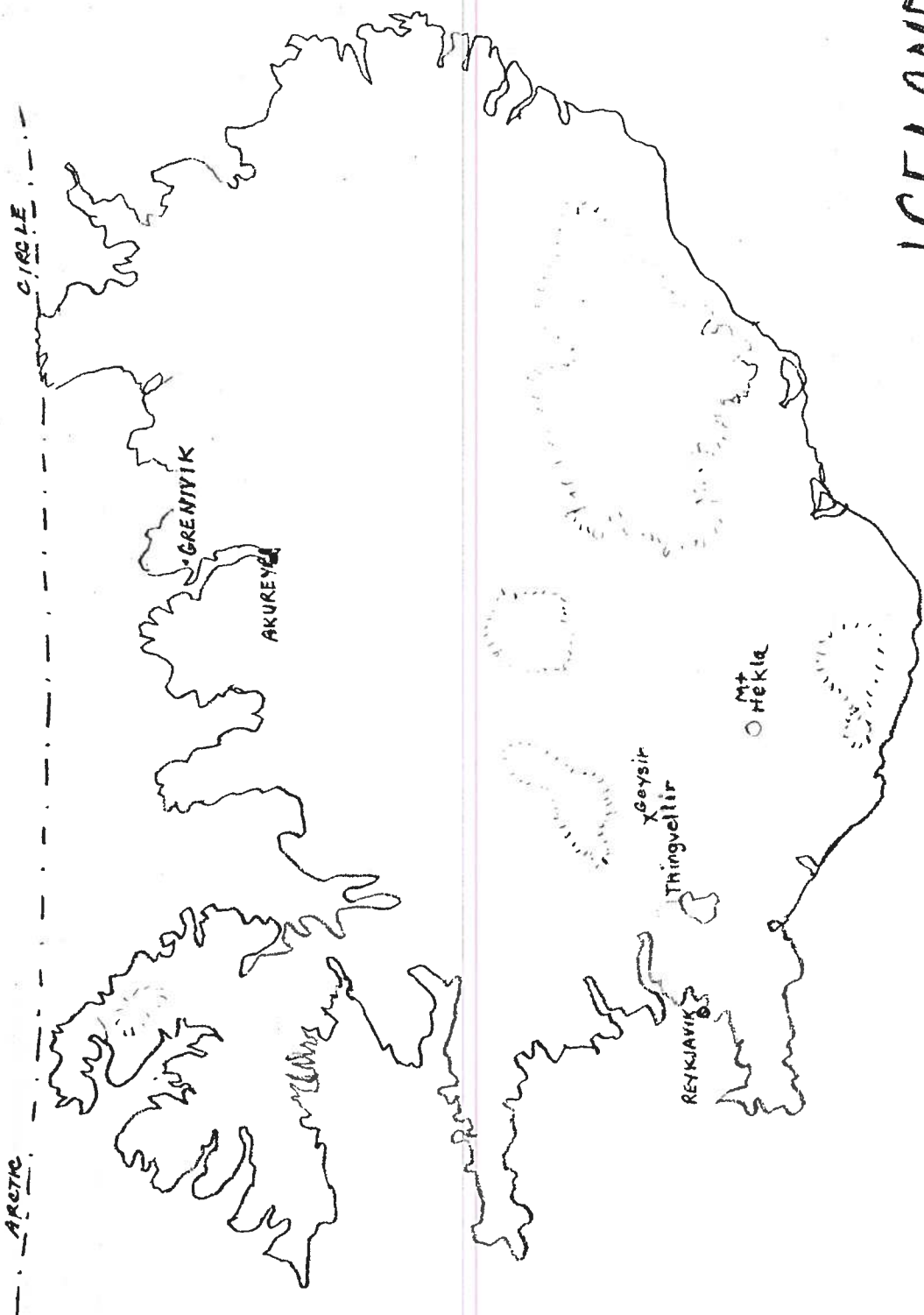
Kristy replaced everything into the trunk and closed the lid. She picked up the aprons , dresses and shawl, pulled the light chain and with the flashlight worked her way carefully to the trap door.

