



Kristinn Rúnar Kristinsson is a 32-year-old Icelandic and a lifelong resident of Kópavogur. Ever since he first opened up about his struggles with mental illness in 2014, he has worked to raise awareness about the subject of mental health in Iceland.

Kristinn has traveled widely with his lecture series *My Rollercoaster Life*, which is primarily geared toward teenagers, and he has also written extensively about mental health, a subject that lies close to his heart.

Described as a “sociable loner” by friends, Kristinn was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2009, although his symptoms began in 2002 with a severe depressive episode. In this book, his first, Kristinn focuses on the mania aspect of bipolar disorder.

Allergic to sugar-coating—especially regarding his own experiences—Kristinn recounts his manic episodes, which at once strain the imagination and tickle the reader’s sense of humor. Since 2009, he has experienced four major manic episodes, has wound up in the back of a police vehicle on three separate occasions, and has been admitted to the emergency psych ward five times.



Don't Stop Me

My Life with Bipolar Disorder



Kristinn Rūnar Kristinsson

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Don't Stop Me
My Life with Bipolar Disorder

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Preface

I became acquainted with Kiddi in the winter of 2011. One evening, while studying for my Junior College finals, I noticed a Facebook message from a person who looked vaguely familiar. I couldn't quite place him but thought maybe I had seen him at the bar. Cutting straight to the chase, this "Kristinn" said that he "admired my character" and asked whether we should get together sometime. As he seemed interesting, I said yes. And, boy, was I right to trust my instincts.

Kristinn Rúnar Kristinsson, or Kiddi, is one of my very best friends today—and one of the most interesting people I know. There are few people as lovely, fun, and kind-hearted as Kiddi. Not only do I admire his trustworthiness and kindness (he's a true friend) but also his honesty and openness regarding his illness. When we first met, I knew next to nothing about bipolar disorder (formerly known as manic depression). Over the years, however, Kiddi has helped to enlighten me, and countless others, about the issue of mental health in Iceland. It's at once an admirable and necessary endeavor.

Among my most memorable moments with Kiddi—when I first began to understand the symptoms of bipolar disorder—came during a visit to the gym one Friday in August of 2014. It was the day before Reykjavík's annual Culture Night, and I had the day off. Kiddi and I had decided to meet at Valsheimilið, a



local sports arena, for an early “power workout.” Kiddi was in excellent shape, and I had been running a lot, too.

Because the weather was pleasant, and because I lived near Valsheimilið, I decided to walk. When I arrived, Kiddi was already there—sun-tanned and in an unusually peppy mood. He said that it was “time to take things to a new level” and declared that he had decided to quit Snapchat. “I simply don’t have the time,” he said, adding that “big things were happening.” I gave little thought to his unusual comments but found his decision to quit Snapchat a little strange: he had always been an active user of the app and had never discussed giving it up before. But I shrugged it off.

Kiddi went on to reveal that he had taken a taxi to Valsheimilið, a fact that struck me as rather strange; Kiddi was always driving. He followed this revelation by saying that he had dropped by at the pub before our workout, where he had finished a nice cold beer. He had even managed to rope in a new Herbalife customer: the taxi driver. “I completely sold him on the idea,” he said. This, too, I found a bit strange. Ultimately, however, I wrote it off as the result of his being in a really good mood, given how well everything was going.

After a brief conversation, we stormed the gym for “the workout of the century”—which was incredibly intense. Kiddi led the exercise session like an army general. Afterward, we stretched and gulped down a green smoothie, and I complimented

Kiddi for his enthusiasm, saying that he could definitely become “Iceland’s finest personal trainer” with that kind of attitude.

After the workout, we strolled to my house. Along the way, Kiddi shared a few of his business ideas. We had often discussed the future, our hopes, and our dreams, but there was something peculiar about this particular conversation. Kiddi wanted me to become his business partner—and said that there was no time to waste. He speculated aloud what exactly we should do and how we would go about it. Although I didn’t quite understand where he was going with all this, I decided to humor him. I thought that he wasn’t being entirely serious—that these were mere pipe dreams.

When we arrived at my house, I offered Kiddi a ride to Kópavogur, seeing as I had some errands to run in that part of town anyway. When I dropped him off, I mentioned that my wife and I would be throwing a small party on Culture Night and invited him to come. I remember musing upon his odd behavior. Quickly, however, such thoughts dissipated in the midst of the day’s commotion.

Kiddi attended the party and was in high spirits. When he left, we said goodbye and made plans to get together again in the coming days. During the following week, I tried calling but learned that Kiddi’s phone was turned off. I tried phoning him several times again, but he did not answer. This seemed strange because Kiddi’s phone was usually on. Over the next two days, I kept calling and began suspecting that something

was wrong; besides not picking up his phone, Kiddi had also stopped answering messages on Facebook, and I had noticed that he hadn't been online for a few days either. Finally, I called his brother Ingi—who revealed that Kiddi had been admitted to the psychiatric ward: he had been manic during the preceding weeks.

That's when everything clicked. All the signs were there. Kiddi had been in a state of mania, but as I was unfamiliar with the symptoms, it hadn't crossed my mind. I had no idea how people in such a frame of mind comport themselves. When I finally realized what had happened, it was a kind of epiphany. That Friday, and the days that followed, afforded me a glimpse into the world of mental illnesses—into what it's like being bipolar.

I admire Kiddi's passion and bravery in working to enlighten the public about his condition.

Peace and love,

Kristján Hafþórsson

Introduction

I began writing this book on November 20th, 2017. I had wanted to write it for much longer, as I always knew that I would publish my first book young (mostly because other people were always saying so).

Having gone out for an ice-cream drive with my close friend and actor Kristján Hafþórsson, I recounted a few of my “manic episodes.” When I dropped him off that evening, he said, “Kiddi, I think you’ve got enough material for a book.” “Yeah, you may be right,” I replied, “how does Don’t Stop Me sound?” Krissi said that he liked the title. Being slightly impulsive, I returned home and jotted down the headings of ten possible chapters, along with a brief outline. We decided that Krissi would write the preface, offering a brief account of my mania as an outside observer.

As noted in his preface, Krissi had witnessed many of the symptoms of manic depression firsthand—but had not understood what he was seeing. As I suspect that many are equally oblivious to manic depression, this book aims to enlighten the average reader about the subject, particularly with regard to the mania aspect of the condition (most people will be more familiar with that other side of bipolar disorder). It’s quite startling how uneducated most of my countrymen are on the subject of mental health.



Finally, I intend to donate a share of the book's proceeds to the psychiatric intensive care unit (32 C) of Iceland's National University Hospital on Hringbraut. I've been admitted to unit 32 C five times. Furthermore, if the proceeds are significant, a portion of the profits will also support my lecture series "Raising Awareness About Mental Illness."

When the Sun Never Sets

As the dull day grows longer
Some side of that sweet boy grows stronger
And Jesus, Peter, God Almighty
What a time he's having—crikey!

Always upward, upward, no side motion
Every window's thrown well wide open
And though one, two, three may close
With a snap of his fingers, open they're thrown
There's opportunity 'round every corner

Oh, this sweet, strong hero
In possession of some puzzling power he seems
That by some wholly, holy incredible means
Affords him rare world-conquering grace
Literally launching him 'to outer space

If ever his path you cross by chance
Extend your arm, ask him to dance
For only 1% of the entire nation
Can boast such a fine pupillary dilation

So hop aboard the train and skip to the back
And greet the other passengers with a tip of your hat
Ingólfur Arnarson, Dirk Nowitzki
Each and every pleasant person's frisky
Completely up for a crazy celebration
Unafraid of heights or sharp elevations

Yes, the cuckoo train's leaving the station
With such wondrous, otherworldly acceleration
To arrive, at last, in loveliest Prague
Enveloped by the sun's burly rays
While the city sleeps, quietly, in the early day

– Fanny Sigurðardóttir



Don't Stop Me

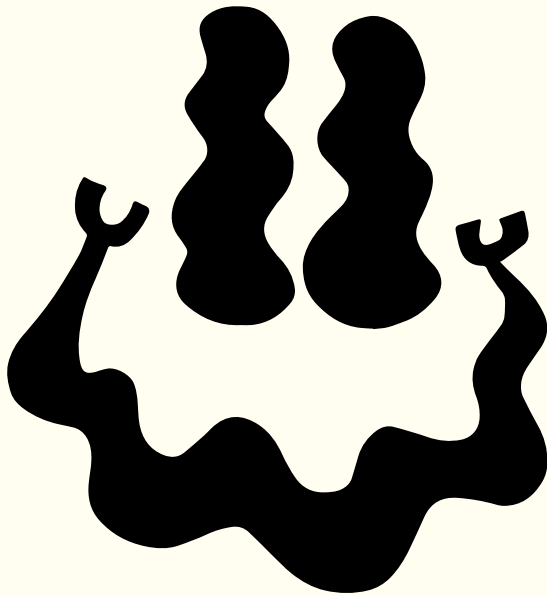
My Life with Bipolar Disorder

“You would never say: ‘It’s just cancer. Stop whining.’

So why would you say that about depression?”

—Anonymous

Trying to Understand Oneself



In 2009, when I was twenty years old, I was diagnosed as bipolar. Some prefer the term “bipolar disorder,” but I don’t like that last part. “Disorder” seems gratuitous. It makes me think of “alcohol use disorder*.”

Bipolar disorder is an affective disorder characterized by alternating episodes of mania, or hypomania, and depression. To be diagnosed, individuals must usually experience both; in some cases, individuals only undergo abnormally elevated moods, but that’s relatively rare.

An estimated 0.8-1% of people over the age of 18 are diagnosed as bipolar globally, suggesting that there are approximately 50 million people in the world who are bipolar today. The statistics vary slightly in Iceland, but there seems to be a consensus that approximately 1% of Icelanders are bipolar**. An equal number of women are diagnosed as bipolar as men, and most are diagnosed between the ages of 17 and 30.

* “Bipolar disorder” is, however, the preferred clinical term. It was formerly called manic depression.

** Approximately 2,500 individuals, if the statistics are accurate.

Symptoms and Types of Bipolar Disorder

There are four basic types of bipolar disorder: I, II, III, and cyclothymia. Mixed affective states commonly accompany each of these types, but they aren't essential to the diagnosis. Each type of bipolar disorder differs according to the nature and frequency of the mood swings. Almost everyone experiencing bipolar episodes suffers from depression and mania, which vary in severity.

Bipolar I, which I was diagnosed with, is characterized by severe manic episodes, so-called "full-blown manic episodes," with a depressive side that isn't necessarily so extreme. This suggests that I'm probably somewhere on the spectrum between types I and II. Upon becoming manic, individuals diagnosed with type I bipolar disorder are often consigned to the psychiatric ward; they can become so delusional as to believe that jumping off a skyscraper poses no real existential threat—convinced that they've got superpowers like, well, Superman.

Bipolar II is characterized by less intense manic episodes but sharper mood swings. Individuals diagnosed with bipolar II can often accomplish a great many things in a brief interval of time without losing their grip on reality. They experience so-called hypomanic episodes that usually last for a few days or two weeks at the most. The subsequent depression, however, can be extremely severe.

Bipolar III—referring to a rare group of individuals who experience elevated mood states when prescribed antidepressants or after electroconvulsive therapy—is probably less well known to the public.

Cyclothymia—a condition that is difficult to diagnose wherein individuals experience mild but sharp mood swings (whether depressive or manic)—is similarly rare but included within the diagnosis. Cyclothymic individuals can often accomplish a lot in a short time and often inspire others to take part in their projects. They rarely finish anything they start, however, and, as if at the drop of a hat, they succumb to a state of mild depression without anyone hardly noticing.

There are also mixed affective states where individuals go through manic and depressive phases in a single day, which can be dangerous*. These individuals must be monitored closely.

Being bipolar can hamper your day-to-day activities and cloud your judgment. A significant amount of time may pass between mood swings, during which time the individual's temperament is normal. Without treatment, seven to fifteen extreme mood swings commonly occur in a lifetime, sometimes a lot more (even with treatment). Some people only experience a single episode over the course of their lives, although such a thing is rare. Being diagnosed late in life is even rarer.

* They're usually depressed in the mornings and manic later in the day.

Bipolar disorder can be traced to many different causes, including genetic, biological, personality, and stress factors. Although there is no consensus among experts as to the exact cause of bipolar disorder, most will acknowledge that many variables come into play, most notably genetic and environmental factors. How much of a role these factors play varies with each diagnosis. In my own case, environmental factors and traumatic events played a much bigger role than the genetic component of bipolar disorder, which may lie dormant through several generations before resurfacing.

It's essential to diagnose bipolar disorder early to prevent frequent mood swings over a protracted period of time without treatment. There are many instances where individuals are unaware that they're bipolar, whether owing to their ignorance of the condition or because they are in denial.

When I experienced my first manic episode and subsequent diagnosis, it was a novel experience for my friends and family to say the least; I've sometimes joked that I must be adopted, given how far my siblings and my parents are from being bipolar. They're hard-working people who put their energy to good use—just that my energy comes in “slightly” bigger doses. Soon after I was diagnosed, I recall relating my experiences to an uncle who was almost sixty years old but who had never heard of bipolar disorder. I remember thinking how little headway we had made as a society in terms of public awareness of mental illnesses.

In the context of bipolar disorder, the primary symptoms of depression vary. Individuals may experience anything from severe depression to mild sadness. Depression comes with low self-esteem and plenty of self-recrimination. Some individuals experience bouts of delusions as well, which hasn't been the case for me personally. What I experienced was exhaustion. I could sleep all day. That's all I wanted to do when shifting between moods. Furthermore, the ennui is deep; on the worst days, there is no purpose to life, and suicidal thoughts abound.

An estimated 4-6% of Icelanders struggle with severe depression on any given day. That amounts to roughly 14-21,000 people. Depression is a genuine mood disorder and not, as some have claimed (mostly the middle-aged), a sign of wimpiness. Irritation, negativity, and impatience commonly accompany depression, and one often finds oneself in a state of absolute lethargy. Everything is no good. Furthermore, a general lack of concentration is sometimes exacerbated by a sense of forgetfulness.

The main symptoms of mania, on the other hand, are tremendous energy and little need for sleep. There's simply no time to doze. A certain extravagance is a common side-effect of mania where individuals spend money imprudently. Embarking on business ventures with other people is also common, and many put their conviction and confidence to poor or good use. As activity and industry increase, manic individuals tend to speak

out of context—they just have so much to say. There's a thin line between anger and happiness, at least in my case, and, in an elevated state, you feel like you're the biggest and the best. The world is yours to conquer. Your creative powers reach new heights, and your horizon seems to expand indefinitely. Some may even feel as if they have been specially chosen by God to change the world, suggesting that it is probably best to stay out of their way.

I conceive of my feelings numerically on a scale of 1 to 10, with the requisite decimal points if further accuracy is required. The zenith of mania is a 10, and the nadir of depression is a 0. If the choice were mine, I'd choose to hover at around a 7 or 6.5, but that wouldn't necessarily be healthy (for one would be erring too close to an upward trajectory). Normal is between 5 and 6. Between 4 and 5, one feels a little flat. Everything below a 4 would be depression.

I would say that those who experience bipolar II, III, and cyclothymia don't generally rise above a 7, maintaining their grip on reality when their mood elevates. Those who are diagnosed with bipolar I may, however, rise as high as a 10: losing touch with reality and entering into psychosis. I'd conjecture that during mania, I've gone as high as a 9.4 and as low as somewhere between 0 and 0.5 when depressed; I don't know anyone who's descended as low as me as a teenager or risen as high as me as an adult.

In Iceland, most people experience elevated mood states as the day grows longer and warmer. Manias do occur in winter, but such a thing is much rarer*. I can't imagine being in a state of mania in the cold and the dark, but maybe one day I'll experience it for myself.

Most Icelanders will admit that everyday life on the island is quite taxing, especially in wintertime, but with the added weight of psychosis or sharp mood swings—even more so. Iceland's northerly climate and fluctuations of light suit me terribly: I'm depressed in winter and manic in summer. It's that simple. There have been some years where I've been on an even keel the whole year-round, but there's just something about the Icelandic seasons that is reminiscent of bipolar disorder. As the darkness sets in and as temperatures dip below freezing, in November or December, my mood grows heavier, and then, without fail, it starts improving after the winter solstice. I feel better in spring, and it's not uncommon for me to begin flying high between June and August. All of this suggests that I would probably be better off living abroad, in a warm, sunny climate, at least while the snow tires are under our cars here in Iceland (from October until April). With the right medication, I should be able to achieve a sense of balance and normalcy the whole year-round, which will hopefully happen as I grow older and more mature. Give it three to four years.

* Stress is often the trigger during wintertime.

How much I sleep also varies. During a manic episode, I can function for several weeks on only two or three hours' worth of sleep a night. While recovering from my mania, however, my body and my brain demand recompense; I've often slept for 20 hours straight (I once slept non-stop for 28 hours). The body and the brain are just completely drained.

Many people recall almost nothing of their manic episodes—the mind just absents itself. It's a little like suffering a blackout from consuming too much alcohol. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and my friends, along with other individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses, have been taken aback by how accurately I can describe the details of my episodes; no matter how I'm feeling, my memory is always sharp, and I can remember the most minute details long after they occurred: license plate numbers, phone numbers, shoe sizes, etc. Pétur Friðrik Sigurðsson, or “the Tank,” as he is sometimes called, once told me that he was hesitant to tell me things—seeing as those things might become immortalized via my memory. I'm grateful for this ability because otherwise, I wouldn't be able to write this book. All of it is quite memorable. If I were asked to estimate, I'd say that I remember approximately 98% of the things that happen when I'm in a manic state.

Childhood

I've always been something of a sociable loner, just as comfortable in group settings as I am at home by myself. I have never felt at home in a classroom, however, for my mind, possessed of a fruitful imagination, cannot function in an environment where I am expected to sit still and learn. This has been a problem—as has my obsession with sports; during my preschool years, I amassed a dozen different sports balls, which I meticulously organized into a specially-made rack in the garage. At school, there was only one ball, which I was expected to share with the other kids. This was such a daily source of torment that my mother, Áslaug Erla Guðnadóttir, allowed me to quit preschool when I was three and a half.

My formal schooling began at Ísaksskóli when I was five. A year later, I transferred to Kópavogsskóli, where I would remain for the next ten years. With the exception of recess and physical education, the entire curriculum failed to inspire me*—especially arts and crafts. Mrs. Egilsdóttir, my first teacher at Ísaksskóli, is to have once observed to my mother: “He seems to avoid those things like the very plague.”

When I was five, my parents enrolled me in dancing lessons. They had done the same for my siblings when they were my age. I did not enjoy these sessions, and when I was eight, during the

* I had not shaken my obsession with sports balls.

death throes of my dancing “career,” I made a habit of hiding whenever it was time for a lesson. I usually sought refuge on the soccer field.

I spent most of my time alone and evinced little interest in other kids. During my early childhood, there were only two boys to whom I grew close (Benedikt Þór Ásgeirsson and Elfar Freyr Helgason). We’ve drifted apart as we’ve grown older, but we’re still friends.

I learned to read by studying the obituaries in *Morgunblaðið**: “I must know if I am related to these people,” I remember thinking. When friends would visit my parents and mention in passing that they had recently lost a loved one, I would inquire as to the person’s name. Having learned the name, I would know precisely whom they were talking about; I was on a first-name basis with all of Iceland’s recently departed. I also made a point of reading everything that their loved ones had written about them, which would sometimes eat up a few hours of the day. I read the sport’s section, too, memorizing all of the soccer stadiums of the English Premier League clubs by name**.

Until the age of 12, I showed great promise in soccer and basketball, and I was spectacularly self-confident. I aspired either to become a professional soccer player or the next Michael

Jordan. Practicing by myself on the court or the field, I celebrated my baskets and goals as if I were being cheered on by a packed stadium of enthusiastic fans. During recess, I practiced signing my autograph, scrawling my name hurriedly—as if a long line of people were impatiently waiting to meet me*.

I’ve often asked my parents, relatives, and close friends what I was like as a child. They tell me that I was a loner, fascinated by all things relating to soccer and basketball—and ravenous for all the newest equipment and merchandise. Sometimes I would call my father at work, and the receptionist would always ask me the same question: “Is this important?” Given that my answer was always “Yes,” my father, Kristinn Jóhannesson, would trudge up the stairs to pick up the receiver. In my defense, was there anything as exigent as the new Adidas Predator cleats—the ones that David Beckham was sporting? If my father approved of a trip to the mall, I would break out in enthusiastic celebration; 95% of the time, his blessing signaled an imminent acquisition. I was always longing for some new thing, but most of the time, I would forget about that new thing if enough time passed. This greatly pleased my father.

When I was eight, my dad finally lost his patience, declaring to my mother and me that he would manage all future purchases**.

* Iceland’s oldest extant newspaper.

** Later, I was fortunate enough to visit a few of them.

* Just like the players of Manchester United had done at Old Trafford, when I had waited in line for their autograph, before a match in 1999.

** I had begun badgering both of them whenever I wanted something.

His announcement came on the heels of a visit to the Kringlan shopping mall, from where my mother and I had returned with brand-new cleats and a soccer ball. Considering that a few days prior, I had also inveigled a few products from him by rather underhanded means, my father wasn't pleased.

When My Life Collapsed

In 2001, when I was 12 years old, my luck ran out. At the same time that the Twin Towers in New York City collapsed, my life, too, seemed to crumble*. As I neither understood what was going on with the world nor with myself, the attacks on September 11th took on a strangely symbolic quality. The city and I seemed to face a similarly daunting task; reconstruction would demand the greatest of efforts.

During the summer of 2001, I gained 25 pounds. I went from weighing 110 pounds to 135 pounds, which is the equivalent of a 220-pound adult male ballooning to 285 pounds in less than three months. The relative advantage that I had enjoyed in sports disappeared in the blink of an eye, and I was relegated to the position of goalie in soccer. This struck a blow to my self-confidence, as it had always been my dream to excel as a striker. I could only console myself with keeping my spot on the A-team. Similarly, my explosiveness in basketball was gone. I could still

* As a child, the World Trade Center had been the grandest building complex in the world.

sink shots from beyond the arc, but my defensive skills were sub-par: a cruel fate for someone who had ranked among the top players in his division during the preceding years.

A year later, I suffered the most severe depression that mental health professionals in Iceland had witnessed. Traumatic events often prompt illness, and the suspicion that my dream of playing professional soccer or basketball had been all but extinguished pushed me over the edge. I had no idea what was happening.

Anxiety resulted in sleep deprivation, which in combination with a general indisposition, meant that I lacked the focus to complete my homework. I started to lag behind in school. I kept showing up to basketball and soccer practice but cut a singularly forlorn figure. Noticing a change in me, my mother asked if something was the matter. Bent on avoiding conversation to the bitter end, I said nothing. Only a few more days would pass until I struck rock bottom.

One day, after soccer practice with Breiðablik*, I visited my grandmother, Guðrún. She lived on the tenth floor in an apartment building in Kópavogur, and the two of us had always been close. Besides feeling generally indisposed, I had also performed miserably at practice—as a goalie no less. My grandmother made pancakes, and we engaged in a rather trivial conversation. There was usually quite a bit of humor to our talks, but not this time.

* My neighborhood sports club.

Thinking that I would never feel better, I strolled out to the balcony and considered jumping. The thought of how much pain this would cause my family impelled me to return inside.

That evening, my dad and I went for a drive. He tried to lift my spirits by telling a few funny anecdotes revolving mainly around my grandmother, who was a uniquely humorous woman. I sat stone-faced through his stories, and when we returned to the driveway, I watched him scratch his head helplessly. Later that night, I suffered an emotional breakdown in front of my parents and confessed how miserable I had been feeling over the past month. We cried together, and I felt slightly better afterward; it was the first and only time that I seriously considered suicide. At 13, an age most commonly marked by youthful carelessness, life struck me as meaningless. Given that I was too proud to discuss my problems*, I had become a danger to myself.

The depression was severe during my teenage years. Thankfully, there was always a similar pattern to my depression. It would begin on days when I felt vulnerable, a feeling that could arise even if I hadn't experienced any negative emotions during the preceding days or weeks. This was how I knew that a mood swing was in the offing. During the first four days of this phase, I would grow increasingly depressed. On the fifth or the sixth day, I would become utterly disconsolate: there would be no

meaning to life, and I would be overcome with complete despair and lethargy. This anguish was necessary for my eventual convalescence, however; it was only at rock bottom that I found the strength to push myself up again*. My feelings would begin to gradually improve, and on the 11th or 12th day, I would usually be ready to return to school.

During my depressive phases, it would fall within my father's purview to check up on me and bring food to my room. Meanwhile, other family members kept their distance. That's how I liked it. The thought of them being aware of my emotional state was too much to bear. I stole away to the bathroom or the shower only when I sensed that no one was around. And I never left the house unless to visit a psychologist or a psychiatrist. Living in a home with eight other people in such a state proved difficult. I was utterly unlike myself, by no means capable of concealing my feelings with a disingenuous facade. With age and with maturation, I would learn to wear such a mask. But anyone who knows me well sees through it. Isolating myself was my way of coping with my illness as a teenager, but I don't especially recommend it.

I sometimes wondered whether sojourning in sunny lands during depressive phases would do me good. In retrospect, it would have been instructive to see whether embarking on a trip

* A lack of openness is a crucial factor in why so many young men commit suicide.

