

I am Gudny Erasmusdottir from Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland, I was born 6 September 1794 at Kirkulaekur, Teigur, Rangarvalla, Iceland and was the fifth child of eleven children born to Erasmus Eyjolfurson and Katrine Asgeirson. At the age of 16, as was the custom, I sought employment away from home. While working on a farm at Vodmulastadur I met Arna Hafliedsson and we became betrothed and were married 4 October 1828. Our first four children died in infancy. They lived from eight days to two months of age. Then Helga was born on 6 July 1833. The following year on 27 December another little girl blessed our household. These two girls, Helga and Gudny, we raised.



Map of Iceland

Then came the dreadful day of 20 July 1847. My beloved left with a wave of his hand in the dusk of early morning and we did not find his body for burying until the first of the next month. The girls were fourteen and fifteen years of age and so it was time they started working for themselves. In time the girls also married. Helga married in 1854 the son of our Minister in Vester Skaftafella, Svein Thordarsson, son of Thordur Brinjolfursson. Gudny married Gudmandur Arnassen in 1856. Gudny and Gudmandur lived with me. Helga and Svein lived nearby at London.

In 1851 Thorin Hafliedson Thorinson, a cabinet maker, and Gudmund Gudmundson, a jewellers apprentice, returned from Denmark to Iceland. While in Denmark they were introduced to two Mormon missionaries. Gudmund said, "It was then that I for the first time saw our beloved Apostle Erastus Snow. I understood and believed the doctrine taught by him and his companion. I was baptized in the most devoted sincerity and repentance on 15 February 1851." Three months later they received the Priesthood. Thorin was ordained a Priest and Gudmandur a Teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood of the Church of Jesus Christ. Both received a call to labor as missionaries in their home at Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland.

Thorin's activity was short lived however. He was accidentally drowned, leaving Gudmandur with the work to carry on but with no power to baptize his converts. Gudmundur was faithful to his trust and had converts in spite of great opposition he had to face. He reported conditions to Brother Snow who after two years elapsed was able to get Johan P. Lorentzen cleared for a passport. Brother Lorentzen organized the mission. He appointed Gudmundur and set him apart as President of the mission after ordaining Loftur Jonsson, Magnus Bjarnsson and Gudmundur as Elders.

In 1855 the Gospel was brought to my home and by the Holy Spirit I knew it to be true. Thoughts of the Gospel filled my whole being. I could think of nothing else. For the first time in years I felt really alive again. I felt eager, energetic and full of joy. Questions sprung into my mind. What about my dead? My husband, my children who had not had the opportunity to hear the Gospel? All these questions were answered in such simplicity that I wondered why I had not seen it in the scriptures long ago. In devoted faith I asked for baptism and stepped forth out of the water renewed in spirit and body, cleansed and ready to work for my Savior, ask what he may. I was made a member that very day and the Gift of the Holy Ghost bestowed on me. Such a beautiful renewed Spirit! I felt I could do anything the Lord required of me. My life was his. How soon I was to be required--little did I know.

Already the spirit of the gathering was taking hold. That very spring a group left our shore headed for America. America, this land was not a land unknown to me. I had read from my childhood the Sagas of the adventures of Leif Erickson in the new land. My own ancestor was born there, a boy child of Leif's brother's wife and her second husband. These people lived there for several seasons and finally left because of wars with the dark-skinned people who inhabited the area. Stories of the Vikings of old told of the young men sailing their ships on the open seas as most boys today play in their mother's



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The idea took hold slowly at first then filled my every waking moment. Just with the thinking of it I could do the work of two women and at this rate I would have the money saved in plenty of time. Word was received from those who had already made the trip. Freedom, freedom from oppression. A man could work his own land and what a land. It was bigger than anyone could imagine. President Brigham Young himself met them and told them to go to a little valley near the shores of an inland lake. An answer to prayer.

The Icelandic people had always been a proud independent people. They did not want to be subjected to others and that is why they left the shores of the Norwegian people in the beginning. They would not bow down in subjection to the warring chiefs of that day. For years they held their independence, but at last they were overcome by their neighbors to the east of them. They had yearned for their freedom for a century. This was like a light shining in the dark.

Objections poured in from every side. First my children and then my friends thought me addle-brained. But I worked on. On that last beautiful morning, 7 June 1857, I arose while the village slept and hurried down past the kirkyard. The morning dew clung to my skirts as I knelt for the last time at the grave of my loved ones knowing never again in this life would I feel the soft earth of their resting place. Nor would I see this bright rainbow of color from the flowers growing in wild abundance. But now I know I will meet him in the full glory of his manhood, if I but keep the faith. I must go as the sun grows warmer and time is passing quickly now. Already groups are gathering to see us off. Gudny, my youngest, walks slowly towards me. She is heavy with child and little Christine is in her arms. Will I ever in this life set my eyes on her again? Here I will but grow old and die. Going I make a new life for us all. I will go.

The little schooner "Adolfinnia" lay swaying in the breeze. Her sails folded like a huge white bird ready to open up and carry us away nestled to her breast. There were eleven of us at the great cliff of Vestmannaeyjar that morning: Loftur Jonson, Gudrun his kona, her son Jon and Gudrun her daughter, Magnus Bjarndottir, Thuridur his kona and son Christian, myself Gudny Erasmusdottir, Vigdis Bjarndottir and Anna Gudlagnsdottir. Beautiful little Anna who was singing, laughing, dancing and full of love and adventure. In her happiness she did not dread the leaving. She was on her way to meet her sweetheart, Thordur Dadricksen, a young Icelandic missionary. Thordur had sent word for Anna to come and he would send money to England to pay her fare from the U. S. port across the country to Utah. Oh how happy she was. How joyful.