Just as she was going to call her mother, the flashlight beam struck a gold object on the floor beside the trunk.

Kristy returned to investigate. There beside the trunk was a small black notebook. Lettered in gold on the cover was the name "KRISTJANA". Kristy was intrigued because she was named after her great-grandmother, Kristjana. She had always wondered what Kristjana was like. She gently folded back the cover and began reading Kristjana's story.

*I was born in Iceland the 20th of May, 1895 on a little farm called Jarlstathir adjoining the village Grenivik. This is in the far North of Iceland almost touching the Arctic Circle.*

*Our summer skies were light and brightened by the midnight sun. Our winters were long and dark.*



ICELAND  
"ÍSLAND"

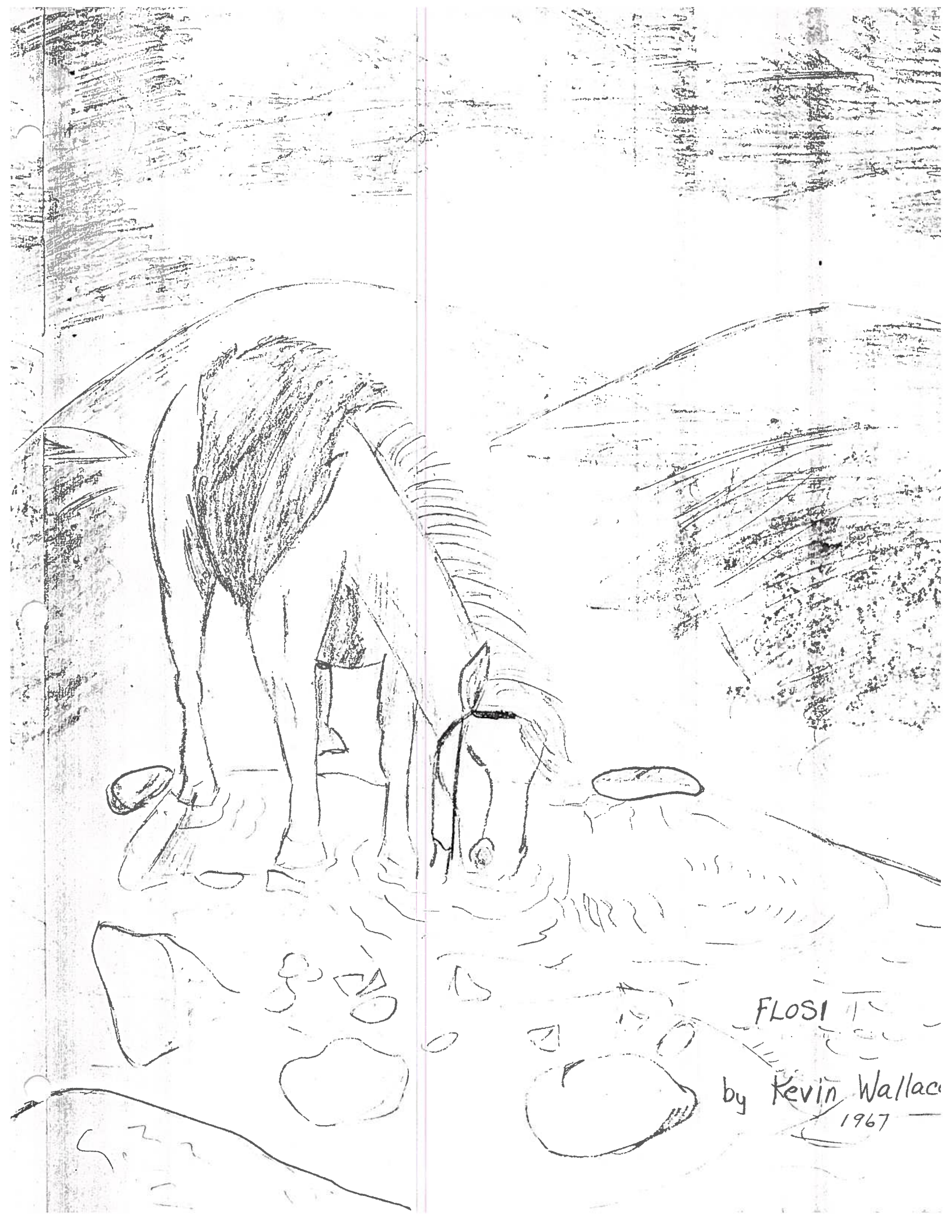
My father's name was Kristinn and my mother's name was Ovida. We lived with an old widow whom we called Amma and Uncle Larus, my father's brother.