* The good thing about the bottom is that there is only one way to go: up.

abroad, as opposed to isolating myself inside my room, would have had a marked effect on my moods. I mentioned this to my father once—but nothing came of it. In his defense, it was probably easier said than done: jumping onto a plane for some sunny region of the Earth during midwinter in Iceland.

Diagnosis as a Teen

I wouldn't be alive today, much less writing my first book, if I hadn't been able to laugh at myself, at other people—at life itself. Whenever I've felt most miserable, I've always been able to assure myself that there are brighter days ahead, that there is plenty to live for, most notably my family and friends.

During my teens, I was so ashamed of my condition that I asked my father how aware my friends and family were of my depression. They “knew something,” he told me, and I had expected as much. But it felt good being certain.

When I was 13, I was placed in therapy with psychologist Páll Magnússon, and I was to him—as to other psychologists and psychiatrists—a kind of enigma, not only because of my young age but because of the unusual nature of my depressive phases. Because I was so young, psychiatrists were reluctant to prescribe medication, which may have exacerbated the frequency of my mood swings. In addition to being diagnosed with severe depression, I also received a diagnosis of ADHD. Later, a further diagnosis of non-verbal learning disorder was identified, which

meant that I was either very good at a given subject or very poor. There was rarely any middle ground.

During therapy, Páll administered a personality test whose results indicated that geometry and mirror-image problems were generally beyond my ken but that I was skilled in languages, spelling, grammar, and articulation. The most interesting item on the test was a puzzle that involved finding the shortest way out of a burning house—I received a perfect score. Páll observed that I was good at planning ahead. He was right: everything down to my very gait was carefully planned. I moved from corner to corner, as if tracing the outline of a triangle, in the shortest amount of time possible. Without knowing it, I had adopted the so-called “triangle method,” while other test-takers usually took a rather haphazard route. When Páll reviewed my response to this particular problem, he began to suspect that I was on the autistic spectrum, although he never pursued his suspicions further. My mother would later lend credence to Páll's intuition. Alone in my room as a child, she said, pretending I was some famous athlete, I could lose myself for hours on end with my sports balls.

On individual items on the IQ segment of the test, I scored anywhere between 70, indicating a severe mental deficiency, and 140, which is borderline genius. I averaged a score of approximately 108, which is slightly above average*. During the

* There were a few items that lowered my score significantly.

time that the test was administered in 2002 (and again in 2005), I was in a depressive phase. Research has shown, however, that when bipolar individuals are manic, they can score much higher on subjects in which they are usually deficient: everything tends to open up for them in such a state*. Following this battery of tests, Páll met with my teachers and administrators in Kópavogsskóli to inform them of my situation—which was very different from that of my fellow students. In the eyes of my parents, the test results seemed a kind of prognostication. Páll's diagnosis indicated that when I felt really good between mood swings, I was experiencing hypomania: an abbreviated version of the manias I would later experience, where I would briefly become elated without losing touch with reality.

At the time, we didn't fully comprehend what this meant—as no one in the family had ever been diagnosed with bipolar disorder**. Reviewing the diagnosis again, the accuracy of Páll's original prognosis seems almost uncanny. In retrospect, we could have prepared much better for the prospect of a powerful antithesis to my depressive episodes.

During my teenage years in primary school, everyone was understanding toward my illness, although, regrettably, limited

assistance was offered*. My grades were fine—but they were almost always dependent on my emotional state. I missed a third of tenth grade, along with all of the national assessment exams, because of depression. Nonetheless, I was voted Most Humorous in Kópavogsskóli at the annual celebration in 2005. There were good times in between the mood swings.

In the fall of 2005, I matriculated at Kópavogur Junior College, reasonably well prepared, despite bouts of illness during my last years of primary school.

Family and Friends

During my teens, my family was uncertain how best to handle my condition, and I felt that my father was the only one who understood what I was going through. I grew distant from everyone else because they seemed ashamed of me. Looking back, I am still bothered by these facts, despite our otherwise good relationship and despite the fact that we are, generally speaking, a rather tight-knit group. I will concede that it must have been hard for them—my life taking such a sharp turn and they being able to do so little to help—as I will grant that they were probably doing their best; they did send me to various specialists. Nonetheless, their ignorance of my condition was profound, and there was little in the way of advice.

* I would have liked to have been tested on geometry and mirror-image problems when I was manic.

** Both of my families are quite large, especially the Höfða leg of my family. Ragnheiður Kristinsdóttir, my father's mother, was one of 15 siblings.

* This is still the case today, sadly.

I had a handful of friends in school. Whenever I returned following a bout of depression, there was always an uncomfortable silence for that first half-hour or so. My classmates weren't exactly standoffish, but they didn't know how to treat me or what to say—and no one asked me what I was going through or if they could do something to help. My illness was never discussed. Despite not knowing the exact cause of my regular absences, they could put two and two together, intuiting that it was probably something psychological and something serious.

Once when I had been absent for almost two weeks from school, three of my friends decided to ask my little brother Ingi Rúnar, who was in the sixth grade, where exactly I was and what exactly was wrong with me. It was a rotten thing for them to do. The next day I gave them a piece of my mind, and their embarrassment inspired an apology.

During my second season with the Valur basketball team, in the 17 to 18-year-old division, a similar thing happened. Despite having missed many practices that fall, I wanted to continue training, but a new coach had been hired who was anything but understanding toward my condition. My father offered to call him to see whether it was worth giving him a chance, which was what he recommended after the phone call. I showed up for practice for a few weeks until the depression set in again. My teammates knew little about my situation and asked the coach if he knew where I was. “Yes, yes, I know exactly where

he is,” he said, “he is sick at home, but I doubt that there's anything wrong with him.” My teammates later told me what he had said, and I was at once distraught and furious. I sent him a message saying that he was “the least understanding, worst coach that I had ever had.” More people quit shortly after that, and the team never lived up to its potential. There was no love lost between the coach and me at the time, but our relationship has since improved. He was young, and I hope that he is a better coach and a more understanding human being today.

The Pain of the Wane

I cannot adequately describe how painful it was to lag in sports during my teens. I had sensed that much was expected of me—as I had expected much of myself. I was the highest scoring soccer player at the Shell tournament in 1998 with 19 goals. A year later, I was selected to the tournament's dream team, even over a few boys who would later become professional soccer players and members of the national team. In the span of those two years, I scored a total of 28 goals and was at my very best as an athlete. But I peaked too soon. I sometimes joke that Selma Björnsdóttir was singing directly to me when she performed “All Out of Luck” at Eurovision in 1999. It was all downhill from there.

It's not uncommon to speculate upon the unsuccessful careers of promising athletes, and I'm convinced that mental illnesses often play a significant role (in my case, at least). In this regard,

there is much room for improvement—in supporting athletes who struggle with mental health issues, which often emerge during early adolescence: a period of life marked by great vulnerability. During the early days of my own struggle, when my abilities in soccer and basketball were beginning to decline, I wish that my coaches had had more experience. They spoke almost nothing of my illness, there was little in the way of useful advice, and rarely did they confer with professionals. As I wasn't forthcoming with my condition, I would have significantly benefited from coaches with some experience and expertise. Knowing what I know now, I sometimes wonder how things could have been different.

The one upside of not having gone professional is that I am untouched by the arrogance that often accompanies a successful career in sports. Even though I'm honest—I am by some considered the most honest person whom they know—I always try to eschew conceit. Admittedly, however, I sometimes forget myself when I'm manic.

In an especially revealing interview, Heimir Hallgrímsson—the former head coach of the men's Icelandic soccer team—stated that some of the athletes on the team had not been the most promising players when they were younger but gradually evolved into respectable athletes later on. Conversely, a lot of promising players had quit too soon, when their professional careers hadn't immediately taken off. I'm convinced that many of the latter group struggled with mental illness: that they didn't receive the

requisite help, education, care, and empathy during this difficult period in their careers. Almost half of all Icelanders struggle with anxiety or depression, not to mention the more difficult illnesses such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or severe anxiety disorders. All of us go through mood swings; it's just the intensity that varies. In my case, it's like being an unwilling passenger aboard a ramshackle corkscrew roller coaster.

The Very Best Day of My Life

In 2004, following a few inconsequential seasons, I quit soccer but continued practicing basketball. During fall that same year—when I was 15 and in the 10th grade—I attended my first session with personal trainer Sölvi Fannar Viðarsson at the World Class gym in Laugardalur. I was five feet, five inches tall and weighed 185 pounds. I wasn't exactly statuesque*.

Owing to the past years' trauma, I was still experiencing intense bouts of depression, which Sölvi helped me to endure. There were times when I cried during our sessions. Nevertheless, we managed impressive results together, and I was once again able to show my true colors on the court. Sölvi was of invaluable assistance. In the fall of 2005, in what was an incredibly sweet return to form, I scored 31 points competing with Breiðablik's 10th division team: ten three-pointers and a free throw.

* I have always been something of a late bloomer, physically speaking: miles behind my contemporaries.

In 2005, I left Breiðablik with my close friend Kjartan Ragnars because the team had become something of a sinking ship. We decided to switch to Valur, a side that had begun to challenge the most dominant squad in the division: Njarðvík. On March 12th, 2006, we managed to secure a Cup Championship by beating reigning champions Njarðvík 66-60—all by the skin of our teeth. It was probably the very best day of my life*. The victory was especially sweet given not only the fact that Njarðvík had lost only two competitive games over the past seven years but also because the former champions had led by 15 points during the first half. To further compound the drama, our coach, Ágúst Jenson, or Gústi, had committed a technical foul for protesting a referee's call, which afforded Njarðvík the opportunity of increasing their lead. In the end, however—to give Gústi the benefit of the doubt—the technical foul was something of a clever stratagem: it lit a fire underneath the team's collective rear end, with Kjartan and me scoring a third of the team's points, 22 of 66. The ensuing celebrations were ecstatic**.

Gústi is one of the very best coaches with whom I have had the pleasure to train. He is also that coach who never lost faith in me after my illness surfaced. Despite having started that finals game terribly—missing my first five shots, one of them an air-

* The Cup Championship remains the one big title that I have won during my time in team sports.

** I had previously lost something like 40 consecutive games against this the most victorious Icelandic basketball team in the history of the youth divisions.

ball—Gústi kept me in the game and encouraged me to keep shooting. I followed his advice, eventually netting three three-pointers, two of which came in the final minutes.

30-Hours' Worth of Driving Lessons

I experienced significant mood swings during my time at Kópavogur Junior College. These intense emotional variations affected my social life and schooling, although I will always remember those years fondly. The school staff was understanding toward my condition, especially my guidance counselor, Guðrún Sigríður Helgadóttir. She did everything in her power to ensure that I progressed in my studies; whenever I did well, she would send me a congratulatory email, and whenever I struggled to complete courses, she would fight alongside me. Without her, I never would have graduated in “record time,” and I suspect that both of us were equally relieved when my studies finally came to an end.

Perhaps the most memorable part of my schooling was when two of my teachers—who taught me Icelandic and political science, respectively—were convinced that the essays I had composed for their subjects were plagiarized*. As I had shown little interest in my studies and would occasionally disrupt class, I was not exactly a favored pupil among my teachers. But I had

* A fact that lent credence to a diagnosis concerning nonverbal academic difficulties.

a knack for writing essays. Whenever an essay was assigned, I would pull myself together and apply myself—and not without a sense of enjoyment. Once, after having submitted a paper to political science, my teacher confronted me with the words: “Who wrote this essay for you?” More than a little offended, I replied that I had written it myself, that I had spent all weekend writing it*. If she needed further confirmation, I encouraged her to phone my father. Taken aback by my self-assurance, she consulted with the other teachers, who admitted that it was possible that I had written the essay myself: I had my strengths. A little embarrassed, the teacher later revealed that she believed me (although an apology wouldn't have killed her). She never did call my father, though, which was a small victory in itself. In the end, I received an 8.5 out of 10 for the essay. Judging by the teacher's incredulity, however, I think it deserved at least a 9 or a 9.5. Maybe she just didn't like me. Maybe she was embarrassed about making the accusation, given my convincing retort. Maybe she still secretly believes that I plagiarized the essay.

At the time, there was perhaps no better witness to my daily mood swings than my driving instructor, Elvar Örn Erlingsson. There were days when I would struggle to drive fast enough and days when he would have to do everything in his power to persuade me to slow down—to keep me from exceeding the

speed limit. While most people require only 20 driving lessons, I completed a total of 30. As navigating in reverse with the aid of the rear-view mirror proved extraordinarily difficult, I struggled to parallel park. I needed three attempts to pass the written exam but passed the manual driving test after only a single attempt. Before taking the exam, my friends recommended that I drive like “an old woman,” always stopping for pedestrians at the crosswalk, for such exemplary behavior was rewarded (“one simply couldn't go wrong”). In the end, I received only three demerits and passed the manual driving test with flying colors. I was a difficult pupil for Elvar initially, but that goes to show how good a teacher he was. He hasn't had to intervene since.

Mania—the Beginning

Mania is a peculiar state of mind, even more so when experienced for the first time. Some have called it a “flight from depression,” which is not far from the truth. It's like taking amphetamines, cocaine, and acid all at the same time—and the analogy becomes more and more apt as the duration of the mania grows longer. Just as many have smoked themselves into psychosis with marijuana, so that they lose all touch with reality, manic individuals grow detached from the real world by some “natural whiff” of these drugs. The longer the mania persists—the greater the gap between one's mind and reality. This gap seems to manifest itself in the eyes, which are gleaming, red, and wide-open. “Your pupils

* It was an essay on former mayor of Reykjavík and Prime Minister Davíð Oddsson.

were so dilated,” my friend Georg Ragnarsson recalled, upon first seeing me in a manic state: “It was as if you had the entire universe in your eyes—the gleam was visible from miles away. It was like you were high on ecstasy. You seemed completely empty. Your voice was different. You emanated a different kind of energy.” As Georg’s description suggests, it is nearly impossible to conceal your state of mind when you’re manic. It is a hugely enjoyable state, don’t get me wrong—but an extremely hazardous one, as well. Some individuals have met their death while manic.

In the lead up to the summer of 2009, I experienced somewhere between 20 and 25 bouts of depression. This depressive spell was followed by an array of curious changes, beginning in the middle of June. My skin became softer. My pimples disappeared. And I lost a lot of weight quickly*. This wasn’t necessarily all that surprising—given that I was exercising up to ten hours a day and sleeping for about three hours a night**. And there were other changes too. My libido was through the roof. My appetite was small. And I began looking at people differently. I began feeling that I had a better read on them—that I could distinguish between the phonies and the people who were worth my time. Meanwhile, my self-confidence grew unshakable.

* Between two and four pounds a day.

** I would later learn that this is often the first symptom of mania; as one’s energy increases, there is less need for sleep. It’s difficult to sit still when one is flying high. One becomes fidgety. Sleeping is difficult and sometimes impossible.

I began to believe that I could reclaim the soccer abilities of my youth; that I could return to Breiðablik and score ten goals during that half-season that remained of the Icelandic Pepsi League*; that I would be sold to Manchester United in the fall and play alongside Wayne Rooney. And with this belief came action. On July 3rd, I phoned Breiðablik’s coach and introduced myself as “the top scorer of the 1998 Shell tournament.” I told him that I had just seen Breiðablik’s poor performance against Fjölnir and witnessed the fans’ heartbreak firsthand.

“I am just the player that you need,” I declared, “and I will score plenty of goals.” Intrigued, the coach asked me to meet him on the following morning before practice.

The next morning, I awoke in a gallant mood. Given that the Breiðablik sports complex wasn’t far from my home, I decided to walk. On my way, I passed my childhood home on Víðihvammur 23 and had the idea of knocking on the door. When a woman answered, I revealed that I had lived in the house between the years 1989 and 1999 and asked if the house was for sale. Taken aback, she replied that it was not. Undeterred, I told her to “let me know if she ever decided to sell”—as I was willing to pay well above the asking price**.

* Iceland’s Premier League.

** I’m actually still convinced that I’ll buy the house one day. The past has a great pull over me. I even have the word “nostalgia” tattooed on my arm. In that house, I had experienced nothing but wins and happiness. Both of which I have greatly missed through the years.

I met the coach and a few old friends at the Kópavogur stadium. They were happy to welcome such an “upbeat” guy into the locker room, and the coach seemed to take an immediate liking to me. We had a good conversation. Despite his receptivity, I noticed him quietly inquiring about me to the other players. Having introduced me to the team, he invited me to practice on the following day, adding that I should probably buy some cleats if I didn't have any; I was standing there in my slippers. I could hardly afford it, but I took his advice and bought two pairs of the finest cleats money could buy*. After all, I was on the verge of going professional after many difficult years.

Searching for good advice on the eve of my professional career, I called Guðjón Valur Sigurðsson, former captain of the national handball team. Although the two of us are related**, I had never spoken to him on the phone. Nevertheless, nothing seemed so natural as placing a phone call to Germany***. Guðjón seemed surprised when he picked up the phone, and I revealed, entirely out of the blue, and as if continuing some past conversation, that I had started playing soccer again and would soon be doing “big things.” I wanted some advice from him about the near future, I

said—about how best to handle all the success and fame. Seeing as this was my first manic episode, Guðjón had no idea what I was going through, and neither did I. We spoke for twenty minutes, and he seemed optimistic on my behalf. He advised me to be careful, and when the conversation came to an end, stated that he would be following my career closely.

On the following evening, after I had attended practice with the team, the then Director of Breiðablik called my father, who is an honorary member of the club, heiðursblikki* in Icelandic, and told him that there was “something strange going on” with his son—that I couldn't just up and join the first team on a whim. Subsequently, my father and I attended a meeting at the team headquarters in Smárinn, where the director announced, much to my disappointment, that I would have to begin practicing with Augnablik, Breiðablik's reserve team, which was playing in the third division at the time. I agreed on the condition that if I performed well, I would be promoted immediately to the first team. He told me that I “obviously knew how things worked.”

Following this episode, the coach and the director would look askance at me when our paths crossed again later in life, bespeaking a kind of cool prejudice, which I find shameful of adults in their positions; men whom I believed had great experience ultimately behaved foolishly. Maybe they felt that I

* The second symptom of mania is profligacy; one feels much richer than one actually is. A few days before, I had even planned on buying a new Audi from my friend Arne Karl Wehmeier without so much as being able to afford the tires.

** Our fathers are brothers.

*** Guðjón was playing for Rhein-Neckar Löwen at the time and would rejoin the team again in 2016.

* The highest honor bestowed upon members.

had made fools of them. There are only four individuals who have turned their backs on me completely following a manic episode—and they are two of them. Their ignorance all but glistens in their eyes.

At the time, hoping to graduate early, I had enrolled in four courses in summer school at Breiðholt Junior College. It went well initially, despite the excessive ambition involved in trying to complete four courses in a month's time. When the exams started, however, the signs of mania became more apparent; during the three days leading up to the tests, I slept for only seven hours, and everything that I learned dissolved into a kind of muddled porridge. My biology teacher revealed, when we reviewed my exam together, that he had never before in his life read such rigmarole and nonsense*. I failed all of my classes, which proved a costly gambit. In 2018, the cost of enrolling in four classes at summer school was roughly 1,000 US dollars.

Cajoling My Way Into the Cup

During the peak of my adventurous return to soccer, some of my friends and family members worried about me—but had no idea what was going on.

I bumped into three old friends at The English Pub in downtown Reykjavík during a night out on the town. Flying

high, I launched into a passionate enumeration of my future plans, and they—knowing me well enough to recognize that my behavior was far from ordinary—seemed worried. One of them must have sneaked off to phone my father, who showed up about twenty minutes later as I descended the steps to the downstairs bathroom. Standing next to me in the adjacent urinal, he said, “I’ve caught you.” (I still don’t know why he chose those words.) Knowing that my friends had conspired to call him, I took off in a huff. With my dad and three friends on my heels, I yelled, “Why the hell did you have to call my father?”—and asked them to leave me alone. They said that they were worried about me*.

On the following day, I attended practice with Augnablik and performed reasonably well; it quickly became apparent, however, that I was nowhere near fit enough to play in the Pepsi League. To make matters worse, I had slept little during the days leading up to training—catching perhaps three hours a night before launching myself into some new project—and so I quickly became fatigued.

With every passing day, I grew more excitable. I was unable to accept the fact that I would not be playing with Breiðablik's first team in the upcoming derby against rivals HK in the VISA Cup quarter-finals**. Desperate, I called a meeting with the club's

* Given that biology was not my forte, I had tried to conceal my ignorance with long and elaborate answers.

* I know that they did what they did because they cared for me—but there are few things as upsetting to me as my family being involved in my manic episodes. It just serves to make the situation more electric.

** The match took place on July 30th, 2009.

then managing director two days before the game, entreating him to straighten things out so that I could participate in the match; I had lost all touch with reality. When the poor man replied that it wasn't his decision to make and that it was unlikely that I could join the team on such short notice, I declared my intention of decorating the stadium green (Breiðablik's color). "It is out of the question that any of HK's colors or flags will be visible during the match," I announced—and this despite the match being an HK home game*.

In the end, I was unable to make it to the game, but fortunately, Guðmundur Pétursson, who played with Breiðablik at the time, helped advance the team into the semi-finals. Breiðablik went on to win the Cup that year.

My First Involuntary Commitment

A day before the game, my father declared that I had become "quite unlike myself." Trying to appeal to my rationality, he asked me to accompany him to the psychiatric ward: if the psychiatrist judged that I was fine, my father reasoned, we would return home, but if, on the other hand, the doctor advised that I stay—we would heed his recommendation. I agreed. When we arrived, psychiatrist Dagur Bjarnason inquired into the events of the past few weeks. I replied with a lengthy and incoherent monologue

that included the assertion that I had become "a great success." Bjarnason stopped me and announced that I was manic. I had never heard of the concept. Everyone just thought I was "flipping out" a little.

Dagur asked me to accompany him into the ward. As soon as the door closed behind us, I was declared mentally incompetent and involuntarily committed. It was an unfounded decision, for I had not, in any way, met the basic conditions for such internment. According to my medical records, the basis for my being declared mentally incompetent was "a lack of insight," which does not suffice for such drastic measures to be taken. In order to be involuntarily committed, the subject must prove a hazard to himself or others—which I did not. (I'll concede, however, that my behavior was far from normal.)

In the next 48 hours, the Ministry of Justice confirmed the legitimacy of my involuntary commission—and I was rendered completely defenseless*. The first thing that was required of me during my internment was to provide a urine sample, allowing doctors to ensure that I wasn't doing any drugs or alcohol, which I steadfastly denied, and which the sample later confirmed.

Early on, I asked for permission to attend the cup game, stating, quite reasonably in my opinion, that I would go to the

* HK and Breiðablik, who are both from the city of Kópavogur, shared a stadium at the time.

* Today, those 48 hours have become 72 hours. It is now the responsibility of the county magistrate to confirm a three-week compulsory internment, that is if the municipality requests it under advisement from the doctor. Longer internment must be confirmed by the court.

game with my father and then promptly return at the blow of the final whistle. When my request was denied, I attempted to break a window—to jump out and run to Kópavogur. I soon learned that the psychiatric ward on Hringbraut, commonly referred to as ward 32 C, is designed in such a way so as to make escape nearly impossible. As soon as I attempted to abscond, a male nurse stormed the room and entreated me to calm down. Faced with the ultimatum of taking medication or being tranquilized against my own will, I refused to budge, and the nurse called security. Although the act of tranquilizing a patient is supposed to be an emergency measure, security hardly attempted to calm me down. I was forced onto the floor, tossed into the bed, and held down by five grown men while the sixth injected me with Zyprexa. After the injection, I flew into an even greater rage. I was so severely embittered and disappointed by the whole affair that I threatened each member of security, one by one, with murder.

On the following morning, I awoke completely exhausted, with ice-packs scattered across my bruised anatomy, having apparently kicked various faultless objects in the room.

Although the rest of my stay wasn't entirely bad, I remained anxious to be discharged—convinced that I was not in fact suffering from a mental illness. I was made to stay the entire 23 days of my involuntary commission. Despite the lengthy internment, I was still considered “excitable” upon being discharged. But I refused to stay any longer.

After Internment

After a difficult stay at the psychiatric ward—in which I received large doses of drug cocktails comprised of various antidepressants and tranquilizers—my life changed drastically. When I was admitted to the ward on July 29th, 2009, I weighed 215 pounds and was in excellent physical shape*. That following Christmas, four months after being released, I had ballooned to a portly 265 pounds—and had lost interest in just about everything. My love of life had been almost completely snuffed out**. I briefly flirted with basketball again before quitting due to a lack of engagement.

Every day during my involuntary commitment, the doctors administered a sizable dose (600 mg) of Seroquel. By the time I realized how large the dosage actually was, it was too late. The goal was to make me completely numb. Common side-effects of Seroquel include a complete lack of initiative, an increased appetite, and a diminished will to live—which are not exactly appealing outcomes***.

* Given my height (six foot, one) and my body type, being in peak physical condition means that I should weigh around 220 pounds.

** To this day, I have yet to regain my past enthusiasm, e.g. for soccer. Prior to my first admission, missing a game with my favorite sports teams (whether in soccer or basketball) would absolutely kill me.