After a beautiful sailing we landed at Liverpool. Here we waited another three weeks for a ship. Each day Anna inquired for a message from her loved one. Each day the message was "It has not been received". What to do now? She could not go on, nor could she turn back. I had no way to help her. I had only the clothing on my back, a change in my case and my ticket. There was a way however. Gudrun, Loftur's kona had watched Anna. She knew she would be a good wife for her son Jon. Had she suggested it yet? No, let Anna worry on. Soon the time for the sailing came. On 18 July we boarded the ship "Wyoming". John carried Anna's basket aboard. Anna's chin set firm. Her face pale, but her trembling lips showed the strain she was under. Her decision was made and she would see it through. Later Jon and Anna had the Captain perform the ceremony. The gaiety of the Adolfinnia boarding was gone. Trails of life began for Anna.

We were six weeks and five days on the high seas. Storms tore at the sails and several times we were blown off course. Sickness raged and it became necessary to ration the water as well as the food. Through these sacrifices our faith increased. We were aware of our many blessings and the administrations of the Priesthood were our comfort. I was blessed and promised that through my faithfulness a safe arrival in Zion and that I would yet live to



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At last land was sighted. We strained to catch a glimpse of it. Excitement overwhelmed me. Finally the harbor of Philadelphia-United States of America appeared before us. The ship was pulled into port by a little boat. I felt like I was watching as in a dream. My! What a racket! Such shouting and hustle. I strained my ears to make some sense out of their gibberish. There were thirty-six Saints on board. The other members were English and Welch. They stayed by themselves and left us few queer looking Icelanders alone. We huddled together not daring to move lest we might do the wrong thing. Finally they roughly shoved us toward the swaying gangplank and on to the shore. Except for the strong arm of Magnus I would have been pitched into the bottom of the sea. Thank God for the comfort of the men of the Priesthood.

We boarded a thing called a locomotive train, such a ride! A trail of iron and thing like a huge sea monster belching fire and smoke angrily moving along like nothing I had ever read in the horror myths of Iceland. I could hardly wait to write my letter back to the little farms telling of the wonders of this great America! The end of the ride was at a place called Burlington, Iowa. We then traveled by hester and great cart fifty miles to a place called Fairfield. Here we were given quarters to stay. We spent the winter of 1857 and year of 1858 here. On 16 May 1859 we left for Florence, Nebraska, the outfitting station, which was located on the west bank of the great Missouri River. We were called to a meeting and men were picked to guide us on our journey. Elder James Brown was appointed president of the company; Joseph L. Farrell sergeant of the guard; John N. Gordon secretary and William Wright the Chaplain. Six other men were appointed over groups of ten: William Steele, Eli Kent, William Gettings, Frank Newburg, Richard Williams, Horace S. Eldredge. Joseph W. Young and George Q. Cannon called the meeting to order and gave instructions for organizing a company. June 13th we started out finally, after a long wait. We had heard fearful stories of those handcart companies who had gone on the year before, but we trusted the wisdom of our Priesthood leaders. We knew nothing would stop us now.

There were 353 people in our camp, 59 wagons, 114 oxen, 11 horse, 36 cows and 41 loose cattle. Approximately six people were assigned to a wagon loaded with all we owned. The wagons contained mostly utensils, food and provisions needed on the journey. There was plenty to do to keep one's mind off the unpleasant things along the way. After walking all day the evening meal was cooked, utensils washed and set away, prayer was said, guards set out and then blessed sleep. I prayed that I would never become a burden to my friends. Magnus and Thuridur were a great comfort and encouraged all of us. Poor Anna, expecting her first child, struggled through each day without complaint. Finally her hour had come and a little girl was born out on the prairie with just the light of a camp fire. She had little help except that of kind Vidges who was to bring many little souls into the world. The little one passed away shortly and was left in a crude grave along side of the camp. Anna rode the wagon for four days then took her accustomed place besides it and walked on.

The sun so gentle in Old Iceland burned through our bonnets like old Heckla spewing forth red hot lava along the trail, burning our skin and drying up the very air we breathed. Even the cattle could not stand it and many died along the way. Mounds of rocks were witness to the many tales we heard of the previous people who had not been so fortunate as ourselves. Each day brought new trials. To ford the streams was fearful. The river seemed to fight to claim our wagons. The oxen plunging fearfully, panic stricken, through the water to the other side. On one occasion women and children were carried through the waters by Indians who could guide us safely over the ever moving quicksands of the river. Sitting astride the horse with both arms embracing the naked body of these heathen creatures was fearful enough without facing the whirling waters and the plunging animals to reach the other side thoroughly soaked, but thanking God the ordeal was over.

Sometimes at night I lay down and dreamed of the peaceful little lakes and brooks, the beautiful flowers and grass of my wonderful little island home. I yearned for it as a prodigal dragging himself sick, tired and mutilated back to the comfort of home, family and safety. But the singing, prayers and constant urging of Kind Magnus carried me through. With thankfulness in my heart, we