Our farmhouse was constructed largely of lava rocks and sod. The houses appeared low because for the sake of warmth in winter, the walls were sunk four feet into the ground. The lava walls were packed with sod. The roof's wooden framework was covered with sod.

Wood was available only as driftwood washed ashore or costly imported lumber. We lived so far North that we had no trees. However there were patches of low bushes.

Inside we had a kitchen, storeroom and bunkroom. Uncle Larus and Father carved during the winter, whittling designs on bunk frames, wooden chests, spoon handles and almost anything wood. I was thrilled when Uncle Larus made me a new "askur". Everyone had their own wooden bowl with a handle and lid called "askur". All meals were served in the "askur". We identified our own by its carved design.

My most constant companion was a spotted Icelandic pony named Flosi, He was such a good friend, I never felt alone. When I called, Flosi would come running expecting a treat. I had no saddle. Sometimes when I had no treat Flosi would toss me off and I rolled like a ball. The fall was never far.



FLOSI

by Kevin Wallace  
1967



These sturdy Icelandic ponies were so small that a grown man could almost touch the ground with his feet when mounted. They were strong, sure-footed ponies exclusively providing land transportation. Airplanes and automobiles hadn't been invented yet.

As the river that flowed past our house reached the flatland in the valley it formed ripple-free pools. Small fish the size of trout would hide among the rocks. I never counted more than nine but I was sure there were many more. When the sun's rays hit the pools, the fish looked like solid gold fish. I tried to catch them but they always got away. Flosi would take me to the valley and wait while I fished with my horsehair fishline.

String and rope were scarce. Uncle Larus would cut Flosi's mane and tail when string was needed. Carefully braided this made a strong cord. It was such a slow, tedious job that I carried the horsehair in my apron pocket so that I could braid it off and on during the day.

One of my jobs was gathering firewood called "svord". It was a sort of peat moss dug from the earth in the lowlands. It was a network of branches and roots some four inches deep. We stacked it in piles outside our farmhouse. When dried out it made good fire fuel.