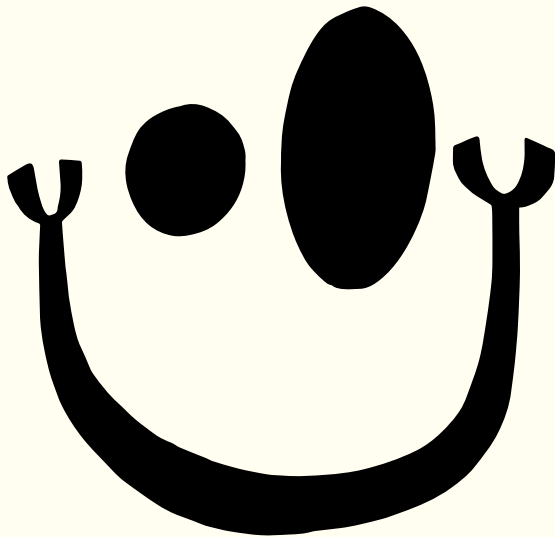
*** I have previously addressed my abhorrence of this medication and entreated doctors to either stop administering the drug or to administer in smaller doses. Sadly, many psychiatrists all over the country administer the drug to their patients as if it were M&M's. I am no longer given the drug; the staff knows my feelings toward it. I have accidentally been given the drug and woken up in the morning only to gorge myself on 2,000 calories in a single sitting: very normal.

The years after my first admission were tough. In January 2010, I decided to change course and signed up for a sports school in Denmark. It was a terrible idea. I had no interest in any of the subjects—soccer and basketball weren't on the curriculum—and all I wanted to do was sleep. To make things worse, the Danes were always singing, and when they weren't singing, they were doing arts and crafts. It was near suicide by boredom. Needless to say, I quit after a few weeks, promising myself that I would never visit Denmark again. I have bad memories from the country, and the Danes have few redeeming qualities. Although I suppose I can't dismiss an entire country based on a few bad experiences.

“It’s a beautiful day. I think I’ll shake
things up a little and skip the drugs.”

–Anonymous

The Prague Trip with Herbalife



Note: To avoid confusion, I decided to dedicate a separate chapter to my trip to Prague, which I embarked upon in the lead up to my first mania.

On July 22nd, 2009, I attended a Herbalife* conference in Prague with over 100 Icelanders. I had been introduced to Herbalife by Skarphéðinn Freyr Ingason, or Skarpi, a personal trainer at the Sporthúsið gym with whom I had grown close. When I first met Skarpi in 2007, my weight vacillated due to my mood shifts, which mostly tended downward. With his help, I had shed 50 pounds, and although we were excited about the trip, there was one slight, unforeseeable hitch: the aforementioned manic episode to which I would succumb just prior to our leaving.

A Big-City Manic Episode

Two weeks before my trip, I took a long and hard look at myself in the mirror: “Are you really going to Prague in such poor shape?” Harnessing my ever-increasing energy—the source of which remained an utter mystery—I put my time to good use. On

* Herbalife in Iceland has not been without its share of controversy, and the negative publicity hasn't exactly inspired confidence in the business. With the proper guidance, however, I'm convinced that there are greater opportunities for forming business relationships abroad, as opposed to getting one's hopes up in Iceland. Although I have tried it, things have yet to pan out.

the morning of July 22nd, 2009, when Skarpi and his wonderful wife Rakel Margrét Viggósdóttir picked me up for the airport, I had lost 20 pounds and was in excellent shape.

Despite observing an alarming change in my behavior, my family refrained from trying to persuade me not to go, suspecting that any intervention on their behalf would only serve to upset me. Knowing that I was embarking on a five-day trip to Prague with little more than a few dollars to my name, they gave me 400 dollars believing that it would be “more than enough.”

At Keflavík Airport, we greeted the rest of our party, all of whom were hoping to soak up world-conquering wisdom or, at least, improve their business at home. (Still others had loftier dreams). Upon boarding the plane—which had been privately chartered by Herbalife, and which was to include a three-course meal—I recognized Geir Brynjólfsson and Óskar Finnsson, two Herbalife hotshots with whom I had become loosely acquainted. At the time, exclusive Herbalife dinner banquets and luncheons were held at the restaurant The Nineteenth*. These meals were conceived of as a carrot for individuals who had achieved measurable results in the business. Despite not having attained the kind of success that merited an invitation, I tried to persuade Óskar to allow me to attend anyway. With a smile on his face, he replied, “I would let you in if I could, my man, but I’m afraid

that everyone who attends must meet the same requirements.” He probably considered my appeals a bit strange, but I think that he secretly enjoyed them.

I arrived in Prague in a gallant mood, forgetting, almost immediately, that the purpose of my trip was business. Under the influence of The Black Eyed Peas’ “I Gotta Feeling,” which I listened to several times a day, I shopped, drank, and generally had a good time of it: adhering to the song’s not so implicit message religiously. As all of us played basketball, Rakel and I were on the market for new shoes. I encouraged her to purchase a new pair, but, at the last minute, she decided against it; I had stumbled upon a pair of Jordans that cost 230 dollars, and she thought it wise to refrain from the transaction so as not to inspire me. Meanwhile, Skarpi reminded me that I only had 400 dollars to my name. I heeded his advice but purchased a Sparta Prague jersey as consolation.

Later that day, upon stepping onto a city bus, I overheard passengers wonder aloud whether Eiður Guðjohnsen had arrived in Prague*; having achieved a physique comparable to a professional soccer player served to greatly boost my confidence. Which wasn’t necessarily a good thing.

* Óskar is a trained chef and was one of the restaurant’s owners.

* That summer, Icelandic soccer legend Eiður Guðjohnsen would join Monaco from Barcelona.

Hot Peppers

As proof of my sometimes manic prodigality—the money that my parents gave me only lasted through that first day. In retrospect, it would have been wise to have been more frugal, considering that there were plenty of difficulties ahead.

With strip clubs on every corner, Prague is famous for its sensational nightlife. Being in such extraordinarily high spirits, I treated almost everyone I knew to drinks—and almost everyone I didn't know, as well. At one point, I even returned to my hotel room to fetch a bottle of champagne to give to those poor people paid to coax passersby into clubs; I suspected that they were poorly remunerated and wanted to cheer them up*.

At a club called Hot Peppers, which my Herbalife colleagues will remember, I bought several rounds of beer for a group of American tourists. When the Yankees took their leave, they left me with a tab that was far beyond my means. I told the bartender that I would take care of it, excused myself, but did not return. On the following night, I went back to the club and was reminded of my outstanding tab by the woman at the bar. Confessing that I was unable to pay the bill, I asked her if she would like me to leave. “Not at all,” she replied, implying that my knack for attracting new clients to the bar—regardless of whether I knew them or not—was well worth my unpaid tab; I had taken regular

walks through the city and returned to Hot Peppers with a large group of partygoers in tow. I was willing to speak to everyone.

Before the Herbalife conference at The O2 Arena on the following morning, I headed down to breakfast without hardly having slept. As I had only packed a single suit, which was sweaty from a long night of partying, I had been forced to wash it in the hotel bathtub*. Dressed in my soaking wet, albeit clean clothing, I met Skarpi, Rakel, and the others, who had a hard time suppressing their laughter on account of my moist attire. After breakfast, we headed for The O2 Arena via the train station. It was the most fun that I have ever had. I was so euphoric and so fried that I burst out into highly contagious laughter at the slightest provocation. My fellow travelers began wondering if I was on acid—a drug that I was unfamiliar with at the time. Their speculations struck me as simultaneously strange and insulting**.

After the train ride, we entered the Arena. My interest in the conference lasted all but an hour, as I was consumed by a desire to return to town and party. Broke, I asked to borrow some money from whomever was standing nearest, but most either had no money on them or did not want to see me do something stupid. Finally, I asked a young couple, of about my age, which I didn't know that well, whether they would be willing to lend me 40 dollars until that evening. They rather reluctantly agreed.

* It's not without some difficulty that I write this, knowing that my parents will read it—and come to understand how I wasted their money in Prague.

* There had been a heatwave in Prague at the time. It was 98°F during the day.

** I was told later that many of my fellow travelers often talked behind my back, which has always stayed with me.

Taxi Driver Trouble

I ran around the area for a while, bellowing soccer chants on the streets of Prague; as a conspicuous fixture of the Breiðablik stands during the previous years, I was used to riling up supporters—although, admittedly, I had never attempted such urban cheerleading before. But I just wanted to get everyone fired up for the evening at Hot Peppers.

I ate dinner at a local bar, downing a few beers with my meal. As usual, I had a hard time hanging on to my money, at once squandering the 40 dollars that I had just borrowed. I called my friend Kjartan and asked him to transfer some money into my account. He agreed, but, contrary to my expectation, the money wasn't transferred immediately; having hailed a cab back to the hotel, the driver complained that my card had been declined. I offered to pop into the lobby to fix it—but he suspected that I was attempting to steal away without paying. I left anyway and entreated the hotel staff to lend me some money. They refused. With the taxi driver hot on my heels, and without Skarpi and Rakel to bail me out, I finally handed the driver my cell phone as collateral, hoping to buy some time. When thirty minutes passed without my securing a loan, the driver sped off with my phone. Furious, I publicized my disappointment in the hotel staff and declared that I was going to organize a manhunt for the driver, which I intended to plan down to its very details. My fellow travelers managed to talk me out of it, reasoning that the

chances of finding him in such a big city were slim; besides, there were only three days left of our trip. Amenable to their reasoning, I put the plan off indefinitely.

Taxi drivers became my mortal enemies during the trip. I once hailed a cab and asked the driver to pull over at an ATM. Feeling that I was taking too long, the driver sped off with my bag sitting there in the backseat*. An hour later, the driver returned to the hotel lobby, having found my hotel keycard in my bag. Spotting him, I scolded him loudly outside the hotel. "Don't you fucking leave with my stuff!" Frightened, he peeled off at once.

A Couple of Snobs

The following evening, we went out for a fancy dinner. I had lost my phone, my friends, and found myself in the company of a few Icelanders whom I did not know. Having placed my order, I leaned toward my seatmate and asked whether he would pay for my meal. "At this table, everyone pays for their own food!" he replied loudly so that the entire table could hear. His snob of a girlfriend echoed his sentiment, remarking that begging strangers for money was beneath contempt. I called the waiter and asked him to cancel my order before informing the couple

* In retrospect, my poor decision-making was likely the result of sleep deprivation (it is rather stupid to leave one's luggage in a foreign taxi).

that I would “never speak to them again*.”

Later that night, all of the Icelanders got together for a party. Still fuming after the dinner incident, I was standoffish—habitually shooting grim looks to the poor couple from the restaurant. The woman’s expression suggested regret, and she teared up to her girlfriends because I wanted nothing to do with her. Put off by the mood of the party, I headed to my home ground: Hot Peppers, a place where people weren’t causing needless trouble just because you failed to pay some measly debt.

Outside Hot Peppers, Halldóra Skúladóttir—who is a good friend today, but whom I didn’t know at the time—pointing to me, said to the bouncers: “Teach him about sex.” Not about to be treated in such a condescending manner, I told her to “go to hell” (among other things) and stormed off. She called in my direction, but I kept walking and gave her the finger. Fifteen minutes later, I had once again returned to Hot Peppers.

Beer Factory

Later that night, I went to McDonald’s. Despite having consumed relatively little alcohol, I was in a potent state of natural high. Upon seeing me, a female employee screamed and dropped a tray full of food. I caught a glimpse of my reflection in the window:

my eyes were so ghastly—so gleaming, gaping, and engorged—I looked like some kind of drug addict.

Every single day during the trip, I ran around the city with an Icelandic flag embroidered on my backpack. I danced and sang inside city buses, even managing to bring a woman to tears after entering one such bus. I will never know what it was exactly that made her cry: maybe she just hadn’t seen such joie de vivre before. I can’t remember a happier time in my life since I was 11. At last, I felt as if the joy and success of my youth had returned for good.

During the night of our last day in Prague, I decided to mix things up a little by visiting more conventional night clubs, which was how I found myself at the Beer Factory. Having noticed me during the previous days, singing soccer chants and chatting with passersby, the owners of the club decided to close a bit earlier that evening because they wanted to make me a business proposition: they were thinking of opening a franchise in Iceland. For reasons I don’t entirely understand, they wanted me to fetch some alcohol before our meeting. Being broke, I scurried over to my hotel, which was on the other side of the street, and emptied the minibar. Not for a minute did I consider how I was going to pay for it, my attitude toward reality reflecting that most famous of Icelandic slogans:

* Obviously, it wasn’t the most decent thing to do, asking strangers to lend me money. But their reactions were overblown. To this day, I’ve kept my word and have not spoken to the couple since.

„petta reddast” (“It’ll work itself out”)*.

Well into the night, the owners of the Beer Factory and I discussed the details of our future business partnership. When I told them that I would be leaving tomorrow, they asked if I could return to Prague at my first convenience. “No problem,” I said, “I’ll come back immediately.” After the meeting, I took a bath and was overcome with an unprecedented sense of calm. This unspeakable serenity confirmed that I had just finalized some wonderful deal and that fantastic times lay ahead.

Unfortunately, the terminus of my mania was reached when I arrived home. My father never believed my Beer Factory negotiations and had no interest in returning to Prague with me. To this day, it remains one of the biggest regrets of my life.

A Dashing Dame

On the third day of our trip, Skarpi confessed that he was worried about me. My behavior was so strange; he just couldn’t keep up. I was always off to someplace new. It was remarkable how calm and conversational I could be in between my erratic bouts, he said, “but then, without fail, ten minutes later, some new idea pops into your head, and you take off.” Trying to stop me or slow me down was easier said than done, and Rakel was often the one

looking for me (“There he is!” I once overheard her say)*.

I wanted to stay in Prague for much longer. When it came time to fly back home, however, deep down, I knew—despite the agreement that I had struck with the owners of the Beer Factory—that I would not be returning any time soon. When we arrived at the airport, I was so completely engrossed in my own little world that I rushed inside without taking my bags. Skarpi yelled in my direction from 50 yards away. He wasn’t pleased.

On the airplane, I sat next to two dashing Icelandic women, who had likewise attended the conference. I took an instant liking to one of them and became convinced that influential members of the organization had arranged the seating: we were to become a kind of power couple and form a business partnership. This made sense because on the flight to Prague, I was seated next to Skarpi and Rakel, and now I was sitting next to her. Someone wanted it this way. Long story short—we never became a couple. We did, however, have a long and pleasant conversation. But I never saw her again.

I have visited the Czech capital twice since the Herbalife trip. First, in 2014 and again in 2015, when I almost decided to move there. Ultimately, however, I decided that a weekend jaunt to my women friends at Hot Peppers would have to do. I have traveled

* It was Skarpi who wound up paying the bill when we left the hotel. He wasn’t too happy about it either. During those five days, I had spent a total of 1,200 dollars—none of it mine.

* My state of mind had a significant impact on their trip. Later, they told me that the trip was quite the learning experience. After a few days in Prague, the goal of the journey had become to get me back home safely. They cared for nothing else.

widely during my life but have never felt a stronger connection to any city than Prague. This connection is probably to be chalked up to that first memorable trip, which I regularly think back on with fondness (despite all of the trouble that I experienced). The good times and the mania overshadow the bad. Revisiting the city, five years later, in a normal state of mind, was unreal. I still knew the city well, for I had immersed myself in it in 2009. One day, I plan on moving to Prague for good. I hope my plan pans out.

“There is no great genius without
some touch of madness.”

–Aristotle

Traffic Control Near the Smāralind Mall



Five years passed between my first manic episode and the next. I experienced severe depression after the first mania, and the period between the latter half of 2009 and early 2011 was challenging. In December of 2010, I had entered into a mixed affective state, which is dangerous; in the space of a single day, I would experience a lofty mania and a deep depression. Christmas of 2010 was the most difficult time of my life. At my wit's end, I combed the internet for help, but I could only blame myself. That summer, I had tossed out all of my medication, convinced that I would never lose weight while taking them. In less than a year, I had gained 70 pounds, and I couldn't imagine anything in my immediate future that would change that. Three months after I quit my medication, I had managed to lose 40 pounds.

Electroconvulsive Therapy

It wasn't the smartest thing to do—quitting my medication cold turkey, and during the subsequent months, I lost all sense of equilibrium. I briefly began retaking my medication during the fall of 2010, before quitting four days later because of dizziness and blurred vision. I began discussing the option of electroconvulsive therapy with my former psychiatrist, who revealed that I could be accepted into treatment almost immediately. I researched the therapy and was optimistic, undergoing nine sessions in

four weeks in early 2011.

Electroconvulsive therapy was first employed to treat bipolar disorder in the 1930s. After the patient is put under with light anesthesia, electrodes are placed on the patient's head, and a slight current is passed through the conductor to induce a mild seizure. The seizure must last for at least twenty seconds to prove effective and sometimes for as long as a minute, depending on the patient. Following the advent of psychiatric drugs in the 1950s, however, the therapy gradually became less prevalent.

According to my conversations with psychiatrists, approximately 80% of patients who receive electroconvulsive therapy respond well. In my opinion, it remains an underrated form of treatment. It helped me return to an even keel, so much so that I have considered undergoing electroconvulsive therapy every month and skipping the drugs*. In light of my own experience over the last decade or so, I place greater faith in electroconvulsive therapy than in psychiatric drugs. Some individuals disapprove of the therapy, citing an unfavorable response or short-term memory loss**.

Through the years, the discourse surrounding electroconvulsive therapy has not been positive, vis-a-vis, for example, its depiction in Hollywood movies. Despite its stigma in

popular culture, the treatment is administered in a professional and safe manner at the National University Hospital of Iceland on Hringbraut, and over the years, it has improved. The therapy is usually only administered to patients who struggle with severe depression and when psychiatric drugs prove ineffective.

Long story short, the therapy worked exceptionally well for me. At its conclusion, I had become more active and felt a lot better. The only side effect that I experienced came on the heels of my first session: a sore jaw on account of some vigorous gnashing of the teeth along with nausea caused by the anesthesia. I vomited on my way home. That was it. The other sessions were without the slightest hitch.

Between the years 2011 and 2014, I experienced many personal triumphs. I lost 110 pounds with the aid of Herbalife (it's usually all or nothing for me). In just eight months, I went from being in the worst shape of my life to the best. I graduated with a diploma from MK, which only took eight years*. And Between 2011 and 2014, I finally achieved a sense of stability that I hadn't experienced since 2001.

I stayed in Mexico and Puerto Rico for a total of seven months in 2013 and 2014**. I felt good. I learned Spanish in a jiffy and didn't experience any mood swings. The sunshine and heat had

* Such a thing is a well known, albeit slightly rare, regimen.

** The same can also be said of psychiatric drugs: some are effective, while others have little or no effect and may even have a negative impact.

* As I've mentioned, book learning has never been my forte. All that mattered was graduating. No one whom I've met has ever asked me how long it took me to graduate from Junior College—and it doesn't matter.

** I could write a whole new book based on those experiences.

a positive effect on me. Upon my return home, however, and after my former psychiatrist had slightly decreased my dosage, just five months passed until I experienced my second mania. My father maintains that the change in dosage was the reason for my manic episode—but I think I know the real reason. There's always something that triggers the mood swings. In some cases, nothing out of the ordinary is required.

In Iceland, all it takes is a little more sunlight and a little more heat.

Under the Influence of Robin Williams

On August 11th, 2014, the American actor Robin Williams—one of history's funniest comedians—took leave of this world of his own volition. The news of his passing struck me hard, as I am sure that it affected many others. Besides suffering from Lewy Body Dementia, Robin Williams had also been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. His untimely death is a testament to how money, fame, and good humor aren't necessarily a recipe for the perfect life. Approximately 18% of bipolar individuals commit suicide, with a much higher percentage attempting to kill themselves in their lifetimes. Given my diagnosis, I am obviously at some risk, although I hope that the gravest danger has passed. (I'm convinced that I've already hit rock bottom.)

On August 13th, 2014, a former classmate at Kópavogsskóli, Íris Hrannardóttir, shared a post on Facebook. "It's about time

we raise awareness about mental health in Iceland," she wrote, encouraging readers to open up and share their stories. Moved by her words, I felt that I could no longer conceal my struggle. This was the perfect opportunity to open up. I composed a draft on Facebook—but deleted everything I wrote immediately. Sweating and trembling, I felt that it was all too much too soon. I stepped outside for some fresh air and considered my next steps. Having so much to say, I imagined letting it all pour out, picturing people sharing my post and replying to it constructively. I imagined fielding phone calls from journalists eager to report on my experiences. The truth was that during this time, mental health wasn't a part of the public discourse, with people rarely opening up about their struggles. Furthermore, there was a particular shame associated with mental illness, which I myself was familiar with firsthand. Just over a year later, the #I'mnottaboo* hashtag would trend on social media. It was a fantastic initiative in which a few thousand Icelanders opened up about their struggle with mental illness. Around the same time, the Red Cross' Help Line was overloaded with phone calls, and the Icelandic Mental Health Alliance (Geðhjálp) launched their #outwithit** prevention effort to encourage openness and to raise awareness of the high rate of suicide in Iceland, especially among young men***.

* #égerekkítábú

** #útmeða

*** A considerable increase had taken place in suicide among young men.

What I foresaw came true. The reaction to my post was beyond expectations. At noon on the following day, a journalist from Pressan called and said that he wanted to write up a news report. The article was published under the headline, “There Were Days When I Could Find No Reason to Keep Living.” It seemed somehow symbolic because Pressan had always been my favorite online media outlet*.

In retrospect, it was clear that a new mania was in the offing. I published the Facebook post in a fit of anxiety with more than a few spelling mistakes, which was unusual. But I cannot begin to explain how cathartic it felt. Receiving dozens of positive comments and personal messages engendered a sense of freedom.

My parents were proud of me for having finally opened up.

A Thin, Thin Line

I kept my struggle with bipolar disorder to myself to begin with, deathly afraid of being misunderstood or discriminated against. As it turns out, I have perhaps been more troubled by my own shame than by the prejudices of other people. Even though struggling with a mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, I find that you're always overthinking things. You shrink from discussing concepts that begin with the word “mental” and

shy away from all related topics. It was perhaps this general sense of aversion that I feared most. Prior to my opening up on Facebook, I had reacted badly whenever someone attempted to discuss bipolar disorder. I did not want anyone to be aware of my condition.

In 2012, I was in the early stages of a relationship when a friend of the woman's sister suggested that dating me would prove difficult in light of my mental illness. When I learned of her admonishment, I was furious. The woman begged me not to confront her sister's friend, but I couldn't resist. I sent her a strongly-worded message on Facebook, asking if she intended to disseminate further warnings—whether my condition was the first thing she brought up whenever my name was mentioned. Finally, I asked her not to blabber about things of which she was ignorant. She apologized.

Speaking ill of those who struggle with mental illness is absurd—and so is avoiding the conversation. What are people to do if close friends or relatives fall ill? Turn their backs? I think many people are in need of some serious soul searching. Today, I'm not the least bit ashamed of who I am. Bipolar disorder is a part of who I am—it's the life that was chosen for me. I've been asked if I would prefer to do without the mood swings if the choice was mine. My answer often surprises people. “No.” Simple as that. I'm not saying that it isn't, at times, difficult. Just that the mood swings have taught me so much. I've gone

* In 2016, I became a writer for Pressan and published several pieces.

through so many things that most people don't get to experience. Fluctuating emotionally is so much more fun than living a flat and boring life.

Manic energy can also be harnessed to accomplish extraordinary things, and many of history's greatest geniuses have been bipolar. Vincent Van Gogh, Jimi Hendrix, Amy Winehouse, Ben Stiller, Winston Churchill, Kurt Cobain, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Jim Carrey, for example, have all managed to harness their manias without losing their grip on reality. There's a thin line between madness and genius.

Research has also shown that individuals who struggle with mental illnesses commonly possess an above-average IQ, with outstanding students being four times more likely to be diagnosed with bipolar disorder than average learners. These individuals are usually highly creative, imaginative, boast an excellent memory, and a sizable vocabulary. Some of the artists mentioned above died prematurely but left behind enduring works of art*. I hope to employ my manic energy toward positive ends in the future, offering further proof that mood swings are neither the result of genetic flaws nor entirely without purpose.

So far, I have been unable to control that energy. I have not been able to use it to create something enduring, except for memories. Which is something.

* Some of history's most remarkable paintings, plays, and buildings have been conceived during manic episodes.

A Manic Personal Trainer

The days that followed my Facebook post were a lot of fun. I felt as if a great burden had been lifted from my shoulders, and I began seeing life in a different light. I phoned my former classmate at Kópavogsskóli and thanked her for taking the initiative, and she expressed how happy she was to have helped spark a change.

I had been selling Herbalife products intermittently, but now—I went all in. I bought a notepad and wireless headphones and began making calls. I not only phoned my closest friends and relatives but distant acquaintances as well, including friends whom I hadn't heard from in a long time. The jitters had completely left me, and my powers of persuasion seemed to have returned. Most of the people whom I called evinced little interest, however, despite my saying that I had lost 110 pounds with the aid of Herbalife.

At the time, I decided to enroll at Keilir's Health Academy to become a certified personal trainer. Having been manic for almost a week, I attended a weekend seminar on team building and emergency care. The first day's assignment was a manual training course on first aid. During the course, half of the class was told to remain inside the classroom and pretend that they were recovering from first-degree burns. The other half of the class—the one I belonged to—was instructed to check on the “victims” well-being and spread a fire blanket over them.

That was it. Misunderstanding the assignment completely, I burst into the room and melodramatically yanked my partner out of the room. The funny thing was that everyone followed suit: all of the burn victims were violently tugged out of the room. “Whatever happened to just checking how they’re feeling!?” the instructor said, guffawing. The whole group burst into laughter. I had begun losing my grip on reality. But I had yet to reach the zenith of my mania*.

