

[FREE] The Windows of Brimnes: An American in Iceland

The Windows of Brimnes: An American in Iceland

Bill Holm

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Bill Holm : The Windows of Brimnes: An American in Iceland before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Windows of Brimnes: An American in Iceland:

35 of 36 people found the following review helpful. magical windowsBy Jim ForestSome years back, Bill Holm, a writer and poet of Icelandic descent, decided to visit the island his ancestors had left behind when they immigrated to Minnesota. He not only found himself happy to be there, but has since become one of Iceland's part-time residents, having bought a small house named Brimnes in a village, Hofsos, along one of the country's northern fjords. Mainly he

and his wife are there for the summer but sometimes they manage winter visits as well, when Iceland's "spareness is magnified by snow and darkness." It's a simple life. Their Icelandic-made stove is older they are but does all a stove needs to do, with the not insignificant advantage that the fish cooked on it were swimming in local waters just an hour or two before arriving in the Holm's kitchen. Holm writes: "When Americans ask me to describe my little house, I tell then, not entirely disingenuously, that it a series of magical windows with a few simple boards to hold them up, to protect your head from rain while you stare out at the sea." As a boy growing up on the prairie, about as far from an ocean as it is possible to be, he read books of adventures at sea -- Moby Dick, Two Years Before the Mast, etc. -- and dreamt one day of finding his way to the world where land gave way to endless water with its tides and rollers utterly indifferent to all headlines, ambitions, ideologies and advertisements. In Iceland he found what he had been looking for. Returning to the theme of windows, he writes: "We do not see reality -- or nature -- directly," he writes, "but always through a window of some sort. These windows are often physical, the window of our `place,' our experience, our particular angle onto nature. But they can also be mental, the window of our prejudices, ignorance, ancestors, income, the boundaries we erect around the imagination. The events of our lives, both private and public, spiritual and political, enter consciousness through these dirty, smudged, undersized windows. St. Paul says we see only `though a glass darkly.' Maybe the sea, so big, so deep, so beyond our power to order, so completely without opinions about what it swallows or what gifts it gives, can provide us with clearer views of our own lives, our country, our connection to others and to history. If, in addition, the sea is flooded with unending light for three months [every summer], we might more clearly apprehend whatever wisdom arrived through those windows." Reading *The Windows of Brimnes*, I often thought of Henry David Thoreau and his journal of living in a cabin on the edge of Walden Pond. If Thoreau had been born in 1943 instead of 1817 and made his way to a small Icelandic house gazing out over the cold water of a fjord, his writing would be hard to tell apart from that of Bill Holm: a luminously written report of what he has been looking at and listening to with unhurried, undivided attention, mixed with the occasional ruminations regarding the not-so-far-away mad world he has fled from. Holm's book serves as an invitation to the reader to find a place where, even if the windows one sees through have not become cleansed of every impurity, nonetheless give us a truer view of the actual world that we normally see with dimmed eyes through unwashed panes. For a book like this to work, it cannot be general. It has to be rooted in a specific place. For Thoreau it was Walden Pond. For Bill Holm, it is the remote microcosm of Iceland, home to far more birds than people. He makes Iceland come to life as has no other book or essay about Iceland I've read in the past. It will be a strange reader who doesn't long to find a way to get there, if only for a visit. At the same time, the book is less an invitation to visit Iceland than a summons to step off the highways we find ourselves captives of and to live a more contemplative life. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. This is a great introspective book... By Benjamin Augustine Holm looks deeply into both his Icelandic life and his American life. He writes about the changes in both, their shortcomings and their positives, but he takes mostly a polemicist stance on American life. A great read for anyone interested in Iceland or America. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Can the Old Country be home for us? By Kate I enjoy all of Bill Holm's work. I prefer his essays and poetry. Bill and I grew up in a similar post-immigrant culture (he was a few years older). The Old Country was very present in our American homes. Can the Old Country be home to us? Bill gives it a try, living both in small town America and in a fisherman's cottage in Iceland.

Bill Holm is one of a kind. A Minnesotan of Icelandic ancestry, his travels have taken him all over the world, providing the material for a number of rich and memorable books. In *The Windows of Brimnes*, Holm travels to Brimnes, his fisherman's cottage on the shore of a creek in northern Iceland. From there, he considers the fate of America "my home, my citizenship, my burden" in these provocative essays.