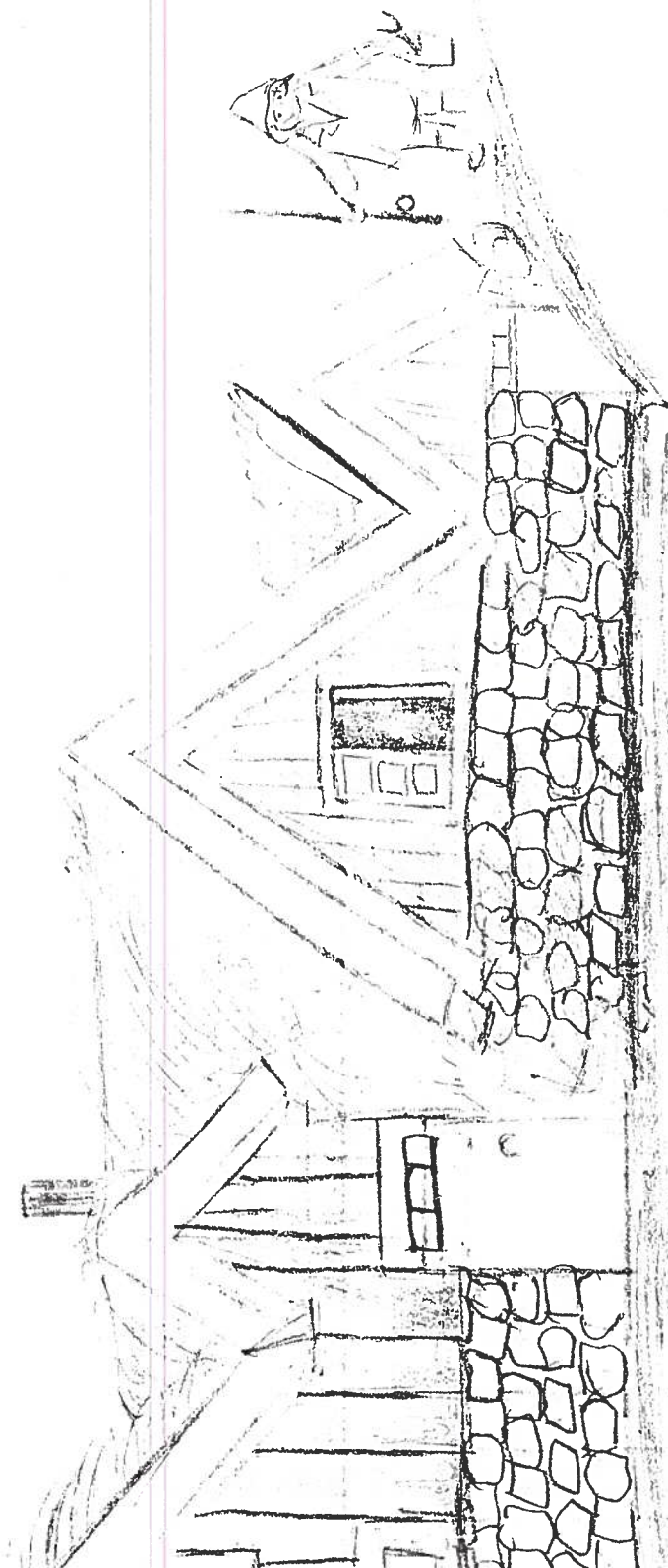
Another job I had was to gather wool snagged in the brush area of the sheep pasture. Iceland's sheep were noted for their long shaggy coats. This was probably nature's way of taking care of the sheep during the cold winters. They would snag their woolly coats on the bushes and leave clumps of wool when they broke away. Girls had to wash, card and spin this wool they gathered. My first knitting lesson was how to make mittens.

There were no schools in our part of the country when I was a girl in Iceland. Parents taught their children to read and write and just a bit of simple arithmetic. The Bible was my only textbook. The Preacher traveled through the district twice a year to see that children were studying and to note their progress.

One of my late summer duties was to gather seeds from the plant that grew in the swampy area where the river once flowed. When the seed pods opened they looked like cotton balls. These were made into wicks to be used in the crude grease lamps in winter. Amma used them for wicks when she made tallow candles. We had no electricity.

On the hills behind our farmhouse were patches of wild blueberries and strawberries. Flosi and I would hopefully check them daily when they were ripening. The berries were only the size of peas but such a treat! I can still taste them.





JARLSTATHIR

UNCLE LARUS

STACKS IN FORGROUND ARE  
"SWORD" (PEAT)

by Kevin Wallace 1967

Between our home and the neighboring farm called Kvammi where I played many times, there was a cave. I was never allowed to explore it. To make sure I didn't try Amma told me the story that bodies of men were buried under the rocks. She said the Trolls buried them when they got too close to the cave. I always made sure the I never got "too close". The big fascination was the resounding echoes. I learned later that certain sounds caused echoes and vibrations resulting in rock slides.

In the wintertime grownups would tell the stories and poems of the Icelandic Eddas. I liked to listen to the stories of trolls inhabiting the mountains. Many stories were based on superstitions such as the spirits of wronged persons returning. Another favorite was casting a stone into the river when crossing thereby earning immunity to disasters while traveling. Sometimes when I was going back and forth from our place to Kvammi I landed in fog. It came so suddenly and so thick that I scarcely could follow the path. Amma told me to sit and wait until the fog lifted if it came when I was near the fjords. It would often disappear as suddenly as it arrived. Once I waited a long time and finally made my way home by crawling on my hands and knees.

Iceland had a wealth of natural beauty. The coast in the North was rocky and steep and indented by numerous fjords. Most of the population lived along the coasts especially in the South where the coast was lowland and sheltered. The