Fear of a Broken Ankle

With every day that passed, I slept less and ascended higher. My cousin Stefán Sigurðsson spent the night with me on several occasions, and we engaged in many long and productive conversations during that month of August. He compared my condition to a camera. “It’s as if your lens grows wider when you’re manic.”

I was living at home with my parents at the time, which greatly complicated matters. I tried to conceal my feelings and often made it look as if I were sleeping when I was actually wide awake and waiting to abscond into the night. I did not want them to worry. After a few days, however, my condition was such that I could no longer keep it a secret. I fought with my family, mainly

* I was probably in a hypomanic state at the time.

my father, who I felt was constantly stepping on my toes, lecturing me about the ways of the world. His overbearing manner did not sit well with me and served only to exacerbate the situation. More often than not, I stormed out of the house in a rage.

As cohabitation with my parents proved impossible, I sometimes sought refuge elsewhere. On one such occasion, I took a jaunt to the countryside to visit my friend Sonja Pálsdóttir and her husband Unnar Freyr Óskarsson, who owned a cabin in Grímsnes. We had decided to spend a nice evening together and eat grill food. I had only just closed the gate behind me when I slipped and fell quite violently to the ground. When they opened the door to greet me, I was standing there, all bloodied and bruised. Returning to my car to retrieve a sweater, I jumped off the porch and twisted my left ankle on the uneven grass. I felt a crack, which to anyone else would probably have inspired a sense of caution. But not me.

After grilling, we jumped into the hot tub. It wasn’t the smartest thing to do, considering that it would have been wise to ice the ankle. When I took leave of the tub, I could hardly place any weight on my swollen foot. Thinking that I would be unable to drive my car, a stick shift, back into town, I phoned my father, who agreed to pick me up*.

* I can always trust my father in such situations. Although the trip to the cabin was brief, I enjoyed being in the company of good friends, who were granted a taste of mania up close.

The trip home took an hour, and I used the time to ask my father very probing questions into his past business dealings, which was something that I had never done before. He was starting to sense that I was becoming more and more manic.

My father took me to the emergency room in Fossvogur where I received an X-ray. It took some time to determine whether my ankle was broken or just badly swollen. After a considerable wait, the doctor concluded that I had twisted my ankle severely, occasioning bruises from my knee down to my toes. I was instructed to rest over the next few days and given pain killers, crutches, and an ice pack. I went home and iced my foot for a long while before retiring to bed and sleeping a few hours. In the early morning, when I awoke, I drew a bath, took some pain killers, laced my sneakers tight, and embarked on a new adventure. Without my crutches.

Genius

Being in the aborning stages of mania, with a twisted ankle no less, I made a deal with my parents to hand over my car keys. Driving while manic is not sensible—especially if you think you're being followed, which I sometimes did. Without the paranoia, however, being manic actually improves your driving abilities. You're more sensitive to the clutch and enjoy a broader perspective on the road. You *do* tend to drive too fast, however, compelled by some unreasoning logic to make it from point A to

point B in the shortest possible time*.

Having consigned my keys to my parents, I was left with no other option than traveling on foot. Every day, I would walk dozens of miles.

Three days after I twisted my ankle, I summoned my family into the living room and announced that I was “slowly beginning to realize what was happening: I had been touched with a rare stroke of genius.” This declaration terrified them, of course, as did observing the extent of my transformation, which had occurred in the space of mere days. Magni Rúnar, my youngest brother, 14 at the time, broke out into tears, which was when my family recommended I admit myself to the psychiatric ward. Not wanting anyone to spoil my elation, I declined**. It was the most frenzied mania I would ever experience.

Convincing a manic person to admit themselves to the psych ward is easier said than done. In this country, it's likely that the individual has suffered through many months of deep depression before gradually becoming manic as the days grow longer. In light of this, it's only natural to cling to any feeling of euphoria***. Voluntarily admitting oneself to the psych ward is

* Nothing, on the other hand, is worse than driving depressed; universal fear makes for poor motoring.

** All things being equal, I get along just fine with my family (i.e. when I'm in a normal state, about 85% of the time), but when I'm manic—especially during manic episodes like that of 2014—their fixation on bringing me back down to Earth estranges me.

*** The elation of mania equals the despondency of deep depression: these are polar opposites.

much more reasonable, however, as it will serve to temper the subsequent depression.

I've often wondered whether it's best to preempt these situations with a familial agreement. Such an understanding was never established between my family and me, although they certainly tried their best to help. Someone once observed that "you don't argue with a manic person," and I wholeheartedly agree. The manic person is always in the right. I've seldom heeded anyone's advice in that condition, and my family has learned the hard way to leave me be.

Family quarrels—especially with my father—have only served to escalate the tension. My father has always tried his best, but we don't agree on the issues. Throughout the years, our close friendship has been punctuated with collisions. He doesn't know how to handle my abnormally elevated mood swings, and sometimes he tries too hard. When I'm manic, my plans are too big for his taste, which means that things often take a turn for the worse. It is perhaps unsurprising that he believes he knows better than me, given that he's almost four decades my senior.

When two bull moose lock antlers, you can expect something of a spectacle.

World Domination and Ronaldo

I often recorded videos of myself on my smartphone for YouTube, where I would delineate my imminent world domination to my viewership. Sometimes, I would broadcast my business ideas, some of which related to my failure to understand why certain areas of Kópavogur weren't living up to their full potential. At other times, I would announce lofty plans from the inside of my bedroom. "I plan on meeting all of the inhabitants on Earth," I once declared, while having sense enough to qualify my proclamation with the admission that, logistically speaking, organizing a private rendezvous with more than seven billion people might prove slightly difficult. At another time, I had the idea of catching a glimpse of every single person in Iceland by sitting down at Café Bleu at the Kringlan shopping mall and watching shoppers as they went up and down the escalator. Needless to say, I'm glad that I decided against the project, as I am glad that I never published these videos online.

When I launched my project Raising Awareness of Mental Illnesses two years later, I edited these videos together to provide insight into the phenomenon of mania. I had 40-minutes worth of material and enlisted the aid of my friends Sindri Þór Kristjánsson and Ragnar Snær Njálsson to create a six-minute highlight reel. I hadn't shown anyone these videos and found them difficult to watch myself. I am probably the only Icelander

to have published a video of himself in a manic state, at least in such a professionally-edited manner*.

In the video, I proclaim my complete dominion over the world, declaring that I am going to change people's lives for the better with my energy and positivity. I also declare that I have gotten into perfect physical shape in the space of only ten days; that I am going to become the world's greatest athlete; that I have achieved ambidexterity in basketball and plan on obtaining an NBA Championship ring; and that I am going to reach the highest rung on the Herbalife ladder: the Founder's Circle. My plan was to begin by conquering Iceland—by transforming it into an investment paradise—before shifting my focus abroad, all the while recruiting anyone and everyone to my cause.

During the following days, at the very height of my mania, I continued to record myself on every occasion. I felt like a god on Earth: as if the spirit of the Supreme Being was manifesting itself to the world in the form of a blue-eyed, blond, 25-year old Icelandic man. I was destined to change the world and convinced that everyone else was secretly aware of my kismet.

I had become so attuned to the world that I began hosting makeshift seances inside my room before bed. Everything was in a whirl, and I began to sense the presence of departed relatives—

especially my late grandmother Guðrún. One night, I fell asleep only to be roused ten minutes later by her distinctly clear voice. “You can do anything, dear Kristinn.” It struck me that perhaps my grandmother had exercised complete dominion over the world during her lifetime and that she had passed the proverbial baton to me when she died in 2011. Over time, her energy and joy would begin to manifest itself*. After that night, I began hearing a buzzing in my right ear, which definitely signaled a direct connection to a higher authority.

After a session at the gym on the following day, I called my friend Kjartan and announced that we had become the richest men in the world. He knew that I was in an elevated state, but suspecting that I would respond negatively, he did not try to bring me back down to Earth.

Walking through the Smári neighborhood in Kópavogur, I took a selfie next to a Herbalife ad featuring world-renowned soccer-player Cristiano Ronaldo. I posted the picture on Facebook and Instagram with the caption, “Let's change the world! It's on! Thank you, everyone, for the support. It means everything to me. Cristiano, let's rock this! #herbalife #cristiano.” I was not only convinced that the post would garner as much attention as when

* The video was entitled *The Man Who Was Going to Conquer the World* (Manic Episode), and it is accessible on YouTube. It was exceptionally well received, garnering 15,000 views during the first four days.

* My mother told me that when I was little, I only wanted to be with my grandmother. Before she died, I was undergoing electroconvulsive therapy and severely depressed. I visited her in the hospital in 2010, when her life was hanging by a thread. She hadn't moved all day. When I entered the room, however, she became animated—as if she wanted to tell me something.

I opened up about mental illness two weeks earlier but also that Ronaldo himself would see the picture and that it would result in some kind of collaboration*. In the end, I received only 37 likes on Facebook and 11 on Instagram. Most people just thought that it was some bizarre joke**.

In front of endless rows of cars on Hafnarfjarðarvegur, I danced and sang loudly to The Man by Aloe Blacc. I was experiencing Heaven on Earth.

Paranoia

I asked my father to drop me off at the World Class gym in Laugar. Knowing that I was being followed, I engaged in imperious backseat driving***. If my father accidentally activated the turn signal when I had asked him not to, I would scream at him. He tried to persuade me that I was paranoid, and so I encouraged him to take a look out the window and see for himself—to observe the suspicious turns cars were making in order to draw closer: surely he wasn't so stupid as not to notice. I revealed that I wanted to rent an apartment just beyond the city limits

* Ronaldo is sponsored by Herbalife.

** When I later asked those who had liked the picture what they thought of it, almost everyone revealed that they thought that I had been kidding, not suspecting that I had become manic a few days earlier.

*** It was one of the worst cases of panic that I've experienced: the fear that something would happen to me or that someone was following me. As far as this particular mania is concerned, I regret the scene with my father the most; he did not deserve that kind of treatment.

of Reykjavík to escape the city's hubbub. Being all too familiar with the fleeting nature of my rambling thoughts and wanting to calm my nerves, he replied that there were probably plenty of apartments available. When we drew closer to the gym, I told him that if there was any traffic at the lights by Laugardalur—that if a row of cars were waiting to make the turn—I would jump out of the car and make a dash for the gym on foot. As this was the case, I made a run for it, eventually speeding through the gym's reception with music blaring in my ears.

Unable to cope with this superabundance of energy, I found myself performing manic exercises in the gym—which were sometimes accompanied by random screams. People considered my behavior strange, but the only comments I received were positive. “That’s some focus you’ve got going on there, man!” an acquaintance observed. “Really going all out, that’s great!” another person commented*. Yet another acquaintance, whom I had met during a night out on the town, told me that I was “looking good:” he had seen the glint in my eye and thought that everything was going my way, which it was, possibly—albeit not in the way that he suspected.

Just like my first manic episode, I had begun conceiving of myself as a professional athlete, imagining that I was training for a Champions League match in soccer or an NBA game. It was

* I looked healthy, exercised up to six hours a day, and lost approximately two pounds a day.

only a matter of time until world-renowned clubs would offer me a contract.

Despite this chaotic irreality, I was having a fantastic time. Some of the gym sessions at Laugar were undertaken for the sole purpose of attracting attention to myself. Often turning the heads of patrons, I did regular sprints on the mezzanine so that the whole gym trembled. Admittedly, this was far from the optimal place for a 250-pound man to do sprints. Someone could have easily walked out onto the platform from the adjacent rooms*.

After one such session, I cooled off in the pool. There was a light spray outside, which was exactly what I wanted after vigorous exercise. I swam a few laps and performed a series of rather manic leaps into the pool—usually off a single foot. I struck up conversations with the elderly and encouraged them in their swimming. One man revealed that in the olden days, he could swim half a mile in twenty minutes. I replied that he would soon regain his former abilities—there was “so much energy in the air.” Bemused, he kept swimming. After all the jumping, I challenged swimmers-by to a three-point contest. I had been excellent from long range when I was younger, and after a few practice attempts, almost all of my shots swished in the pool’s chain net. An inordinate number of swimmers took up my challenge when I tossed them the ball. I also participated

* The area is more intended for less hectic exercises, like lunges.

in a few beach volleyball games, which proved a little tough; the games were long, and I had slept little over the previous nights.

After the swim, I headed toward the Kringlan shopping mall—looking for attention. Upon my arrival, I felt quite strongly that people were looking at me, and so I dropped in on a few stores and walked several circles before heading back out toward Skeifan*. The traffic was steadily becoming heavier, and the cars were driving faster. Uneasy, I decided to run. To attract even more attention to myself, I ran through a red light by the store Pfaff and took a beeline for the Hagkaup supermarket. My friend Þorsteinn Grétar Júlíusson, known familiarly as Grétar, called out to me. I jumped into his car and greeted him along with his then-girlfriend and their dog.

Grétar asked me why I was running around Skeifan. “Can’t you see I’m being followed!?” I replied, somewhat scandalized. When he said that he hadn’t noticed, I became miffed and instructed them to be on their way: this wasn’t the best time for me to be meeting his girlfriend for the first time. We drove to Kópavogur anyway to visit our mutual friend Kjartan. As I waited in the car, with Grétar’s girlfriend and dog, Grétar and Kjartan held a crisis meeting about my emotional state**. Afterward, Grétar and his girlfriend drove me home.

* A business neighborhood in Reykjavík.

** Having a normal conversation with the ex-couple a few months later was good, and I asked them what they were thinking on that day.

No matter where I went, everyone seemed to be following me. I went downtown later that evening, and after all the clubs closed, I noticed a black car with tinted windows. I also grew aware of a stranger walking behind me. “Are you following me?” I asked, turning around. “Yes,” the stranger replied and smirked. He probably thought that I was joking, but his blunt response only served to worsen my paranoia. I kindly asked him to stop stalking me and let him pass. I became so frightened that I broke down into tears. Seeking refuge at Devito’s Pizza, I phoned my father and asked him to pick me up. The employees sensed that something was gravely wrong and permitted no one to enter the pizzeria while I recovered and waited for my father*.

Culture Night

Later that summer during Culture Night, my father grilled steaks for the family. As I sat down at the table and helped myself to some food, a decision was made to solicit everyone’s opinion regarding my emotional state. I had just poured sauce over my steak and held out my spoon in what I believed was a singularly straight manner: “Are you seeing this?” I asked. Unimpressed, everyone agreed that I was acting quite unlike myself, and they were worried. I hadn’t finished a single bite of the steak when I stood up and denounced their referendum: “I won’t be a part

* I was a regular at Devito’s at the time. They behaved like absolute professionals.

of this god-damned nonsense! Enjoy your meals!” I stormed off. My brother Ingi followed me. “Do things really always need to end up this way?” he asked. I replied that such situations would be difficult to avoid in the future if everyone insisted on publicly assessing my psychological state*.

Ingi and I went out for some fresh air and stopped by at the Garðabær ice-cream parlor. I wanted to prove to him that I had become famous. He voiced his skepticism, but I sensed that he was a little intrigued, nonetheless. When we arrived, the staff was busy cleaning tables and refilling supplies, which in my mind was proof that they were preparing for “the arrival of the king.” Having finished our ice-cream, we returned to the car, and Ingi commented that I had not received any special attention from the staff. I was outraged. “Are you really so stupid as not to notice? Didn’t you see how they were arranging everything: cleaning the tables and restocking supplies? Do you think that it was some kind of coincidence? Didn’t you see how they stared?” Expressing his dismay at the sharpness of my tone, Ingi replied that debating with me was useless.

Being single at the time, which was rare, Ingi agreed to join his big brother for a night out on the town. It being Culture Night, we went downtown for a party that my friend Krissi Haff and his wonderful wife Rakel Bergmann Pálmadóttir were hosting.

* It would prove the last time that my family went around the table to comment on my psychological state.

Their apartment was located right next to the psychiatric ward on Hringbraut. Walking by the ward, I told my brother that I had stayed there in 2009—but that I would never return.

Partying while manic can be a lot of fun. Having my brother around also helped to mitigate my wild side, and I made it back home unscathed. I did, however, manage to mess with him a little; standing side by side in the queue outside the nightclub Dolly, I slyly delivered a rather manic right-legged roundhouse kick to his calf. As he was standing with his legs straight, his knee buckled. None the wiser, Ingi turned around and blamed a few girls that were standing behind us: “What the heck is your problem!?” I later took credit for the strike, adding that he hadn’t stood a snowman’s chance in hell against my “manic speed.”

A Young Bill Gates

More so than other people, manic individuals feel that they are at the center of the universe. At the time of this manic episode, for example, I spent a lot of time listening to the radio, always waiting for my name to be mentioned. One day, Þór Bæring—a radio presenter at K100—said that he had heard that “a young Bill Gates” was visiting Iceland, although he had no objective proof. “If anyone has any pictures, please send them my way. They say that you can’t miss him in downtown Reykjavík,” he said. I was certain that he was referring to me, that he was encouraging me to go further in my projects—to bring even more attention to

myself. That same day, I drove down Kringlumýrarbrautin with my father when I spotted a man standing on a traffic island with binoculars. I was convinced that he was searching for me*.

Bipolar individuals often have strong opinions and sometimes nurture a sense of infallibility. My parents live with my brothers on Digranesheiði in Kópavogur in a 5,000-square-foot house. I had some ideas on how we could better utilize the space, at times arguing with my father over the house’s location and the size of the windows, which I felt were too big and too prominent. I told him that anyone who wanted to could spy on us through the windows and that the whole design was ridiculous. He disagreed. The windows had never been an issue before, he replied, convinced that I would later realize that my reasoning was untenable.

Around the same time, I told my brother Bjarki Rúnar that everyone in the family was completely devoid of bright ideas. The lower floor of the building housed a 430-square-foot playroom, but I wanted to transform it into a gym. My father and I would oversee the renovations, I reasoned, and customers would flock to the gym to purchase subscriptions and personal-training sessions with yours truly. Given that the space was small, customers would be granted access to the gym in groups. My

* I’ve never seen a person with binoculars on Kringlumýrarbrautin since, and to this day, I don’t know who Þór Bæring was referring to, and neither do I know whom the man with the binoculars was looking for.

father never took to my idea but kept his disapproval to himself so as not to upset me. The only comment he made was asking where in the world the customers would park? Never in want of a speedy reply, I answered that they would park by the Digranes church—which is a four-minute walk away*.

On August 24th, 2014, I created an event on Facebook that I was going to share with all of my friends. The invite read: “Next Saturday, August 30th, I’ll be holding a reunion for all my friends at Bankastræti 5. The party begins at 9 pm and concludes when everyone has had their fill. Food and drinks will be on the house. I’d be surprised if Björn Jakobsson, B5’s manager, isn’t on duty that night, taking care of business. I hope to see you all.”

The event never went from a private to a public one, fortunately. It would have cost a pretty penny—and I would not have been able to afford such an extravaganza. At the time that I created the event, however, I was convinced that money would soon begin streaming into my bank account and that footing the bill would be no big deal.

Stunted Traffic Culture

On Tuesday, August 26th, I left the house at around noon with the music in my iPods blaring. I didn’t remove my headphones when my father tried to speak to me, offering only vague gesticulations

* It has been demonstrated that patrons are rarely willing to walk for more than 30-60 seconds to go to the gym.

that I was headed out on the town to draw attention to myself. Our relationship had become somewhat fraught, and I had had enough of friends and family offering advice*.

I tied my laces tight and took off in the direction of the Smáralind shopping mall. Beginning to conceive of myself as Iceland’s first superstar, I had the idea that some kind of celebration would be taking place in Smáralind on that day. From that day forward, I reckoned, I would need to be escorted by bodyguards so that I could walk the streets safely, for such was the extent of my fame. I took as secret a route possible to Smáralind, which is less than a mile away from my parents’ house. I did not want anyone to see me but sent messages to friends inviting them to share in my experience. As there were few people present when I showed up, I shouted that I, “must have arrived early,” and laughed maniacally. Preparing myself for the celebrations, I completed a few sprints on the second floor and a series of stretches by the escalator before removing my iPod and my phone from my pocket—to “flaunt my corporate sponsors.” Confronted by a security guard, I did not bother to remove my headphones but yelled that I had done nothing wrong.

* My brother Ingi later told me that my father had stopped reading the Morgunblaðið newspaper, a ritual that he had kept up for many decades. He was so worried that I was wreaking havoc that he was no longer able to relax. I was involved in all kinds of projects at the time, and my mania was getting worse with each passing day. Family life goes to pieces when I’m in an elevated mood state. The atmosphere at home is electric. On the other hand, when my mood takes a dive, everyone becomes sad with me.

I then sprinted down the escalator to the parking lot.

Before I knew, I was standing in the middle of the cross-section by the Orkan gas station and directing traffic with my arms.

I used to live in Mexico where people know how to drive—where chatting on the phone or lollygagging on the left lane are offenses punishable by collision. You're simply run over. During my time in the country (which I spent on an even keel), I often found myself wishing that the Icelanders learn to drive like Mexicans. When it comes to the road, my countrymen are alarmingly bad, too preoccupied with who has the right of way as opposed to allowing the occasional motorist to pass; how often I have gripped the steering wheel terrified of a collision. Standing at that cross-section, it seemed that I had finally had enough of Iceland's stunted driving culture and begun tongue-lashing motorists who weren't holding their own.

Inside one of the cars, idling at a red light, I noticed a mechanic who just a few months prior had swindled me. Lacking the patience to browse for used spare parts, he ordered everything new and then charged me accordingly—later boasting about it to my friend. Seeing him, I completely lost it. He was a headhunter employed by the psych ward to find me, I “reasoned,” banging on the hood of his car with all of my might so that I left a clear indentation. The man was terrified and tried to calm me down. I told him to scram and splashed some water

on him from my bottle. Later that day, he dropped by my house, seeking an explanation for my behavior. Knowing full well that he had previously fleeced me, he did not demand that I pay for the damages.

After the incident, continuing to diligently execute my duties as a freelance traffic controller, I saw that people were pulling over to the side of the road to talk on their phones. I must have cut a rather striking figure there on the street, for the police received numerous complaints. Needless to say, I was becoming a hazard to myself and others. An old woman was so frightened when I banged on her window that she couldn't shift gears; her car trembled. The police failed to apprehend me, however, because I immediately bolted when I saw them. As chance would have it, my brother Ingi was on his way to lunch on Dalvegur with his friend when he spotted me. Instead of taking a left turn by the Smāraskóli school, he must have had a premonition and turned right. When my brother approached, his friend, soccer extraordinaire Gunnar Örn Jónsson, said, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, what's going on over there?” What they saw were several cars on the side of the road and me running down the middle of the street with the cops behind me. Ingi yelled: “Kiddi, what the hell are you doing!?” I told him not to worry and to proceed to lunch.

The world was under my control.

Arrested by Smāraskóli

I realized that the jig was up. There was no avoiding the psych ward. First, however, the police would have to catch me, and they had little chance of keeping up with the pace and stamina that I had developed on the second floor of the World Class gym in Laugar. I sprinted toward the Smāraskóli school, where I came across a few children playing on the soccer field. Always in the mood for encouragement, I yelled, “the sky’s the limit if you just train hard enough!” I made one final dash toward Sporthúsið gym but did not make it much farther. Fortunately, the scene with the police unfolded in an area with no children present. Angry at myself for being apprehended but worried about injuring myself, as well—about suffering a setback to the excellent physical shape that I had achieved—I resisted arrest and threatened the officers that I would kill them if they broke my arm. I did not mean what I said.

I’m as strong as a bull when I’m manic, and the first officers on the scene—a man and a woman—were no match for my strength. Unable to state their location when they called for backup, I began heckling them, choosing as my object of derision their job prospects in foreign countries. “You gotta be kidding me!? You don’t know that we’re near Smāraskóli in Kópavogur!? You’ll never be able to work abroad. I lived in Mexico and Puerto Rico!” I yelled, apropos of nothing.

In the end, it was comforting having my brother near at hand. He called our parents, who also happened to be in the neighborhood. Although no one could predict what I would do next, it was clear that my mania was about to run its course; I was exhausted, body and soul. When my parents arrived on the scene, we cried together, and it felt important, for I had put them through a lot during the preceding days.

When I reviewed my medical records years later, I discovered that my father had been in contact with our general practitioner*. Together, they had discussed my condition and tried to contact the city physician of the greater Reykjavík area. Being unable to reach him, they were uncertain how to proceed. Our doctor wrote that my parents knew my illness well and believed that I needed to be declared a ward of the court—that I needed to be admitted to the psych ward under the city physician’s aegis. I was suffering paranoid thoughts, delusions of grandeur (I believed that I was verging on divinity), and had stopped taking my medication. Furthermore, the doctor added, I was unwilling to allow my parents to accompany me to the ward**.

After my arrest, I was transferred to the emergency room of the psychiatric division in a large police vehicle. I would stay

* My then psychiatrist was on holiday.

** After reading my medical records, I dismissed my general practitioner. I felt that it was beyond his remit intervening in that manner and that I could no longer trust him—especially considering that he never discussed the matter with me afterward, offering no explanation for his actions.

there for a few weeks. On the way to the ward, I had a normal conversation with the police as if nothing had happened. I am short-tempered but have always been quick to regain my wits.

It was the one time that my involuntary admission was justified: I was a danger to myself and others. Nonetheless, the medical records wrongly indicate that I was standing in the middle of the street, attempting to jump in front of cars and stop traffic. I was a long way away from trying to end my life on that day. My father approved of my compulsory internment with his signature. He was probably greatly relieved.

“Normal life is for people who lack all courage.”

–Anonymous

Bipolar and Bare at the Austurvöllur Square



I recovered relatively quickly from my second mania but experienced an unsurprising bout of depression during the last two months of 2014. Although the severity of my depressions has become milder as I've grown older, I exhibit little desire for being out among other people, avoiding birthday parties and sporting events alike*.

The depression followed on the heels of an interview I did with the news program Iceland Today** on Channel 2. During the interview, I discussed my bipolar disorder with a particular emphasis on the traffic-control incident, which had occurred three months earlier. It was the second big step I took in speaking openly about my illness and raising awareness of mental-health issues in Iceland. The interview was well received and garnered considerable attention; it's not every day that people are arrested for endeavoring to control traffic. On the following day, there was a benefit concert that I promoted during the interview. The concert was hosted by the organization Yes, You Can*** and arranged by my friend Ragnheiður Guðfinna Guðnadóttir.

By the time 2015 rolled around, I had managed to stay in fine physical shape and felt pretty good about myself. I was convinced

* I usually enjoy being in crowded places when I'm in good spirits.

** Ísland í dag.

*** Þú getur. Being part of the initiative was an honor.

that a good year awaited me because the number 15 has always been a favorite: it's tattooed on my left arm. From January to May, everything was fine. The depression, or rather the sadness, had subsided, and I began to imagine brighter days. I've always been somewhat enchanted by the prospect of spring, awaiting it with anticipation and greeting it with open arms when it finally arrives. This year was no different.

Zinzino

I was presented with a business opportunity earlier that year, which would later serve as the impetus for other projects. A friend of mine Sindri Þór and a mutual acquaintance, Ragnar Snær, had been trying to recruit me to the network marketing company Zinzino*, which specializes in the sale of coffee and BalanceOil. The two of them had achieved great success in a short space of time and planned on grooming other salespeople for similar triumphs. As a result of my impulsiveness and openness, I was a perfect candidate in Sindri's eyes. I joined the company in March 2015, at a time when there had been a veritable sales explosion in Iceland. I had a hard time parting with Herbalife, but feeling that the company had stagnated, I was open to new challenges.

Zinzino's employees were promised a monthly salary of 8,000 dollars if they worked hard and scheduled several presentations

a day. Soaking up the available information, I was determined to achieve success. Sindri invited me to lunch with Guðrún Brynjólfssdóttir, who to this day occupies Zinzino's top tier in Iceland. Having been a member of the organization for a brief time, I considered the invitation a great honor—a sign that big things were intended for me in the future. After only a few days on the job, I called Guðrún and bombarded her with questions. I was exploding with enthusiasm and curious about my prospects at the company. The phone call lasted a whopping 45 minutes. She was excited to hear from me but admitted that she had never received such a phone call in all her time with the company*.

During one of the big presentations—held every week in the Gala banquet hall in Kópavogur—I unwittingly plopped myself down on the back sofa reserved for the higher-ups and proceeded to strike up a conversation**. During the middle of the presentation, attendees were asked to stand and state their position within the company. The presenter ended by saying: “And you can see Crown members, and those above them, seated in the sofa in the back.” Those present turned their heads and saw me sitting there, ensconced among the company's big shots.

I recruited a few young men to my team, including my brother Bjarki and his friends Kári Gunnarsson and Lúðvík

* Network marketing is a business model that has seen positive results in many countries.

* I have always done this. If one has access to the company's upper echelon, and if one intends on climbing to the top, there is nothing wrong with drawing a little attention to oneself.

** In retrospect, they must have found me singularly courageous.

Marinó Karlsson. We worked hard on our first presentations. As the days passed, the wild enthusiasm for success and money at Zinzino began to rub off on me. I read books into the small hours of the night to enlighten myself about the business. I slept less and less, incessantly planning for the future. And I phoned prospective buyers and sent them messages to discuss the business model and to invite them to presentations. Showing up early one morning to plan for the days ahead, Sindri was taken aback by my ambitions: I had cleaned the rooms and scrubbed the drinking glasses, wanting to make everything impeccable for the presentations. Needless to say, certain manic red flags were beginning to be raised.

It came as some shock to my parents and my former psychiatrist that only ten months elapsed before I entered into another elevated mood state; following my last manic episode, my medication dosage had been raised considerably, and I was put on six different drugs: two types of psychotropic drugs, mood stabilizers, and antidepressants. Becoming manic again following such a regimen was a proverbial slap in the face for my former psychiatrist, proving that drugs only have a limited effect*.

I can pinpoint the exact start of my third mania: June 4th, 2015. It was on that day that I met Elís Svavarsson, a childhood

friend, for a cup of coffee. There was something special about our meeting. While I was edging closer toward a manic state, the improving weather and the increasing sunlight was having a similar effect on Elís' mood. We engaged in a lively hour-long conversation about life, discussing Zinzino—the proposed main topic of our talk—only in passing. Vibrating on the same frequency, we elevated each other's moods. It was the first time that a mere conversation about life served as the impetus for mania. During the next few days, Elís approached a mild manic state but was subsequently administered a soporific and was fine. I, on the other hand, visited Zinzino's headquarters at 1.30 in the morning—sensing that someone was up and about. Alone at the office, Jónas Guðni Sævarsson, a soccer legend from Keflavík and a senior member of Zinzino in Iceland, was packing up his stuff after a long day. Having become well acquainted over those few weeks, he took the time to draw up a so-called Diamond Plan for my benefit. It would mean an income of a few thousand dollars a month, but I would require several assistants to make it happen, and we would have to work hard if the goal was to be attained over the next few months. After an hour-long meeting, we said our goodbyes, and I went home.

As I tried to sleep, a slew of symbols and signs appeared on the adjacent wall. The mania had officially begun.

Suspecting that the BalanceOil was playing a role in my elevated state, I incorporated this intuition into my sales pitches,

* One must find the right balance of drug dosage for each patient, not simply stuff them full of medication. In my experience, psychiatrists have a hard time understanding this.

telling clients that the product was having such a positive effect on my brain that I no longer needed my medication. It was a questionable sales tactic, to say the least—but it worked. It helped me sell several subscriptions. When I revealed my spiel to my partners, they took a deep breath, knowing that I had little research to substantiate my claims. As we worked to perfect our presentations, I began to lose touch with reality. (The Zinzino bubble was also about to burst)*.

Untouchable

Earlier that year, on my 26th birthday, I went out for an ice-cream drive with my brother Ingi and my father. I told them that I expected to become manic soon, but they responded skeptically: the two of them were optimistic that I would manage to avoid such episodes during the foreseeable future**.

At the ice-cream parlor, we bumped into psychiatrist Ingólfur Sveinn Ingólfsson. Among other things, he oversaw my electroconvulsive therapy at the psychiatric intensive care unit

* I think I'm finished with network marketing in Iceland, although I may try my hand at Herbalife or Zinzino abroad. I remain excited about the prospects in Prague or Mexico and convinced that my third manic episode can be entirely traced to the Zinzino venture; extreme environments serve as a special hazard to bipolar individuals.

** Often when I discuss bipolar disorder with the two of them, the conversation ends badly. They are very often in complete agreement with each other, as if they're teaming up on me. Then there's the judgment: I once told my father that people could do amazing things when they're manic, and he replied that bipolar disorder was little else than "a genetic flaw." Needless to say, his explanation disappointed and angered me; subsequently, the three of us engaged in a heated and emotional conversation.

(32 C) in 2011. When I was admitted again three years later, I became annoyed by his arrogance. He never deigned to greet me, and whenever he walked inside the ward, he would ask for the floor to be cleared away—as if he were a king. I grew so fed up with his lordliness that I once headbutted the glass that separated us and screamed at him. At the parlor, however, he greeted me and wished me well. This coincidental encounter served to confirm my intuition that a manic episode was in the offing*. It wasn't quite as frenzied as the one before but rather a memorable medley of serious and hilarious moments.

In early June, for example, I was cruising through the Grafarvogur neighborhood in Reykjavík when I spotted a car that shared my license-plate letters. UT: two letters that inspired my car's jocular nickname. "The Untouchable." Intrigued by this coincidence, I shadowed the car for a while until the driver—a woman in her early 50s—pulled over near the shopping center in Spöngin. Stepping out of the vehicle, she asked me what the hell I was doing. I told her to take a look at the license plates—that we were two untouchables destined to conquer the world together. She gave me a look of utter bemusement before scurrying into the shopping center**.

* I had probably known for a few weeks that another episode was right around the corner.

** In retrospect, I don't believe she was headed to the shopping center; she probably felt that I was tailgating her and became nervous.

Later that day, wearing nothing but shorts and a t-shirt, on a rather cold summer's day, I strolled into The Laundromat Cafe in downtown Reykjavík to warm myself. Lacking the patience to sit around and wait for bodily heat to accumulate by natural means, I began jogging around the bar. As it was round and situated in the middle of the café, it seemed particularly well suited to that kind of thing. I had only completed a few circuits when an employee announced that there was “absolutely no running on the premises.” Somewhat insulted, I replied that I was only trying to warm myself. Not willing to budge, he retorted that I needed to do that someplace else. I agreed—but on the terms that I would never return to The Laundromat again*.

I headed for Lækjartorg square, where I spotted two young women engaging in a performance-art piece involving watercolors and dancing. It was rather risqué as far as street art goes, and it was mostly men ogling the two performers. This incredibly impressive piece had originated in Prague, I concluded, where there are certain “wilder” dances to be found. Believing that I was the right man, at the right time, at the right place, I began to showcase my own artistic talents alongside the young women—doing a little dance of my own and peppering my curious freestyle

with a few light sprints. The women didn't say anything, but they may have thought that I had been sent there to join them*.

I had been partying almost every night—and my nights often began in the late afternoon. In just a few days, I had managed to ascend to an elevated mood state; when I walked past the Pond in Reykjavík, I came to believe that the birds knew who I was and what I intended to accomplish in life. At one point, I wrote a brief and extremely manic post on Facebook. “It only took me 15 years to figure all of this out.” When a friend asked me what I meant, I simply responded with the word, “Life.” After 15 years of great disequilibrium, I had finally realized the meaning of life. From that point onward, I would feel good. My suffering was in the past.

On the seventh day of my mania, at 4 pm on a Thursday in Reykjavík, I met a curious sexagenarian named Steingrímur. After a brief exchange, we decided on an early dinner at the restaurant Apotek. Engaging in a deep conversation, the both of us in a questionable state of mind, Steingrímur assured me that I would achieve great things in life, predicting that I would become the successor of Bjarni Benediktsson, the Chairman of Iceland's Independence Party. He was certain of this. We ordered good food, bathed our tongues in white wine, and treated ourselves well. After the meal, we walked up Laugavegur and visited a few

* My brother's ex-girlfriend, Guðrún Lilja Ólafsdóttir, or Gugga, happened to be inside The Laundromat at the moment and witnessed the scene unfold. Without my noticing, she phoned my brother and reported on my abnormal behavior. Gugga is a real mensch, and we have discussed this incident many times since. She has said that witnessing a manic episode firsthand was fascinating.

* I got the feeling that my energy was contagious and that they were being paid for their performance.

bars for happy hour. As it happens, we were expelled from two of the three bars we visited because my friend was a known troublemaker. I had to get rid of him—and just like that, he was gone. I haven't seen the man since.

Prikið

I strolled over to Prikið and ordered a beer. Walking up the stairs on my way to the balcony—a popular drinking spot among patrons on weekends—I was stopped by one of the bar staff. In a rather severe tone, he informed me that the balcony was closed. “I didn't know—I'm sorry,” I replied. “No problem, my friend,” he responded. Sensing a hint of sarcasm in his enunciation of “friend,” I retorted: “You don't call me ‘friend’ with that tone.” “Okay, baby,” he said. I completely lost it. I've never been a violent man, but at that moment, something snapped. I put down my beer and threw the man in a choke-hold, and moments later, I was brought down by four employees, who were understandably taken aback by my behavior. It was only 6 pm on a Thursday. Having been dragged down the stairs, I was quite literally tossed out. I yelled that I would spread the news how miserable an establishment Prikið was before vowing never to return. “I couldn't care less,” the manager yelled back.

Outside, a passerby asked me what in the world was going on. I gave him the short of it before battering the window by the entrance three times with my fists. The manager stepped outside again and revealed that the police were on their way. I walked up Laugavegur and bumped into Krissi Haff, who was on his way to the store; some people you don't meet for ten or twenty years, others you bump into regularly—and exactly when you need them the most. Krissi could tell that I had experienced some sort of traumatic event. My forehead was scratched up, and my clothes were torn. Worried, he advised me to go home and rest*.

Just over a year later, I met Prikið's manager at a party hosted by a mutual friend. At the time of the incident, I was in such a tumultuous emotional state that I could not recall any faces. He, on the other hand, recognized me immediately**. We had a productive conversation about the incident. He told me that his coworkers at Prikið had been convinced that I had suffered a blackout from drugs and alcohol. “The whole thing seemed a bit strange, however, given your manner of dress,” he said. He went on to admit that the incident ranked among the most extraordinary moments in Prikið's history, considering that it had occurred at 6 pm on a weekday. He concluded the

* I realize now just how dangerous being manic can be (even though it's often a lot of fun, too). A manic individual may experience many of the same sensations that drug addicts crave. At this particular moment, my state of mind epitomized this truth: my behavior was completely at odds with my character.

** He had also read a few of my posts online.

conversation by telling me that I was always welcome at Prikið and that everyone would receive me with open arms*.

This is one of the few manic episodes that I've never written about and only told my closest friends and family members. Shortly after my conversation with the manager, I stopped by at Prikið to give them a second chance. I'm glad I did.

Manic! at the Disco

Returning to downtown Reykjavík, I tried to exercise good judgment with regard to alcohol, alternating between beer and water. I eventually found myself at the nightclub Austur, where I had one of the strangest experiences in my life.

For the past year, I had felt an intense connection to Justin Timberlake's "Mirrors" owing perhaps to the song's video, which depicts reality through the eyes of a bipolar individual. I had first seen the video shortly before entering into a manic state myself. At the end of the video, Timberlake dances while gazing into the looking glass, viewing himself from the different vantage points of his multiple personalities. Much like the mirror in the video, the mirror in the staircase of Austur is extraordinary; it served to catalyze several weird experiences. That night, I found that I could not pull myself away. I stood in the middle of

* After the incident, I hadn't stepped foot into Prikið for 15 months. I had actually planned on standing outside the club on the day following the incident so as to encourage the locals to boycott the place. I later thought better of it, avowing to put the incident behind me.

the staircase and stared deeply into the eyes of everyone who passed by. In what may have been the most profound epiphany of my life, I sensed that I was half myself and half the world. Passersby were bothered by my stares, and before long, several members of the staff asked if I was okay—whether I had taken something. Returning downstairs, I paced back and forth by the bar, and within a few minutes, I spotted the police on the street through the window. Marching outside, I opened the door to the police vehicle and declared, "I don't need any assistance. You can leave." They told me to shut the door and went on their way.

At B5, the spirits were high. The men's national soccer team had just claimed victory over the Czech Republic in the UEFA Euro Qualifiers, which meant that the team was in a good position to qualify for the Championship in France. Earlier that night, I had tried to influence the outcome of the game by controlling the players with my mind and by speaking directly to the athletes and the coach. I watched the first half of the game at home but departed for downtown Reykjavík at halftime*.

At B5, I spotted a current and former member of the team. They were dancing in the middle of the floor surrounded by women, who seemed to have formed a human barricade around them to prevent other women from approaching. Feeling that I owed them some "real talk" on account of the haughtiness they

* Iceland was a goal down but ultimately managed a comeback and won the game 2-1.

had displayed toward me over the past decade or so, I took a beeline toward the two men. As was often the case, one of them was rather intoxicated. I got right up into his face and screamed: “Wake up, boy! Don’t you want a chance at competing at the Euro!?” He was startled but said nothing; it’s not pleasant being yelled at, especially not by a manic individual attempting to avenge a decade’s worth of perceived disrespect*.

When the other man told me to relax, I replied, “show me some respect**.” In good spirits following a great performance earlier that night, the man replied: “Of course I remember you, man, shouldn’t we just get a drink and have some fun?” Unsurprisingly, I didn’t feel up for it***.

Naked in Downtown Reykjavik

Having left B5, I looked up at the clouds and began to interpret their formations. They seemed to be pointing me in the direction

* The athlete in question has never wanted to speak to me (nor has he obliged requests for selfies from tourists) at any of the city’s clubs. Without fail, he has responded that he “doesn’t feel like it” and has asked me to be on my way.

** Through the years, he had been in the habit of patronizing me whenever we crossed paths—even though we were as good as equals on the pitch when I was at my best; he once asked whether I had played defense. I have never in my life played defense on the soccer field, and I suspect that he only asked the question to belittle me.

*** It’s incredible how rude and arrogant some professional athletes can be (although they were in relatively good spirits that evening). I’m convinced that the two above-mentioned players rank among the rudest, although there are a few other players who are equally uncivil. As public personas, I believe that they should behave as role models while recognizing that their careers won’t last forever and that they will meet the same people they were rude to on their way up, on the way down. I’m not exempt from arrogance when I’m manic, but I am never haughty in a normal emotional state. There are, of course, soccer players who are positive role models and generous people, but, in my experience, they are relatively rare.

of the Harpa Music and Conference Hall, which I have always considered an extraordinary piece of architecture. Upon my arrival, I observed a spectacular lights show that was being projected onto the building’s facade, which was full of meaning: indicating which guests were worthy of my attention. I felt as if I were meant to hold a lecture, or some kind of show, at Harpa on the following day. Wanting to prepare for this mysterious public presentation, I became determined to enter the building—at 3.30 in the morning, no less. I tried punching in a security code, convinced that someone had programmed the system to afford me easy access, but none of my lucky numbers did the trick. Walking along the side of the building, I came across an open door and a security guard. I ran up the stairs toward the door, and the guard asked me what exactly it was that I was doing. I replied that I was going inside to rehearse for a show. When he asked what show I was referring to, I told him to stop being silly and open the doors. He said that he would call the cops if I didn’t leave. “Like you’re going to call the cops?” I replied and walked off. Reality seemed like some vast conspiracy, wherein I was impervious to the interventions of the police, because a cadre of powerful individuals was monitoring me and ensuring my well being.

On the following day, at just past noon, I headed downtown again*. Entering The English Pub by Austurvöllur square,

* This was Saturday, June 13th, one of the most memorable days of my life; memories from that day will always bring a smile to my face.

I ordered a beer. The weather was unusually pleasant, and I was in fantastic spirits. I noticed that there was something extraordinary taking place on the square and realized, before long, that a #freethenipple protest was being held with plenty of people in attendance. Feeling as if it were destiny—that there was a reason that I was there at this precise moment—my mind leaped into overdrive. I stepped outside and strolled around the area, taking in the atmosphere and observing the environment. Returning to the bar, I ordered another beer and began scheming. I picked up a candle that was sitting on the table, gazed deeply into the flame, and brought it gradually closer to my eyes. This ritual would at once intensify the strength of the sun's rays and my own vigor. "Be careful not to burn yourself, young man!" a woman cautioned.

There was a Bostonian sitting at the bar who inquired as to the outside commotion. Without blinking an eye, I replied: "There's an assembly being held in my honor. A decision has been made to move Iceland's Independence Day from June 17th to June 13th. I will be addressing the assembly shortly as the nation's new President*." The words had barely left my lips when I realized, with some disappointment, that I was, in fact, not going to be the next President of Iceland—because I had yet to turn 35. The

* The number 13 has always been my father's lucky number, as well as one of my favorite numbers, and so I was convinced that all of this was destiny—that I would later be handed the keys to Bessastaðir, the presidential estate.

Bostonian, however, received my remarks without reservations, and we subsequently engaged in a lengthy conversation about basketball, centering primarily around Larry Bird and the Boston Celtics. After our conversation, I went outside and proceeded to perform a regimen of manic exercises and bizarre jumps in front of a dense crowd of people. And then I took action.

Dressed in gym clothes—shorts, a t-shirt, and sneakers—I walked past the stage and the Parliament building to the statue of Jón Sigurðsson. A friend of mine, Jóhann Fannar Sigurðsson, spotted me and was about to say Hello when I brushed him off, remarking that I needed to tend to some "unfinished business." This business to which I referred entailed stripping off my clothes and striking a triumphant pose in the nude next to the statue of Jón Sigurðsson. It was my way of showing solidarity with the #freethenipple movement*. Intensely focused, the attending crowd faded into a blur for the duration of my performance, which lasted probably around 15 seconds. Retaining some grip on reality, I knew that I would probably need to complete my exhibition in a hurry so as to enjoy my moment without being arrested. Having finished, I quickly dressed again and disappeared into the crowd.

As I walked away, I was accosted by a woman who asked if I intended to perform other such acts on that day. I told her that I hadn't considered it, and she advised that I should refrain from

* I also believed that other Icelanders would follow my lead and take a stand in their birthday suits.

doing so. I sensed a certain hostility toward the #freethenipple movement, and so I told her to shut the hell up and be on her god damn way. She called the cops.

My Brother Guðni

In August 2007, my brother Guðni Rúnar—who was one of Iceland's best skateboarders—died at only 22 years old. At the time of his passing, I was partying with my friends on a two-week holiday in Benidorm. It took an entire day for the news to be relayed to all the members of my family.

The day that I received the news began on a pleasant note. I watched the Manchester derby at a bar with a few Englishmen, and after the game, I strolled through the streets alone. Despite not having received the bad news, I felt my happiness gradually turn to sorrow; I missed my brother. As the memories washed over me, I suddenly became homesick. It was a kind of premonition: we were so close that it seemed like someone was sending me a message from beyond letting me know that he was gone*.

As flight school in Canada was less expensive than in Iceland, Guðni had spent three months there studying to become a pilot. One of his best friends, Davíð Jónsson—who lives in Canada—had accompanied Guðni during his final flight, along with a Canadian couple who was friends with Davíð. During the

flight, the plane's sensors malfunctioned, forcing my brother to crash land in a wooded glen. The flight records indicate that Guðni had just increased the aircraft's altitude to avoid a nearby storm cloud, and it is believed that the plane drifted off course. According to what I have read, the deeper one descends into a closed valley, the more difficult it is to turn an aircraft around. Guðni crash-landed the plane in such a way that he would bear the brunt of the impact. Because of this—the other three passengers survived. It took nine hours for help to arrive, and as the plane was soaked in gasoline, the tiniest spark would have spelled certain doom for everyone on board*. Only a single day was supposed to separate our return flights to Iceland.

During my trip to Benidorm, my father periodically rationed money into my account to prevent me from spending it all at once. Shortly after a priest had broken the bad news to my family, I called my father to ask why he hadn't transferred the money. I began the phone call by scolding him mildly, and he could barely muster a reply. Sensing that something was off, I asked whether he was sick. With some difficulty, he told me that he was not, adding that he would transfer the money soon and call me again later**. Worried about my reaction, my family made arrangements for Svanhildur Sif Haraldsdóttir—

* I believe that this message was meant to prepare me for the coming trauma.

* I feel compelled to one day travel to the site of the crash to investigate conditions.

** My sister, Ragnheiður Kristinsdóttir, later told me that my father had stared at the phone for the longest time, not knowing whether he made the right decision by not breaking the news immediately.

one of my mother's best friends, called Hilda—to meet with me and tell me the news, which further complicated matters. Hilda was vacationing in Torrevieja at the time, about an hour from Benidorm, and I was on my way to drive go-carts; it took some time for her to find me—which meant that all of the twenty friends with whom I was traveling knew that my brother had passed before me.

With everyone looking for me, Ágúst Ingi Halldórsson, an old schoolmate from Kópavogsskóli, found me and told me that I needed to go back to the hotel: Hilda needed to speak to me. I didn't quite understand why. Ágúst tried to act naturally, but I could tell that something was bothering him. We had known each other since we were little.

At the hotel, I met Hilda, and before she could say a single word, she hugged me close and broke down in tears. My mind began racing. Despite my earlier premonition, my first instinct was that something had happened to my sister, who was nearing the end of her pregnancy. When Hilda finally managed to speak, she revealed that Guðni had died in a plane accident on the day previous, adding that the details of the crash had yet to emerge*. It was the most crushing moment in my life—made even worse

by the long distance separating my family and me. Not half an hour had passed when I began receiving condolences in the form of text messages from friends back home. It was fortunate that I had not received them earlier. I called my parents and bawled my eyes out, laying on a chaise lounge in the dark.

I had planned on getting a tattoo during the trip, and after Guðni's death, I decided that it would be in honor of his memory. Given my emotional turmoil, it is fortunate that the tattoo, which is on my back, turned out well. "R.I.P. Guðni Rúnar Kristinsson 1984-2007†" it reads. Five years later, Gunnar Valdimarsson tattooed my brother's face underneath the letters. The picture was taken during Guðni's final Christmas.

During my time in Benidorm, I became friends with Elva Björk Olgeirsdóttir and Svava Kristín Þorsteinsdóttir, both of whom helped me cope during that most difficult time of my life. Even though I had only known them for a couple of days, at the news of my brother's passing, they brought me flowers and sympathy cards and kept a close watch over me during that first night. It's extraordinary just how kind some people can be. I am eternally grateful.

My brother was a lot of things, among them, ambitious. He was considered the first professional skater in Iceland, and he recorded a lot of material, usually with two cameras to capture the best angles. A year before his death, he released the skate video *Á Brotnu Teili* ("On a Broken Tail"). It was as if he had rushed to

* Hilda later told me that breaking the news had been one of the most challenging moments in her life. Almost immediately, I transitioned into a precarious state of mind, becoming increasingly restless and having difficulty processing new information. There were moments when she feared that I would wander off and become lost or that I would be hit by a car. I was in a completely different world.

finish—suspecting that he was not long for this world. I have often thought back on what a world-class skater he would have been and what excellent material he would have captured with the aid of modern recording equipment. I miss him every day.

I believe many things. I believe that Guðni was taken from us for a reason and that he was destined for bigger things. I believe in reincarnation—and that Guðni and I had been together for centuries upon centuries. What I do not believe, however, is that this is my first time on Earth, considering especially my strong sense of nostalgia and the uncanny connection that I feel to certain individuals. On the flip side, I can imagine that it must be even more crushing: losing a loved one and believing that one lives only once. “One Life, Live It,” is a sentiment that I wholeheartedly disagree with and would never employ myself*.

Two days after Guðni passed, I returned to Iceland. I had not slept for 36 hours. It was an incredibly taxing thing to do, stepping onto an aircraft shortly after losing your brother in a plane crash. Fortunately, my friend's family—that of Gunnar Héðinn Stefánsson—was seated next to me on the plane. They helped me a lot.

Guðni's passing changed my life completely. I descended into a state of emotional disequilibrium. Although I can't be certain, it's possible that my first manic episode in 2009 had

something to do with my brother's death. It was a source of great trauma, compounding the other traumatic events that I had experienced. During the first years after his passing, I spent a lot of time mourning Guðni's death, but when my bipolar symptoms resurfaced, culminating with another manic episode in 2014—greatly heightening my senses—I began to sense his presence again. I became convinced that we were the same person. I later realized that he was probably more a part of me than all of me.

Skate Show

During the 2015 mania, I had an especially strong sense of Guðni's presence; he was watching over me and challenging me to step outside the box.

Following my nude pose on Austurvöllur, I proceeded directly to Ingólfstorg square, where a group of skaters had gathered, among them some of Guðni's old friends. There were also a few younger kids zooming around on their boards. It struck me suddenly that I was to organize a skate show at the square later that day, and so I began to cheer on the younger kids who were practicing. There were three of them, probably around 12 years old, all of whom I felt showed great promise—and my presence was making them even better. Things took a turn for the worse, however, when one of the boys' mother began to film. It threw the boy off, and he began making mistakes. Taking a beeline for the woman, I asked her to stop what she was doing: we were practicing. “That's my

* I know that 10-20% of people agree with me; others need to feel it for themselves in order to believe. I am, at least, glad that I belong to the minority.

son. I'll film him if I please," she replied. I explained that we were practicing for a skate show slated to be held later that day and that she was bothering us. "Get the hell out of here," I yelled. Just like the woman at Austurvöllur square, the boy's mother must have felt threatened because she proceeded to call the cops. She told them that there was some kid on Ingólfstorg square wreaking havoc. "Some kid," I thought to myself—"doesn't she know that I'm the future president of Iceland." I interrupted her phone call but could tell that it had already concluded; she was pretending to talk on the phone to avoid making eye contact. "You're pretending! You're pretending!" I said. Finally, I screamed so loud that my voice seemed to echo around downtown Reykjavík.

Having received numerous complaints, the cops were forced to intervene. As this was far from normal behavior, many people were concerned. My emotions got the better of me, and I broke down in tears, ripping off my Breiðablik uniform and showing Guðni's friends my tattoo of him on my back. They did not know how to act.

One of the responding officers was Páll Fannar Helgason, a former teammate at Valur. We had won a Cup Championship together in 2006, and it was odd seeing him in this unfamiliar role. He was nice enough to escort me to the car without handcuffs. He asked me what I wanted to do, and I replied that I "just wanted to go home." They had received numerous complaints about a young man with a Herbalife logo on his back who was causing trouble,

Páll said, and that he had already realized that they were referring to me. Being calm and not having broken any laws, the cops drove me home in lieu of the police station or the psych ward. I was not a danger to myself or others, although admittedly, I had ventured far beyond the boundaries of normal behavior. Wanting to see if I could respond quickly, Páll asked if I was on any drugs. I immediately replied that I was on Chlorpromazine, among other things*. "Are you messing with me?" he laughed. He had never heard of Chlorpromazine and felt that it was too long and too difficult to pronounce—never mind to write it down. I said that I was being serious and helped him with his spelling.

Páll and his colleague dropped me off at home after a 15-minute drive and a brief conversation. I later learned that they, suspecting further complications, parked on the adjacent street.

Traffic Control in a Bathing Suit

Having indulged in some cake and a glass of milk, I leaped into the hot tub. The proximity of my parent's house to Digranesvegur, a busy street in Kópavogur, inspired the intuition that I should engage in some mild traffic control in my bathing suit. Rather than venturing out into the street, I took my position on the hill adjacent to the road and signaled to the drivers to speed up or slow down. Depending on how well they followed my commands,

* Chlorpromazine was the first psychiatric drug that was administered in the 1950s.

I either clapped my hands or abused them verbally. It was then that I spotted my sister driving down the hill. I called to her, yelling that because she was in the lead, she was “the leader”—“the pacemaker.” All of this made perfect sense.

I noticed a few people picking up their phones. Accurately conjecturing that they were calling the police, I returned to the hot tub and adopted a facade of innocence. The police checked in on me repeatedly but lacked sufficient cause to arrest me.

Finally, Birgir Örn Guðjónsson—a famous local cop, referred to as Biggi the Cop—arrived on the scene, and things played out differently. It was like I knew him personally, like I was meeting an old uncle. “Hey, Biggi, good to see you. What’s up?” I said. We had a nice talk, and before long, I laid down flat on my stomach on the grass, realizing that I was in need of help. Having put me in handcuffs and draped a large towel over them—to make it look as if I was returning from a trip to the pool—Biggi took me to the psych ward*.

While I waited to be admitted, I had a heartfelt albeit somewhat comical conversation with Biggi, another police officer, and Davíð Ásgrímsson, my brother-in-law. I explained to them that I could control people and events with my mind, casually mentioning that I was currently influencing the outcome of the NBA Finals. Furthermore, I revealed that I had played

a pivotal role in Manchester United winning the Champions League in 1999 and 2008. “But I made the games as exciting as possible so as not to invite suspicion,” I told them. This resulted in much boisterous laughter.

According to my medical records:

1. I arrived at the ward accompanied by the police, dressed only in a bathing suit with a blanket draped over my shoulders.
2. I had been in a hot tub but was in an agitated state and had probably been harassing the neighbors (feeling that they had been bothering me).
3. I believed I was famous, which was why I was being followed and watched.
4. I wanted a little privacy.
5. I had been behaving improperly in public, and the police had paid me numerous visits.

It’s unbelievable how distorted this information becomes when it’s relayed to the doctors*. The suggestion that I had been harassing the neighbors is completely erroneous: I was living with my parents and barely knew the neighbors, who did not bother me in the least. I had no contact with them. It’s also utterly false that I was harassing them. Furthermore, the cops only intervened in my affairs twice—and that on the same day.

* The mania came and went quickly; it only lasted nine days, although the run-up lasted a few weeks.

* Just like in 2014 when I had allegedly thrown myself in front of cars.

To say that the cops had “paid me numerous visits” is a gross exaggeration.

Reading my medical records often puts me at a loss for words. Some of what is recorded there has little or no relation to the truth. Nonetheless, it was interesting to observe my condition through the eyes of doctors, who often employ concepts with which I am unfamiliar. During my 2015 hospitalization, for example, I was described as having “bipolar disorder: current episode manic without psychotic features, F31.1.”

Because I yelled at doctor Þuríður Halla Árnadóttir when she revealed that I would be subjected to compulsory internment, I was labeled a threat. According to the medical records, I was “going to attack her”—but that’s only her side of the story. Violence was never my intention. On the contrary, it would be rather unusual for a person not to react at all when told that they’ll be admitted against their own will—without being considered a danger to themselves or others. I screamed so loudly that I felt as if I heard a chorus of different voices echoing throughout the building. This wasn’t all that surprising given my recent epiphany that I was half myself and half all of mankind. Finally, the doctors threatened to tranquilize me if I didn’t calm down, and so I accepted medication instead. During the first few days after I was admitted, I was described as “extremely restless” and “incapable of taking care of myself”—which is also an exaggeration.

This particular mania was milder than the one previous,

owing in large part to my family deciding to remain on the sidelines: they knew that what had happened during the previous episode had not been good for anyone. For the most part, I remained lost in my own thoughts, and so I had less contact with my friends than before. With the exception of one incident.

Before being admitted, my friend Sindri asked me to meet him downtown. He took me out for a drive and began to casually express his concerns. When we reached Hringbraut, he decided to rock the boat, suggesting explicitly that I meet with a psychiatrist to assess my condition*. He had barely formed the words when I forcefully struck my flat palms against the dashboard and ordered him to pull over at once. Without saying a word, I slammed the door and began walking in the direction of Kópavogur. Sindri yelled for me to get back into the car, but I ignored him.

Sindri is a good friend, and we’ve shared many memorable moments throughout our lives. Nevertheless, his approach to tackling my mania was not good enough. Simple as that. To make matters worse, I had known that he had been in contact with my father, which upset me greatly. This moment, and others like it, had repercussions for our friendship. There are some people who are unable to discuss the more serious sides of bipolar disorder (i.e. depression) and are likewise incapable

* Even though he was only trying to help, individuals must be exceedingly careful what they say to me when I’m manic.

of conversing about the complexities of life*. These individuals are usually quick to change the subject when the conversation takes a turn toward such matters, and they are not, in my opinion, true friends. (I've met quite a few.) As I have always endeavored to face life's challenges head-on, I have evinced little interest in such individuals. Some people are simply incapable of being there for you, finding it easier to take off**.

I spent 27 days in the psychiatric ward, and I had many memorable moments, including a "slight" abuse of my daily leave of absence.

Party at the Psych Ward

Expecting to be liberated from the ward at the end of June, I decided to invite "a few" friends to The English Pub on Thursday, July 2nd, to celebrate my freedom. The guest list totaled approximately 100 people, including many close friends and some more distant acquaintances. So extreme was I in my planning that I sent the invite on Sunday, followed it up with a reminder on Wednesday, all the while spending considerable time coordinating the event in the meantime.

I invited all of my Zinzino colleagues, including my brother

* Sindri, however, is not one of those people who get off spreading stories of my manic episodes and the laughs that they bring.

** I have realized that I have little need for such people. I've also begun to discern the difference between true friends and those who have slowly distanced themselves from me.

Bjarki. Upon receiving the invitation, he notified our father, and although I understood that I had put him in an uncomfortable position, I was unhappy with his intervention. When my father called, I feared that he would contact my psychiatrists and spoil my plans. I pleaded with him that the party was "extremely important to me" and that I had put great effort into planning it. Eventually, I gave him an ultimatum: his ruining my party would come at great cost to our relationship.

On that Thursday, upon taking my daily leave, I told the staff that I was on my way to The English Pub to attend a friend's birthday party—when, in reality, it was my own party to which I was referring. Approximately 50 people showed up to celebrate my freedom, which I had yet to attain; when I sent out the invites, I had expected to be discharged in time for the party, but this was not the case. I was still subject to involuntary internment and technically deprived of my autonomy in the eyes of the law.

I was supposed to return to the ward at 10 pm at the latest. At 10.30 pm, a staff member called and asked if I was on my way back. I told him that I was almost there—and then I told him the exact same thing when he called again an hour later. This led the on-call doctor to phone my father. My dad told the doctor exactly where I was and what I was doing—as if hoping that I would be picked up.

Despite the deceptive nature of the evening, I had a fantastic time with good friends, and everyone was in excel-

lent spirits. As I had been ingesting strong medication four times a day for the past three weeks, however, I quickly became quite drunk. I spun The English Pub's infamous Wheel of Fortune several times, telling everyone that I knew exactly the right kind of force to apply in order to get lucky (one should never spin "too quickly," I advised)*.

In retrospect, I was fortunate that the staff of 33 C hadn't found it necessary to call the cops. As I wasn't considered a hazard to myself or others, bringing me back to the ward by force wasn't the right thing to do.

I arrived home an hour after midnight. My father opened the door, and without having to say a word, I could tell that he was angry. "Go downstairs and keep it down," he said. I woke at nine in the morning, went to the gym, and returned to the ward. Everyone was aware of what had happened, and Óttar Guðmundsson—the "Celebrity Doctor," as I call him—was considerably uneasy. I am probably the only Icelandic to have hosted a party while a patient of the psych ward.

I wasn't punished, but I had exhausted any goodwill regarding my leaves of absence. After a conversation with the medical team, I went home, retrieved my car keys without permission, and returned to the ward late. An intern tried calling me three

times. When I returned, completely calm, he was on pins and needles, pleading with me to hand over the keys: I was in danger of being deprived of my liberty for six months.

My three-week involuntary internment was almost over, and I was skating on thin ice. I handed the intern my keys and declared that I was fine with remaining at the ward over the weekend; I needed it. Recognizing that I had betrayed the doctors' trust, I apologized. The staff warned that I should not "play with fire" while I was still recovering, but I could not resist the urge to test the limits of my leaves of absence. I told the doctors that having recovered an ounce of freedom after the strict rules at 32 C had come as a great sense of relief—and that I had simply failed to control myself.

Everything went according to plan over the next few days, and I was discharged the next weekend without a hitch.

Vísir's Journalism

On June 14th, 2015, a nude photo of me on Austurvöllur square was published on the news website Vísir. Suspecting that I would be upset with it after my mania ran its course, and considering it beneath contempt, posting such a picture without delving into the backstory, my family asked that the photograph be removed. (The only purpose of posting the photo was to attract clicks.) It took a phone call from my brother-in-law Davíð for the journalist to switch out the original photo for a standard picture

* My friend Bragi Michaelsson later thanked me for revealing what downtown Reykjavík could be like on Thursday nights: he hadn't expected such a lively atmosphere.

of Austurvöllur square. The updated article explained that the subject of the story was suffering from a mental illness, but the original photo remained public for 86 minutes. I later wrote a harsh letter to the journalist—to which he did not respond—where I took issue with his wording: it was not clear to me who it was exactly that was suffering from a mental illness, him or me.

A few months prior to that story being published, the same journalist had written another article about a man struggling against involuntary internment. The article was accompanied by a photo of a person being strapped down in the psychiatric ward. The visuals were absurd, serving only to inspire prejudice against the mentally ill. I have never seen straps used in psychiatric wards, for they have long since become passé. The photograph was met with considerable anger, and I believe that it would be most expedient for everyone if the journalist switched careers. Or decided to write about something else. The last thing that we, those of us who work to raise awareness of mental illness in Iceland, need is journalists frustrating our efforts with mindless coverage, wording, or photographs.

In July of 2018, when I was on an even keel, emotionally speaking, I went to dinner at Bryggjan Brugghús and bumped into the above-mentioned reporter. I had been waiting for the moment for three years, and on that particular Saturday evening—that poor journalist chose the wrong restaurant. Recognizing him immediately, I refrained from marching over to his table right

away, but when he stood up to visit the bar, I called to him from my seat. I introduced myself as “the Austurvöllur exhibitionist” and asked him why he hadn’t responded to my letter. “What was I supposed to say?” he replied, bemused but also a little frightened. I asked him to refrain from writing on the subject of mental illness because his reporting only served to engender prejudice. I also reminded him how egregious it had been, posting that photo of the person strapped down in the psych ward. He could offer no answers. Finally, I declared that he was an appalling journalist. Visibly frightened, he walked away. Having finally had the opportunity of voicing my opinion, face to face, felt good*.

In June 2015, while visiting me at the psychiatric ward, my brothers showed me the infamous photograph somewhat reluctantly. Contrary to their expectations, I wasn’t the least bit ashamed, taking a peculiar pride in my nude pose—I just laughed and thought it was cool.

The Story Behind My Exhibitionist Moment

There’s a funny story that helps explain why so many people called the cops on the day that I exposed myself on Austurvöllur

* It did not matter to me that I had been patronizing a fine restaurant, surrounded by people—this was something that couldn’t wait. Sometimes I shock people like I’m wielding jumper cables (depending on the person and the circumstances, of course); that’s just the kind of person that I am.

square*. While creating my website**, I perused the comments section beneath the articles published that Sunday, June 14th. I discovered that on the same day as my “incident,” there was a commercial being shot in downtown Reykjavík centering around a man on a bicycle in a skin-colored suit. The ad encouraged drivers to pay better attention to cyclists, who oftentimes seem invisible***. As an article on Vísir explained: “The naked man who was seen cycling around downtown Reykjavík was acting in a commercial about traffic safety on behalf of the Icelandic Automobile Association. The man wasn’t actually nude but wearing a skin-colored suit. According to their diary, the police had received complaints regarding a naked cyclist whom they then tried to locate. The man was seen cycling past Austurvöllur square, where a large crowd had gathered in support of the #freethenipple revolution. The man was followed by a cameraman on a four-wheeler.”

Another article on Vísir read: “The Reykjavík Police were notified of a naked man on Austurvöllur square today. The man exposed himself during an assembly in support of the so-called

#freethenipple revolution. According to Vísir’s sources, the man cycled around the area for some time. Most of those who had assembled were unaffected by the incident. It’s worth mentioning that the man was wearing a helmet and a flesh-colored sock on his penis. According to the police diary, the man disappeared, and despite search efforts, officers were unable to locate him.”

Another article on Morgunblaðið’s website stated: “According to Runólfur Ólafsson, Director of the Icelandic Automobile Association, the commercial had been in the works for some time, with the association having decided to shoot the commercial on that day in light of favorable weather conditions. It had been a complete coincidence that the #freethenipple rally had convened on the same day. Runólfur seemed rather surprised when the undersigned asked if there had been any connection between the two. ‘The timing of the shoot had nothing to do with the assembly,’ Runólfur stated, adding that the police had been made aware of the shoot beforehand.”

Vísir concluded its coverage on the story by posting the aforementioned photograph of me and by revealing what had actually taken place: “It’s come to light that there were, in fact, two separate individuals who caught the public’s attention with their nudity today. One of them undressed and posed in front of the statue of Jón Sigurðsson, where a large crowd had gathered in support of the #freethenipple revolution.”

It just so happened that all of these events—the #freethenipple

* I didn’t give it much thought at the time, not really delving into the public discussion surrounding the incident, but I always tell the story during my lectures, *My Rollercoaster Life*. Having a screenshot of the moment is fun because the story always attracts attention. What scares me, however, is knowing that an unblurred version of the photo exists somewhere, probably on the phone of the pedestrian who captured it, and at Vísir.

** kristinnrunar.com

*** The punchline of the ad was: Do Cyclists Need to Be Naked to Attract Attention?

protest, the commercial, and my exposing myself—had taken place on that same Saturday afternoon. It's curious that my "moment in the nude," so to speak, had been conflated with the cycling commercial. The police couldn't understand why they received so many complaints regarding a commercial production involving a nude cyclist with a cameraman in tow. Apparently, it took a few hours for them to realize that these were two separate incidents.

I had a lot of fun reading the comments beneath the articles. Given that the article that featured my nude photograph was the most read story on Vísir that day, there were quite a number of comments, the nature of which seemed to indicate some division among the readership. Some observers reacted positively and appeared envious of my gumption. Others were outraged. They interpreted my act as a disrespectful attempt to "trump" the women, who bared their breasts in support of the cause: I just had to take it a step further to prove that they would never obtain the same rights as us men. Two comments in particular stuck out, both authored by women present at Austurvöllur square on that day. One of the women stated: "No, actually, he didn't have a sock on his penis, and he wasn't wearing a helmet. He just stood there in all his glory. I'm not saying that it was bad. I just want to point out that the women who bared their breasts were trying to obtain the same rights as men. And then there's this guy, whose vibe seemed to suggest that since women are trying to stand on equal footing as men, he's going to take it a step further—to

ensure that women remain a step behind. Maybe that wasn't his intention, but that was the feeling that it engendered." The other woman wrote: "The man emanated a kind of 'fuck you' attitude by exposing himself on that day and at that time."

My intention was the exact opposite. I wanted to show solidarity with the revolution. In my manic frame of mind, I believed that I could lend the women additional power and courage in their admirable fight. It all happened very quickly. Before I knew it, I was standing there, completely naked, in front of the statue of Jón Sigurðsson, posed in an attitude not previously rehearsed—one that I will probably never recreate. As I was so focused on assuming an apt position, I didn't notice anyone taking a photograph*.

Browsing the comments section was informative. We are quite a judgmental nation; apparently, it did not dawn on anyone that there might be some psychological aspect to the story. Fortunately, a few positive individuals defended me and my act, which made me happy.

* Someone probably snapped a photo and sent it to Vísir. I doubt that a professional photographer would have been able to capture the exact moment, although it is impossible to say, given how many people were in attendance.

“I can’t tell if it’s killing me or
if it’s making me stronger.”

–Junaid Muhammad

Arrested on My Sister's Wedding Day



Having been discharged in July of 2015, I took another big leap and posted an update on Facebook. Despite being open about my mental illness, I was ashamed of having been admitted to the psychiatric ward. The inspiration behind the post was a conversation with my friend Auðun Georg Ólafsson. During my time in the ward, we had been in the process of planning a lunch, but considering that I was still in the hospital, I revealed that I couldn't exactly set the date. Auðun asked what had happened, and I replied that nothing had happened—only that I was in the psych ward following an episode of mania. He told me that I should not feel an ounce of shame and encouraged me to speak candidly about my experiences. And so, soon after being discharged, I shared a post on Facebook explaining to my friends why they hadn't heard from me in a while: I had been in good hands in the psychiatric ward, which was nothing to be ashamed of, even though I had been ashamed before. It turned out to be my most influential post*.

That fall, I experienced my worst depression since early 2011. It lasted well into the winter. November and December were difficult months, and it was only with great difficulty that I was

* It had an even greater impact than my post from a year earlier regarding my struggles with mental illness. People considered me brave and offered support with over 100 extremely positive comments. I will be eternally grateful to Auðun for his support.



able to interact with other people. In November, I spoke to my then psychiatrist and asked him to schedule electroconvulsive therapy. Over a period of only two weeks—I received treatment seven times*. Despite its relative success, it was a bit too much; one of the main side effects of electroconvulsive therapy is short-term memory loss; I could not remember anything from that Christmas—nor any of singer Bubbi Morthen's holiday concert at the Harpa Concert Hall.

With the advent of a new year, I began feeling better, although my convalescence took time. To me, the months following a mania are a kind of free fall, both in terms of my emotional well being and weight gain. To recover from mania and plunge into the darkness and cold of winter is staggeringly difficult. The sense of hopelessness is profound.

Grossly Overweight

Despite feeling better, I was in poor physical shape—historically so between the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2017. During the time, I weighed, on average, about 310 pounds, which took a mental toll. I was quite concerned with appearances, especially my own, which sometimes made being around people difficult. Some days, even something as mundane as a trip to the grocery store proved problematic. I didn't want to meet other people,

especially those who had previously complimented me on my good shape. Despite such apprehensions, I did not refrain from going outside, although I could often tell, without a single word being said, that some people felt that I had lost all control.

During election night in 2016, I met an old friend—an influential figure within the field of fitness in Iceland—who asked why I had become “so grossly overweight!?” I had just treated the man to schnapps at the night club B5 in Reykjavík, which, in light of his rudeness, is a decision that I greatly regret. I walked away but returned shortly afterward to declare that he had achieved the rare feat of going from an absolute mensch to a worthless wretch in the space of 30 seconds. He tried pulling me back as I walked away, but I had no interest in making up. He knew that I was bipolar, just as it had not escaped my notice that I had once again gained a lot of weight. Being overweight, one receives one's share of abuse, although such flagrant discourtesy is rare. A few months later, I used his insult as inspiration to shed the excess weight.

Although I probably experienced hypomania, I did not have a full-blown manic episode in 2016, owing most likely to my poor physical shape and my attendant disappointment—I simply lacked the confidence to soar any higher. During the latter half of August, my family began to notice a change in me, although I never lost any sleep. They discussed my state among themselves but saw no reason to intervene. My brother Magni later told me

* I went three times a week, from December 15th to the 30th.

that they thought they had discerned a slight whiff of mania in my behavior and that my brother Ingi had visited for the sole purpose of checking in on me.

During September of that year, I had lunch with my friend and absolute chief Hjörtur Atli Guðmundsson. He suggested that I was beginning to fly high, which was perhaps unsurprising given how eventful the preceding days and weeks had been: I had held several lectures that were well received, and I had been in the news following the publication of the aforementioned mania video. A few days later, I invited Hjörtur over for grill food, and he told me that my deportment had changed. I was much calmer.

I was partying a lot at the time, which is something that I do when I feel good. As a result, many people began to wonder whether I was manic. Annoyed by such speculations, I posted an update on Facebook, stating that there was a difference between having fun and being manic. I received many responses, the best of which from Grétar Björnsson, an old basketball teammate, who replied that considering that such little time had passed from the incident on Austurvöllur square—people were on their guard. As time went by, he reasoned, they would become less concerned.

In the spring of 2016, my friend Kristinn Marinósson*

* Kiddi or “the Piece” as he is sometimes called.

founded a supporters’ club for the Haukar basketball team*. While recruiting members, he asked whether I would help create a cheerful atmosphere. Although I wasn’t keen to begin with, I came around eventually, attending my first meeting a day and a half later with a repertoire of 25 songs about all of the players and coaches. I had also composed a few more songs of non-specific pep. The club was named “the Mania,” in reference to my bipolar disorder. The Haukar Mania was obviously much more boisterous than rival fan group the FH Mafia; no one can resist the power of the Mania!

In March of 2017, I met strength trainer Vilhjálmur Steinarsson at a party hosted by members of the Haukar sports team. Vilhjálmur had just returned from Norway as he had been hired as the assistant and strength coach of the men’s Domino’s-division team. We recognized each other and hit it off immediately. Having discussed my history of fluctuating weight, I began to sense that he was the man to help me. During nights out on the town, I was tired of being habitually conflated with politician Sigmundur Davíð or convict Siggi “the Hacker.” Something had to change. Being confused with Sigmundur was fine—but not Siggi**.

* Although I had grown up playing for Breiðablik, I played with Haukar for almost three seasons between 2007 and 2009, and I have many good friends from that time. The family of my brother-in-law Davíð has strong ties to Haukar, and he encouraged me to attend practices.

** Whenever I was compared to him, I would retort that I couldn’t be him on account of it being way past his curfew. He was indicted for computer hacking and pedophilia.

During our first session on April 1st, 2017, I weighed 316 pounds and 8 ounces. We devised a program comprising three weekly workouts. Every week, I would send him information about my weight, and every two weeks, he would measure my waist. It went well, to begin with, but I was hungry for even better results. During my first two months with Villi, I was exercising regularly and eating better. I lost 25 pounds in six weeks. Although my measurements continued to improve, my sleep was erratic. By the end of June—when I had lost almost 50 pounds—I sensed that an elevated mood state was in the offing. As I had been open about being bipolar from the beginning, I told Villi immediately. The warning signs were all there: I worked out constantly and had begun showing up to training sessions completely exhausted, unable to cope with sessions that I had completed with relative ease weeks earlier. Nonetheless, I became much quicker, which meant that he was able to tire me out with sprints and jumps in a matter of 15 to 20 minutes as opposed to an hour. We spent the rest of our sessions together, stretching and talking. He's a resourceful guy, especially when it comes to exercise, and an excellent coach. As the weeks passed, my numbers kept dwindling, and we celebrated the loss of 50 pounds that July by posting pictures and videos on social media.

Even though things were going well, I sensed that he didn't quite understand what I was dealing with mentally. We did not continue our training that fall, and I don't really know why we parted ways.

The Girls from L.A.

If I were to put a date on when the next mania began, I would say that it was on Wednesday, June 28th. Following a vigorous workout with Villi, I decided to reward myself by ordering a Triple Play combo* at the Ruby Tuesday in Reykjavík. On the way out, I bumped into two girls from L.A., who asked if I could direct them downtown. Feeling that the city center was closer than it actually was—we were almost five miles away—I decided to show them the way by walking a bit. Realizing that it was too far to walk, I offered to drive them one at a time in my two-person BMW Z3. It was one of the few moments since I bought the car in 2010 that I lamented its small size. The girls were grateful, and we planned to meet up at The English Pub later that evening. I had obviously begun feeling better; my workouts were going well, and my confidence was slowly returning. In retrospect, meeting these young women was a point of no return. It marked the beginning of a four-day weekend of debauchery—originally meant to be only one. I was in excellent spirits and met plenty of people, most of whom were tourists.

Shortly after the onset of my mania, I partied with my sister's ex-boyfriend, Andri Þór Kristinsson. When we met during the mid-90s, Andri was driving a Honda Civic that boasted a very powerful sound system. Impressed, I asked him to tune the

* A Triple Play combines the restaurant's three most popular meals into a single order.

audio system in my BMW, which was when he offered me some advice: “Wherever you go, especially in good weather, you should always drive with the top down, turn up your speakers, and make everyone turn their heads.” Not only did I heed his advice, I eventually bought four different pairs of sunglasses to attract even more attention.

Most manic individuals feel as if they're the center of the universe. I'm certainly no exception.

Extreme Extravagance

My sister Ragnheiður got married on July 15th, 2017. I was to be the master of ceremonies along with my cousin Jóhanna Friðrika Sæmundsdóttir. Ten days before the service, however, I had not spent a single minute preparing, hoping to cram on the night before the wedding. As the nuptials neared, and I began to lose touch with reality, I started feeling as if the wedding wouldn't happen at all. Somehow, I reasoned, the preparations hadn't been adequate, and as long as I felt the way that I did, the whole thing was unlikely to take place. A few days before the big day, I asked my brother-in-law Davíð: “Is this wedding really going to happen?” He replied that it most certainly was, knowing full well that I was in an elevated mood state.

The day after I asked the question, I arrived at the Smárahvammur field in Kópavogur to practice soccer. I noticed two 12-year-old boys on the pitch, both of whom were goalies

for Breiðablik. I offered to take a few shots at them. They agreed—and what was to be a casual practice session turned into an hour-long goalie drill where I iterated the importance of courage and self-confidence. “You can become professional soccer players,” I declared, “if only you apply yourselves and are sufficiently hungry!” At the end of the drill, their demeanor had been completely transformed. I concluded my impromptu lecture by imparting what I thought I knew about the art of soccer. (Perhaps in a slightly manic way.)

It was during this particular manic episode that my profligacy reached new heights. With the aid of the company Netgíró, where I had secured a credit limit of 4,000 dollars*, I went on a spending spree, purchasing various products and merchandise on installment plans.

Having secured said credit, I visited Jói útherji, my favorite soccer store, and proceeded to purchase merchandise for more than 1,500 dollars—and that at a considerable discount. I bought seven jerseys, including three from the new Manchester United kit; two pairs of cleats; a few soccer balls; goalkeeping gloves; and the Errea Soccer Association of Iceland slacks, in honor of my past glory at the Shell competition and a reminder of the fact that I had played one game for the national team. An employee inquired, tongue-in-cheek, whether

* Netgíró is a loan company that allows customers to repay credit 14 days later without interest or to spread the payments on installments.

I intended to buy the whole store*.

Over the next few days, I also bought a new smartphone, a television, a personal computer, Beats headphones, and a suit. I was not at all concerned with this extravagance, and when I finished the 4,000 dollar loan with Netgíró, I applied for an even higher limit. Fortunately, my request was denied. “You must begin repaying your debts before we will consider granting you an additional loan,” I was told. But there were other fish in the sea, I reckoned. And so I obtained credit with Aktiva, totaling 3,000 dollars.

During the time, my account with Arion bank was so far overdrawn that an adviser could not understand how it had happened. According to the bank's policy, a client's credit limit may not exceed three months' worth of wages—but I had long since exceeded that limit and was trying to secure further credit. My self-confidence was through the roof, and I always believed that money would begin streaming into my accounts before long.

To put it mildly, I had sunk myself into considerable debts—and the chickens would come home to roost over the coming months. With the generous support of my family, we drew up a payment plan for my debts, which involved, among other things, work at my father's new company, Mathofið. I also agreed to

strike up an active relationship with the vacuum cleaner at home. First and foremost, however, my way out of debt entailed the adoption of a more economical approach to life. I would have to learn from my experience.

I decided to swallow my pride and relinquish my credit card to my father: insurance that things wouldn't get worse*. I told him that I was determined to honor my commitments, knowing full well that there were boring months ahead. And although it felt a little like having one's feet chopped off, I could only blame myself. My father even asked me to hand over my passport, which I felt was rather excessive. He could not ask such a thing of me. I was, after all, a self-determining individual. Besides, I told him, I could still travel to many parts of Europe on the strength of my driver's license alone, and asked whether he intended to confiscate my license, as well? The way things ended, I handed over neither. Although he wants what's best for me, he can be a little extreme at times.

Accident-Prone

That summer, I suffered a mild injury that seemed a clear sign to slow down. Following a workout at the World Class gym in Laugar, I stubbed the pinkie toe on my right foot violently against a locker-room bench. Given that the toe stood out perpendicular

* The staff at Jóí útherji have come to know me but not necessarily because of me being bipolar. I have brought specially-ordered products from abroad and asked them to label them. They have told me that no one is as fastidious as me when it comes to faithfully replicating jerseys, especially older ones.

* Although I could have easily applied for a new credit card.

to the rest of my foot, I knew that it was broken. Calm but in pain, I yanked the toe back into place and proceeded to the spa area to cool off. Having ordered a Somersby cider, I headed toward the emergency room. Although it wasn't technically an emergency, I wanted an X-ray to confirm that it was broken. While waiting for assistance—which took five whole hours—I popped over to a convenient store. While there, I stocked up on energy drinks and snacks for over 50 dollars. The X-ray eventually confirmed that the toe was broken, and I was told to take it easy over the next few weeks.

As I wasn't prescribed any pain killers upon being discharged, I visited the emergency room again on the following morning. I was still dressed in a suit and a pair of rather snug dress shoes, which I had squeezed into earlier that night. Looking down at my feet, the woman in the reception commented that I should probably reconsider the nature of my footwear, given the broken toe.

Subsequently, I came close to suffering a permanent injury, or death, for the very first time in my life. I stopped by at home for a change of shoes and decided to jog downtown. Lacking the patience to wait for the lights to turn green, I punctuated my jog with short bursts of sprints whenever I came to a crosswalk. Confronted with two contiguous crosswalks by the Harpa Concert Hall, I decided to cross both of them in a single mad dash. Thinking that an oncoming car on the left lane would be the last to cross, I made a run for it. To my surprise, there

was another car on the right lane, which I failed to spot until halfway through my sprint, that was zooming my way—I escaped collision by the breadth of a few millimeters. Afterward, I found myself in a mild state of shock, although I didn't think too much of it until later. Having crossed over to the shore, heading toward the concert hall, I began walking on the giant rocks on the beach, which dot the shoreline for several miles. By walking atop the boulders, I felt that I was strengthening my legs while simultaneously showcasing my grit to foreign passersby.

A Thin Line Between Happiness and Anger

I often find myself in an altruistic mood when I'm manic. If someone is begging for alms on the street, I always offer to donate. Once, in front of the World Class gym in Laugar, a young woman was offering a brief presentation of the Icelandic Red Cross to pedestrians. Noticing me, she asked if I would be interested in making a donation—to which I replied that I was more than willing. Standing there, I silently reflected upon the appropriate amount before declaring: "1,000 dollars a month!" The young woman was dumbfounded. With a surprised smile on her face, she asked whether I really possessed the means for such a generous contribution. Being absolutely convinced myself, I replied by signing my name on the dotted line and encouraging others to do the same. The poor girl was at a loss. The following month, I received a bill for 20 dollars, which suggested that the

girl probably sensed that something was off. By the end of that summer, I was making regular donations to five different non-profit organizations. It felt right to me. Never mind if I could afford it or not.

Following my exchange with the young woman from the Red Cross, I walked past the Laugardalur swimming pool. By the entrance, there were two boys, probably around the age of ten, who were hosting a raffle. Naturally, I selected a knick-knack from their conglomeration of objects and handed them 40 dollars. Simultaneously puzzled and elated, they said that they had been there for two hours and that this was by far the most charitable purchase anyone had made. I told them to enjoy it. "May fortune smile down on you for the remainder of your lives," I added*.

Besides being liberal with my donations, I was often in the mood for gift-giving too. One of the jerseys that I had bought at Jóí útherji belonged to the French super-team Paris Saint-Germain. The letters on the back of the jersey read "NEYMAR JR 10," in reference to Brazilian athlete Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior who had recently joined the club as the most expensive soccer player in history. From the moment that I bought the jersey, I knew that I would wind up giving it to someone special. I only wore it once but kept it on me in case the opportunity presented itself. While working out at World Class, I spotted a

man in his thirties wearing a French jersey. I knew immediately that he was a foreigner—most likely French—although I couldn't be certain. I walked up to the man and handed him the jersey, saying that it was for him. Like the raffle-boys, the man was both elated and baffled, asking if I was sure. "Of course," I responded casually. "You're from Paris, right?" He nodded his head with a giant smile, which was the extent of our conversation.

I wasn't always in the sunniest of moods, however. Sometimes, I grew suspicious of people who seemed engaged in questionable activities, like drug-dealing. Once at World Class, I left the gym at the same time as two men, who were probably in their forties. I had noticed them earlier in the locker room and had a bad feeling about them. It was raining outside, and the parking lot was filled with puddles. As I exited the gym, music blasting in my headphones, I slowed down to allow the men to walk slightly ahead of me. Waiting for the right moment, I jumped into a large puddle and splashed water over them. Turning around, they raised their arms in anger, and I responded by yelling obscenities in their direction and running after them. Despite outnumbering me two to one, they probably sensed that messing with me, given my erratic behavior, was a bad idea and bolted to their car. I slowly circled around their vehicle, and in their desperation, they peeled off—middle fingers protruding from the window.

In retrospect, it was a rather presumptuous and excessive

* I was usually positive in my dealings with people, telling everyone that the best was yet to come and that they should live their lives to the fullest.

move on my behalf, but sometimes it's okay to give people a piece of your mind. No matter who they are.

The New Michael Schumacher

Like so many times before, I grew obsessed with the chaotic traffic in Iceland. I wanted to change things for the better, once and for all—and getting arrested was completely out of the question. Musing upon my past failure, I recognized that a different tack was required, and so I decided to become a role model. Persuaded that local motorists would emulate my good example, I began driving around incessantly, often tracing the same long route around town: from Kópavogur to Sæbrautin; from downtown Reykjavík to Hafnarfjörður; and back home again. I did this every single day, discovering novel ways of gripping the steering wheel and beginning to feel more and more like the new Michael Schumacher. Following the advice of my brother Guðni*, who had taught me to keep my foot on the pedal before the light turned green, I never dallied about.

I also visited the Klettur Tire Garage in Reykjavík and expressed interest in purchasing “the finest 18-inch tires that money could buy.” Perusing the tires underneath my car, which seemed perfectly fine, the employee asked why? It was an honest response. I replied that I needed the best tires on the market

and that I would return tomorrow to finalize the purchase. I never did*.

Feeling like a professional driver, I sped along my usual route while keeping an eye out for the police—who never pulled me over. If I spotted the cops, I drove in evasive triangles, from corner to corner, and took “secret” routes. If I was zooming through the streets in the evenings or during the night, I directed other vehicles in this or that direction with my blinkers. I did this constantly. Certain vehicles and motorcycles, I believed, were waiting for my signal to indicate that the cops weren't around. If this proved to be the case, I turned on the floodlights, and we peeled off.

Having studied the lights to complete my route in the shortest possible time—I knew exactly when to slow down or accelerate in order to catch the green light.

I don't know how much money I spent on gas during those weeks. When I'm not manic, a full tank lasts me almost a month. But at the time, I must have finished a tank of gas in under a week. In my defense, however—someone had to teach these people to drive.

There were times when I had been driving for so long and had gotten so little sleep that I could only navigate out of certain neighborhoods with the deepest of concentration. One time, I

* Guðni worked briefly as a driver for Kjöthúsið, my father's old company.

* Deep down, I knew that this was nonsense and that I couldn't afford it.

became stuck in Árbær, a suburb of Reykjavík. As my vision had gone blurry, I called my father and asked him to pick me up. As he drove back to Kópavogur, I dozed in the passenger seat.

There were also panicky times when I felt as if I were being followed. Once after midnight, I was driving around when Lykke Li's "I Follow Rivers" began playing on the radio. When the song started, I was suddenly overcome with a sense of vengeance; since "these people" were following me during the day, I reasoned—I would give them a dose of their own medicine during the night. I did this for about half an hour before calling it quits and driving home.

I once resorted to rather extreme measures. Convinced that I needed to protect my family from possible stalkers—they knew where my family and I lived after all—I headed home and retrieved a one-liter glass bottle and filled it with water. I drove toward Digranesvegur, near Kópavogur Junior College, and, making sure no one was looking, tossed the bottle out the window, and it shattered on the street. It was my way of impeding traffic past my family's house*. I drove home.

There were times when I was so convinced that certain cars were following me that I had a hard time peaking out the window after arriving home. I hoped that my neighbors were aware of the situation and that they would look out for me. It was a terrible feeling. Fortunately, also a rare one.

Innovative Traffic Control

My brother-in-law Davíð was worried about me. Growing ever more suspicious of my incessant driving, he suggested I hand over my keys and allow him to become my chauffeur instead. Thinking that I would take offense at his offer—he half expected me to punch him in the face. On the contrary, I was amenable to his proposal. On that day, he drove me around to a few places before dropping me off at World Class.

After working out and stretching, I was visited by strange thoughts. I wondered if the planes had actually hit the World Trade Center. It couldn't have happened, for something so terrible just couldn't be real. Mulling it over, I concluded that the whole thing had been staged with the use of computer-generated graphics—that it was a secret plot to shake things up in the world and that no one had died. Having settled the matter, my train of thought was conducted to another tragedy, that of racing driver Michael Schumacher, one of my heroes. I began to wonder whether he had actually suffered a severe head injury while skiing. After all, there had been no photographs and few reports following up on the incident, which took place in 2013. I concluded that it, too, was without any element of truth. It was merely meant to shock the world.

At the spa, I made another surprising discovery. Not only did the Jacuzzi, which was always rather hot, feel tepid, but I was

* My sister and her family also live in the area.

able to withstand the frigid waters of the cold pot for much longer than usual. This led me to surmise that my body temperature had been altered.

Following these bizarre thoughts and sensations, I called Davíð to pick me up. Not wanting to be seen—I hid behind a tree. When Davíð pulled up to the entrance, I called to him and signaled for him to drive around to the parking lot. “Back up toward the tree so I can jump inside,” I whispered. Following my instructions calmly, he asked what was going on. I replied that I didn’t want to be seen because strange things were happening. As we drove off, I held my bag to the passenger-side window to remain invisible to the public eye. If Davíð had nursed any suspicions about my state of mind, all doubt had now been removed.

I kept to my habit of traveling on foot, often from home and to downtown Reykjavík. One day, I questioned whether my idealistic methods, i.e. that of driving around in hopes that fellow motorists would follow my good example, were really working; people kept driving irresponsibly and perishing on the road. It was then that I decided to adopt yet another approach. Perched on a grassy elevation facing the Icelandic Meteorological Office in Reykjavík, I laid supine on the drenched hillside, controlling traffic by tapping lightly on the grass with the ball of my foot: it signaled to drivers in the vanguard that they should accelerate slightly and set the pace for the other motorists. If, on the other hand, the cars drove too fast and refused to heed my signal when

I contracted my legs, I struck the grass with all my might—while screaming that I was on my way to the psych ward for the fourth time because of them!

Because of my anger, the drivers were persuaded to slow down. Moving closer to the road so that they could see me, I prayed that they would drive more sensibly. Completely drenched following the day’s strange operations, I headed to downtown Reykjavík.

Marine Life at Grandi

My sister’s wedding was approaching fast, but I was completely unprepared for my duties as master of ceremonies. To make matters worse, I was in dire need of sleep, having only slumbered for two or three hours a night for the past three weeks*. Instead of preparing, however, I found myself in downtown Reykjavík on the night before the wedding, not partying exactly—but on a somewhat inexplicable mission.

Breathing in the ocean air near the Harpa Music and Conference Hall, I walked atop a stone seawall toward a yellow lighthouse. It was a narrow path, and the slightest misstep would have sent me plummeting into a tangle of seaweed. Always fascinated by the ocean, I contemplated the unnatural size of the ships—the needless dumping of gobs of oil and waste into the ocean. Had we really not progressed further as a society? Lost in

* I never achieved deep sleep, and it was beginning to take its toll.

my thoughts, I noticed a few seemingly moribund birds and felt as if they were crying for help. Appalled by the bleakness of the environment, I left.

As if sleepwalking, I came to my senses in the Grandi neighborhood, examining the fish tubs by the sail-making company Ægir. I wasn't drunk, but I had absolutely no idea how I had gotten there. It was all rather horrifying. Exhausted, delusional, empty—and struggling to navigate back to the city center—I came across a car parked near the fish tubs that was filled with tools. The vehicle, I felt, contained clues concerning my next steps. Discovering that the car was locked and that the keys were not inside, I decided, rather wisely, not to break in.

Wet and bedraggled, I walked toward a bright lamppost near the restaurant Marshall. I was dressed in fine clothes with cuff links that had taken me a long time to attach earlier that evening. As I drew closer to the lamppost, I heard a voice, and began feeling as if someone, or some *thing*, were commanding me to remove my shirt without detaching my cuff links: this bizarre exercise would strengthen my arms. The voice, I realized, belonged to that of my late brother Guðni. He wanted me to complete the trial so that I could reap some mysterious award—perhaps a trip abroad to some sunny foreign country*. Guðni appeared to me as two little eyes, which simultaneously followed and guided me.

* I did not realize until later that these cuff links, which I wore only on that one occasion, had been given to Guðni on his confirmation.

I half managed to remove my jacket and my shirt, but the cuff links made it difficult. It was an exhausting endeavor, which took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Half naked, I realized that the test wasn't over. I needed to remove all of my clothes. With the incident on Austurvöllur square still fresh on my mind, I hoped that no one would see me. This trial—that of removing my clothes without detaching my cuff links and then putting them on again—was a test of my precision. Just as I was dressing again, the lamppost turned to illuminate a small black vehicle with tinted windows that was parked nearby. If I completed the trial, the key to the car would be revealed, which would enable me to drive to Keflavík Airport and fly abroad to that aforementioned sunny place. It was with great difficulty that I managed to put my shirt back on without removing the cuff links, while also slipping my toes into my drenched socks and tying my shoes, but to my disappointment, I did not find the keys*.

Despite my failure, I was growing physically stronger; owing to my efforts, the entire universe would be roused on the following morning with more powerful limbs. Wherever I went, people appeared to be stretching, as if they were trying to adjust to the additional energy I had conferred upon them.

Having no money for a taxi, I considered walking home but

* Engaged in this surreal game, I probably spent about two hours beneath that lamppost.

found that I simply lacked the energy. As it was the middle of the night, I did not want to wake anyone at home. In the end, I took a taxi home to Furugrund and told the driver that I had lost my wallet when we arrived. I asked him to jot down his bank account on a piece of paper and told him that I would transfer the money the following morning. But I lost the note immediately*.

My apartment was a mess; despite my abundance of energy, changing the sheets or washing my clothes proved too menial—I had no patience for such things. And even though there were clean linens in my closet, I slept for days without any sheets on the bed. When all the towels were dirty, I did not wash them, resorting to a dishtowel after showering instead. Without deep sleep, the life of man devolves into chaos.

Wet and cold after a long night, I took a shower. I cranked the temperature so high that the smoke detector began beeping**. Soaking wet, I left the bathroom and ripped the batteries out. It was not the most prudent thing to do. At night. As a resident of an apartment building.

* All things being equal, I am completely reliable when it comes to money. But this time, I lost the paper immediately, which was unsurprising given my manic state.

** The shower at home allows for both very cold and very hot showers, which can serve to re-energize the body. This particular shower was, however, somewhere close to 120°F, and so it was fortunate that the smoke detector began beeping, helping me discern what was happening.

Pepper Spray

I did not communicate much with my friends and family, who complained that it was near impossible to get a hold of me, whether by phone or through social media*. And on the day of my sister's wedding, which was to start at four in the afternoon, I had no contact with my family whatsoever.

I left the house around noon to practice soccer. No longer possessing far-flung hopes of playing professionally, I casually rehearsed some old moves on the pitch next to my apartment, wearing the expensive cleats that I had purchased a few days earlier. As usual, the music from my iPod was blaring in my headphones.

Following a quick change of footwear, I headed outside—when once again, I became aggravated by my compatriots' poor driving. Reality morphed into a kind of video game, and I began firing imaginary bullets at speeding motorists, screaming at them to slow down and go home; they just couldn't be trusted on the city's streets. This melodramatic barrage continued near the Kringlan shopping mall, where I had plumped myself down

* Kiddi Marinós and Ævar "El Águila" Erlendsson, two of my best friends, later told me how strange this was, for I usually respond quite quickly. When I was manic, it was as if I wanted to be alone in the world; I didn't fret about anything going on around me. My plans rarely panned out, and I lost all sense of punctuality. I felt that I was working on certain projects and wanted to be left alone. Some people have felt hurt by my disregard, but that's just how things are. I usually make up for it when I become myself again.

on the side of the street. Before long, a foreigner* pulled over and asked me what the hell I was doing. Ignoring his question, I inquired if he was interested in becoming my chauffeur. He was not. Resuming my attacks, I spotted the cops and took refuge inside the shopping mall, where I was inspired to venture even further beyond my comfort zone.

I had become rather obsessed with global security matters, having published a blog post relating to the apparent negligence surrounding the much anticipated Rammstein concert in Iceland. As I saw it, anyone could enter the concert venue with a gun, a knife, or a bomb, and although most people were convinced that such a thing could not happen in Iceland, it was, I reasoned, impossible to know the mind of terrorists—who very often target large concerts**.

Despite having no idea what I was doing, I was certain that I would be the man to revolutionize security matters in Iceland—beginning with Kringlan. While singing aloud to the songs on my iPod, I engaged in a somewhat glib inspection of the mall's security system, concluding that it was “cutting edge.” Heading outside again, and still singing, I passed a female shopper and

offered a concession apropos of nothing: “I do realize that I’ve strayed quite beyond the definition of normal!” I said. She smiled. When I exited the mall, I left my slippers behind and ventured out into the world in my socks. I also left my house keys.

Taking a beeline to the intersection of Kringlumýrarbraut and Miklabraut, I briefly danced for pedestrians and motorists before dashing across the street in the direction of Lágmúli shopping center. Pointing to my socks, a man pulled over and offered me a ride. “Don’t worry about it,” I responded. When he pulled over again a few minutes later, I asked if perhaps he was “a little slow”—couldn’t he see that I was perfectly fine? After I told him to “get the hell out of here,” he must have called the cops.

Aside from worrying about impending terrorist attacks, I had also grown concerned about the environment, and so I had decided to take up recycling. Noticing the refuse scattered by the road, I began tossing it into the trash. Just when I had discerned two empty cups of beer by the pharmacy in Lágmúli, I spotted the cops again. Frightened, I made a run for it toward the Hilton Reykjavik Nordica Hotel and quickly rid myself of the beer cups by—quite contrary to my avowed environmental concern—hurling them at the ground.

Infuriated that I was once again being pursued by the police, I ran across the street, noticing two officers sprinting behind me. I wasn’t too concerned, however, knowing that they were powerless against my ziggling and zagging. One of them called out

* About 90% of those individuals who stopped to talk to me on the street were foreigners, many of whom asked for directions. I always interpreted their inquiries as their way of testing my state of mind—whether I was lucid enough to complete the tasks they set me.

** Two days after the Rammstein concert in Iceland, a terror attack occurred at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester where 22 people were killed—only 1,000 miles away.

to me. "Kiddi, Kiddi, stop!" I looked behind me: a decade earlier, the officer who was calling out to me had been the girlfriend of my former brother-in-law*, but our acquaintanceship did not suffice to convince me to slow down. It was around this time that this "old friend of mine" broke out the pepper spray, and despite suffering the most egregious pain that I've ever experienced, I managed to keep running toward the Laugardalur sports stadium. While completely blind, a pedestrian, standing next to a rather lofty tree, jumped onto my back—it was like a scene from a movie. Despite thwarting my escape plan, I had to give it to him: it was an incredibly professional maneuver. He managed to take me down without harm.

Never in my life have I screamed with such terror, with such fear and helplessness, as during this particular arrest. The police had no towel, no milk, and no water to soothe my eyes. I had become extremely thirsty after the day's struggle, and my face was on fire after the Mace. They called for backup, and four officers were required to make the arrest as I resisted vigorously. Still screaming for water, I yearned to submerge my face in a vat of cool liquid. The female officers told me that they were working on it. Despite my supplications, I was offered no water.

Pepper spray should only be used in the most exigent of

circumstances, which in this instance was far from the case; it wasn't that I posed a threat but that the officers were incompetent. This is not to say that I hadn't strayed far beyond the bounds of normalcy—but the idea that a 280-pound man could outrun four cops is entirely ridiculous. Surely there must be some stamina requirement for professional police officers?

To tell the truth, I don't know where they took me. Wherever it was—possibly the jail on Hverfisgata—I was permitted a shower and given clean clothes. The shower was piping hot when I had specifically asked to take a cold shower: only a masochist would step underneath a steaming showerhead after being sprayed with Mace. The officer told me that the shower was freezing cold and that I should stop whining. I replied that it was burning hot—and that he was insane. I don't know if he was just plain stupid or whether he wanted to see me suffer. Whatever the case, after I thrust my burning face underneath the scorching shower, I dressed and was driven to the psychiatric ward in a large police vehicle in the company of four officers.

The reason for the pepper spray and the arrest, according to the police report, was my "threatening behavior toward the officers"—which is nonsense. I didn't display any threatening behavior at all. The report also states that I had been wandering around for a day and a night in my socks, which is also a complete fabrication. I was without my shoes for 15 or 20 minutes before the cops arrived. Bizzare? Perhaps. Criminal? No.

* She started dating my sister's ex-boyfriend after they had broken up. Perhaps it's just easier to say that this was a woman with whom I was pretty well acquainted.

My medical records state that my father had visited the police station a day earlier and asked the officers to arrest me if they saw me around. But it defies belief that he was able to order my arrest by himself. He obviously wanted me to be admitted before the wedding in order to calm my family. He didn't attempt to contact me during the days leading up to the wedding, nor on the wedding day itself—neither to tell me to relax or to tell me that it was important for me to attend. By all accounts, these were desperate measures that could not have been easy to undertake.

After reading the medical report in July 2018, I allowed a week to pass before I confronted my father. I wanted the anger to subside so that our relationship wouldn't sour. I read aloud a few points that he had neglected to tell me over the past few years. But he remained convinced that he had done nothing wrong. I grew tired of his attitude eventually but managed to bite my tongue. He excused his actions by saying that the family just couldn't function when I was manic. I told him that it wasn't only my fault, that they needed to learn to handle these situations better—what with their age and years of experience. He then said something that made me lose my patience: "You don't belong anywhere else when you're manic than in the psych ward." I began cursing and screaming. He replied that I could not behave so rudely toward him. I said that I absolutely could and invited him to call the cops—considering how adept he had become at that kind of thing recently. I slammed the door, and we didn't speak for a long time afterward.

We have had similar collisions in the past, and it has become clear that he always expects me to come crawling back, begging for his forgiveness. But such a thing will not happen in the future. As there is also no chance that he will apologize on his own initiative, it seems almost like a competition in stubbornness at times. Sometimes, we need to help each other cool off.

Depression or Mania?

As we awaited my admittance to the psych ward, my old friend, the police officer, and I had a good conversation. I didn't begrudge her the pepper spray, and she remarked upon my speedy transformation; I seemed to be changing for the better with every passing minute. All of the derangement had melted away, and I was quickly becoming myself again.

With my fourth stay at the psych ward in the offing, I struck a deal with my "good friend" Halldóra Jónsdóttir, chief physician of the emergency ward (32 C), agreeing to admit myself for at least a week. As the days passed, I knew that Halldóra would try to extend my stay, and during every consultation, I inquired if she would call the cops if I left. She replied that she probably wouldn't but always asked me to stay nonetheless. After ten days, my patience had run dry. I had begun vomiting on account of the tension and the agitation in the ward, which I've always handled quite poorly. Besides, I had been administered large doses of psychiatric drugs, especially Olanzapine.

On that tenth day, I asked for an interview with the doctor so that I could be discharged. The on-duty physician, Puriður Halla—who was responsible for my compulsory internment in 2015—asked whether I had been admitted because of depression or mania: obviously, there's not much communication between doctors on the ward. After chewing on her words briefly, I replied that I was admitted on account of mania but that I'd fully recovered. As she could not legally force me to stay any longer—unless resorting to compulsory internment again, which she didn't think was necessary—she set me free.

My father picked me up, and he was greatly displeased. He was less angry and more reticent because he knew as well as I did that I hadn't fully convalesced. My father had a long conversation with Halldóra a little later, the latter of whom confirmed that I was still considerably unwell. The medical records also reveal that, just like before, my father would be in touch with the doctors on the ward.

There are times when I feel completely helpless, destitute the power of self-determination: everything must go through my father, who always receives a phone call when things go awry, and who deliberates on my behalf, back and forth, back and forth, with the doctors. When we've spoken to psychiatrists together, my father usually ends every sentence with "Don't you agree?" I've called him a "doctor's pet" to needle him—but many a true word is spoken in jest.

I've requested the annulment of those individuals designated as my close relatives. Henceforth, I shall be answerable my own actions. The current arrangement has failed.

The Inconvenience of a Summer Wedding

Daðið and my sister's wedding went well, although, as my sister later told me, the mood was rather strange at first; it was as if she was getting dressed for a funeral, such was the shock of my absence. Just two and a half hours before the ceremony, my father had received a call from his pals in the police announcing my arrest. In retrospect, it was probably better that the matter was definitively resolved prior to the wedding—as opposed to my wandering about downtown without anyone knowing my whereabouts.

Just a week before I received my medical records, I asked my father, without suspecting any foul play, "how was it that the police called you directly when I was arrested? I didn't volunteer any information." He mused upon my words briefly before speculating that it was probably because I was registered in their system. After all, he reasoned, I had been arrested before. All of this was complete nonsense, of course, as he had asked the police to be on guard and to call him immediately if they spotted me. Ultimately, he got what he wanted: peace of mind for the family, knowing that I was in safe hands.

My father delivered an emotional speech during the wedding. At one point, he even teared up. A lot had happened during the days leading up to the ceremony, and my state of mind, moments prior, was far from convenient. It's amazing to think that of those two weddings that I've missed—that of my cousin Guðrún Halldórsdóttir and my sister—my car was chosen as the designated wedding car, which means that I was certainly present in spirit.

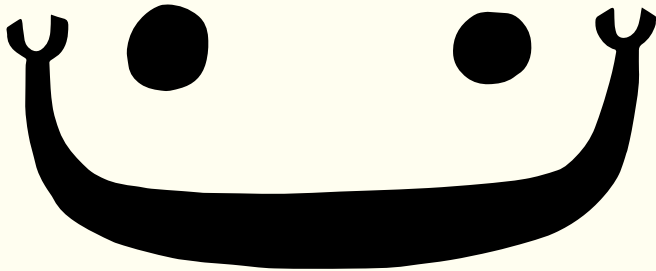
Inviting me to a wedding will always prove precarious given that most ceremonies are held during the summer, which greatly increases the likelihood of my entering into an elevated mood state. My absence from the aforementioned two weddings owed to my mental state, but I also missed a wedding celebration that my cousin Heiðrún Halldórsdóttir held during the summer of 2018. I barely made it to my friend Sonja's wedding, which was held the day after I was discharged from the psych ward in 2015. And I was manic when my cousin Magnús Orri Sæmundsson married Guðrún Gísladóttir in 2009.

I hope to be well when my brothers and I get married. It would be best to schedule the wedding for spring or fall, to be on the safe side.

“I’m not crazy. My reality is
just different from yours.”

–Lewis Carroll

In a Basketball Player's State of Mind



The days that followed my self-discharge on July 25th, 2017, were relatively calm; however, it was not long before I returned to a similar state of mind as when I was admitted ten days earlier. There had been no reason to administer injections of any kind during my time at the ward: I didn't cause any trouble, except when other patients were about to be tranquilized, at which point I yelled at the staff—are you really going to do this to the person? As I had written a long post on social media detailing my own experiences with injectable sedatives, they knew my feelings on the subject well*.

Iceland Listens

One day, while listening to the radio, I learned that the Gung-Ho obstacle race was to be held on August 12th in Reykjavík. Hearing this, naturally, I became convinced of three things.

1. That I was meant to organize the race and that the ads on the radio were being broadcast to remind me of this fact.
2. That the programming on the radio station K100 had been specially designed to keep me abreast of the latest developments.

* Generally speaking, the staff welcomed the perspective of patients and complimented me on my writing. However, I once met two doctors during a night on the town who, in response to my criticism, replied, rather harshly, that everyone was doing their best in difficult circumstances.

3. That everything that the broadcasters were discussing was being relayed to them from my mind (I knew the news director, Auðun Georg).

I often watched live streams from K100 and was convinced that the hosts were aware that I was sitting there on the other side of the screen observing them. The station's slogan is "Iceland Listens," which suggested that it was the perfect venue for the transmission of ideas: I would beam my messages to the hosts who would then relay them onward to the rest of the country. The police would undoubtedly contact me soon and ask me to calm down: my incredible energy was causing too much of a disturbance in society. Once, the radio personality Kristín Sif announced that earthquakes had begun rumbling and that "someone needed to stop this man." To this day, I have no idea why she said what she said or to whom exactly she was referring; needless to say, I heeded her words as if they were directed at me personally. Sitting at home, watching and listening, I declared to myself, with a grin on my face, that "nothing could stop me now." I was like a Disney villain with good intentions.

The Gung-Ho race, which is open to all ages, is three miles long and features ten huge inflatable obstacles that participants must run, jump, and bounce through as they attempt to navigate the course. In preparation for the race, I began walking all over the Laugardalur area in Reykjavík and arranging makeshift

obstacles in front of the World Class gym. I traversed the track and field stadium—which at the time was being converted into a soccer field—stamping down tufts of grass, hoping to aid the field in its recovery*. I had in no way convalesced from my earlier admission to the ward and was quickly returning to an elevated mood state; by stamping down on the uneven grass on the pitch, I was also repairing the damage to my soul. The divots were of varying sizes, and I completed a few meticulous rounds, careful not to miss a single one.

Stealing onto the Laugardalsvöllur soccer field, I jogged a few laps and occasionally jumped on the track mattresses. When I had concluded my running and was exiting the field, I noticed an abandoned long-sleeved purple shirt labeled "University of Chicago—Track & Field." As there was nobody around, I took the shirt and put it on**. I felt that this chance occurrence was a sign that I should begin practicing the sport. My brothers Bjarki and Ingi are multiple Icelandic Champions in track and field, and I thought that I should get into better shape and begin training with them. My only prior experience was a one-month flirtation with the shot put in 2011. I never managed to hurl the shot farther than 33 feet and lacked the patience to try to improve. After all, the Icelandic record was more than twice as long. Deciding to

* The pitch was severely damaged, as it had been mainly used for track and field throwing events.

** I later learned that a few up-and-coming American track and field athletes had been training in Iceland.

focus on running events, I trained for the entirety of the day and well into the evening in my new shirt.

“Faith Moves Mountains,” as we say in Iceland.

Rey Cup

The Rey Cup—a soccer tournament for teenagers, local and foreign alike—was being held at the Valbjarnarvöllur field in Reykjavík at the time. It was not only my enthusiasm for soccer that drew me to the tournament but also my feeling that I could control the outcome of the games. Circling around, I would sit down in the corner of the field belonging to the team for which I was rooting. Intensely focused, I would impart my talent for reading the game, which I had possessed as a talented young soccer player, to the players and coaches.

I employed my “telepathic powers” while watching a few games and discovered, to my delight, that my team almost always proved victorious*. Prior to one of the games, I kicked around a soccer ball and tried drawing attention to myself by launching the ball 100 feet through the air directly to the coach of my favored team. I wanted him to feel my presence during the game. I tried to be slightly cunning as I paced around the field, celebrating in a subdued fashion when Breiðablik scored. Once after a goal from Breiðablik a young boy pointed at me and yelled to his friend:

* Very often, the team that I wanted to win was my team, Breiðablik.

“Did he do that!?” This only served to strengthen my belief that I possessed unique powers. Another curious incident involved a goalie whom I wanted to control his team better. Without saying a word, I walked behind him and took my position at some distance from the goal. When he had taken three goal-kicks in a row, each time sending the ball out of bounds on the right side of the field, resulting in the opponents gaining a throw-in, he shot me a disappointed look. Convinced that I was throwing him off by standing in the wrong place, I relocated. The accuracy of his kicks greatly improved.

Dirk Nowitzki

I have a tattoo of Dirk Nowitzki—the former NBA player and star of the Dallas Mavericks—on my left arm. He’s shooting a large onion. The tattoo is a nod to both my all-time favorite athlete and a cherished catchphrase, namely that “everything is onion-something.” (“Onion” in Icelandic sometimes serves as an intensifier, like “extremely.” This usage likely originates with the fact that “onion” also signifies “the best of something*.”)

During his time in the NBA, Dirk Nowitzki was incredibly loyal. He played with the same team for his entire career** and sacrificed an incredible amount of money for the sake of the

* This usage has since gained popularity among my friends and acquaintances.

** I’ve also got the word “Loyalty” tattooed next to his picture.

squad. When his career came to an end in 2019, Nowitzki was the sixth highest-scoring player in NBA history, the greatest big-man shooter in the game, and had one NBA Championship under his belt.

Only once was my admiration for Dirk Nowitzki in danger of waning.

Driving to the gym one day, I found that I had suddenly become fed up with Dirk Nowitzki, with my Dirk tattoo, my Dirk bracelet, and my habit of posting videos and pictures of him on social media. Addressing him from the driver seat in English, I declared, loud and clear, that it was time for him to “give something back.” After all, he was well aware of my tattoo, given that my friend and fellow Dallas fan Ágúst Þór Ágústsson had posted a picture of it on Twitter*.

Instead of going to the gym, I decided to visit the basketball court at the Kópavogsskóli school. As I began to shoot, I sensed Dirk's presence and was overcome with a feeling of well-being. I was certain that he, too, was shooting hoops at the American Airlines Center**, merging his powers with mine. Being 11 years his junior, I felt as if I could impart some of the speed and freshness that I had acquired, and in return, I hoped that he would confer some of his understanding of the game and his incredible

shooting ability; enthusiastically emulating his movements—which I knew like the back of my hand*, having watched roughly 1,000 games with Dirk—almost all of my shots were on target. I talked to him aloud, sensing that he was growing fresher and sharper with every passing minute**. In retrospect, I wished that someone had captured my performance on video.

Later that day, I tweeted a picture of myself holding a basketball wearing my Nowitzki bracelet with the caption, “Another Ring for the King.” I tagged Nowitzki in the Tweet to catch his attention***. Convinced that Dirk had received my psychic message telling him to visit Iceland, I took off for the Hilton Reykjavik Nordica and the Grand Hotel to reserve two rooms—one for me and one for Dirk. Nothing less would do. On my way there, I had even begun moving like him: as if I were 7 feet tall. I experienced a sense of stiffness and, because of this woodenness, found that I was constantly stretching. To my disappointment, I learned that all of the rooms were booked for the next two weeks. Or so I was told.

I later tried ordering a ticket to a Mavericks game with accommodations in the best part of Dallas. But my card was

* In the post, Ágúst announced that the Dirk's “biggest fan in Iceland” had just gotten a tattoo of him shooting an onion. Dirk liked the Tweet, which was especially enjoyable.

** The Mavericks' stadium.

* Dirk is the only player in NBA history who has mastered the one-legged fadeaway, which is an incredible asset given that he's 7 feet tall.

** Dirk was 39 years old at the time and on the verge of starting his penultimate season.

*** Unfortunately, the Mavericks fielded one of the worst teams in the league during the 2017-2018 season.

declined. My dream is to see Nowitzki play before he retires, and I am determined to do everything in my power to make that dream a reality*.

Laugar Spa

There's an all-or-nothing atmosphere at the World Class gym in Laugar, which so perfectly squares with my manic mentality that I came to believe it had been constructed especially for me—for a single, ambitious, volatile young man, who in the future would need to use every ounce of his energy at the spa to maintain his balance for the sake of doing exceptional deeds.

Believing this, I would sometimes visit the Laugar Spa twice a day—sometimes three times—availing myself of the facilities more than any other patron; if I wasn't at Laugar during the day, I was at the World Class gym near the Kringlan mall during the night, and there were times when I completed two workouts in a single session: working out, going to the spa—and working out again. Everyone who purchased a membership, I believed, did so for the sole reason to watch me train, and everyone performed much better when I was present. (This was especially true for the foreigners—who had been inspired to visit Iceland on my account.) I strutted around like a king.

* I would also like to meet him in person. Such a thing, however, will probably be quite difficult, given that Nowitzki is a superstar. The tattoo will hopefully give me a slight edge.

During this particular mania, I didn't restrict my workouts to running and lifting weights, indiscriminately bursting into any exercise room whenever I heard music. While normally put off by the gender ratio in the Zumba classes—I no longer cared if it was mostly women. Besides, there was always that one other man who attended the classes, and he seemed relieved by my presence, encouraging me to attend more often. I rarely did. I did, however, learn a lot by watching him move: his enthusiasm, his exaggerated and wild movements were oddly charming—if viewed from a safe distance (anybody who came too close was in danger of being splashed by his sweat).

In light of my loyalty, I felt that I deserved a percentage of World Class' sales. Although I never went so far as soliciting a cut, I took it as a sign of respect from the owners when I was unexpectedly granted access to the V.I.P. section of the locker room—which I hadn't even known existed. Despite my self-described regalness, the V.I.P. section was too snobbish for me, and I decided to stick to my old locker (#15).

I grew familiar with almost every face in the gym and always greeted the celebrities earnestly, at times messing around with them for fun. I once thanked singer Páll Óskar for all the songs that he had composed, suspecting, deep down, that he had written some of them for me*.

* I also felt a connection to him as he had sung at my grandmother Guðrún's funeral. He was one of her favorites, mostly because of his Dr. Love radio show, which he hosted around the turn of the last century.

I have visited several psychics in my lifetime, among them, a woman in Hafnarfjörður named Ólöf Guðnadóttir, who is considered one of the most clairvoyant mystics in our country. During my three visits to Ólöf, she told me the most spectacular things—some of which I haven't shared with a single person. Among other things, she revealed that I possessed potent clairvoyant powers myself and predicted that I would become a fortune-teller in the future, that I would offer healing sessions and readings for other people. This sounded interesting, but I could not foresee how exactly this would happen. And then I had an epiphany.

There's a section of the spa fitted with a recliner and a fireplace where members are encouraged to enter into a state of deep relaxation. I came to believe that by staring into the fire and focusing my mind on a given individual, I could predict that person's future and dispense advice accordingly*. I felt that I could influence the fire, which is comprised of many smaller fires of varying sizes, and the lights in the room with my mind. I felt that my senses had heightened considerably, especially my sense of sight and taste.

Toward the tail end of my elevated mood state, I began wearing a tight bodysuit. Many were understandably confused. Sometimes, when dining alone, I ordered a filet mignon. I was living the good life.

* I felt especially attuned to other people at the time, feeling as if I could connect with everyone and anyone by just thinking about them.

Rum and a Cuban Cigar

I went out almost every night. Usually alone in my car. If I had a drink, I would leave the car in a safe place in downtown Reykjavík and walk those approximately four miles back home. If ever I took a taxi, I would stroll down the hill leading to the queue near Arnarhóll and light a cigarette: my way of announcing to the taxi drivers that I had arrived, that it would be a busy night, and that the tourists were coming to the country in droves.

Whenever I went clubbing, I usually visited The English Pub, where I had become a regular in the eyes of the staff. One of the troubadours, Alexander Aron Guðbjartsson, later told me that he always found it a bit strange: the fact that I, being so young, always showed up alone. In my mind, the troubadours played much better when I was around—I gave them additional energy, and I would often request difficult songs to test their abilities.

On one Friday night in July, I decided to go all out. My friend Ævar had purchased a Cuban cigar for me in Cuba, which I had delayed smoking for a few months until the right moment presented itself. That night was the night. Having polished off a bottle of rum, I headed downtown with a Stella Artois in one hand and the cigar in the other. Posing next to Reykjavík's Pond, I raised my glass and my cigar to signal to pedestrians that I was on the verge of a historic night. Before embarking on my magnificent journey, I briefly danced and jumped around by the Pond.

At Ingólfstorg square, I finally lit my cigar, but before smoking it, I strolled about briefly, alternately directing the cigar at passersby and chewing on it while turning around in circles. Engaged in this strange dance, I gestured toward cars, roads, and buildings—in a ritual that served not only to illuminate the city of Reykjavík but simultaneously stave off crime on the streets as well. I was the first person in history to discover this technique, which meant that I, an artist and an inventor, would soon become famous. I walked the streets for the entirety of the night, believing that everyone knew me. “That guy with the cigar.” This feeling of having become a celebrity was so persuasive that I felt as if my very body was transforming—as if I had at once become softer and harder because I had done something extraordinary. It’s impossible to describe.

Bigger and More Perfect

I had become a big name. Cashiers at grocery stores and waiters in restaurants hardly knew which way to turn when I arrived. When individuals whom I knew little or not at all called me on the phone, they seemed short of breath. Once while eating at Laugar Spa, a group of women in their thirties was dining at an adjacent table. They were on edge because of my presence, eating slowly and seeming insecure. As the mood was uncomfortable, I finished my meal in a hurry and left. “Don’t be all jittery, girls, just because I’m here!” I said as I passed their table. They put up

quizzical faces, and I walked away laughing.

I kept driving all over the place, looping around the Reykjavík area at breakneck speeds. Sometimes, I followed cars belonging to companies from whom I wanted sponsorship deals, and I was particularly enthused by vehicles marked by sports companies. I often drove past Costco, certain that my lofty goals had proved contagious: I was the man responsible for the corporation’s expansion into the Icelandic market. I was similarly pleased by huge retail chains such as Bauhaus and the Korputorg shopping plaza, which I passed when driving to Mosfellsbær.

Everything in Iceland was bigger and more perfect because of me—I was the secret architect of all of the country’s most beautiful buildings. The important thing was making the buildings big enough, I thought, making the advertisements around the city more salient. Weather allowing, I often concluded my drive with the top down cruising past the Harpa Music and Concert Hall, which was, of course, the very pinnacle of my unspoken achievements.

I was planning extravagant purchases, including an Armin Strom watch, which I intended to buy online and which cost approximately 23,000 dollars. The purchase would necessitate a rather complicated transaction, which, fortunately, didn’t go through.

I was quite preoccupied with these prospective investments. I had filled my phone with all kinds of mediation apps—which under ordinary circumstances, I try to avoid. I even placed a

bid on a four-bedroom luxury apartment with a swimming pool in Cyprus, subsequently receiving numerous phone calls from unlisted numbers. Foreign voices asking for a copy of my passport and credit card*.

Furthermore, I invested small amounts in crude oil and gold while planning on purchasing a significant amount of dollars**.

The Writer of the Most Popular Songs

I have never been as self-confident in my life as during this particular mania. An email from Apple, inviting me to a three-day conference in the US in late August, didn't exactly serve to diminish my confidence neither. I imagined that Apple had gotten wind of my "genius"—that I had been discovered through my videos on YouTube—and that they had big things in store for me. The email stated that I was not allowed to visit other countries prior to the conference, which I found a bit strange—but not strange enough to detract from my excitement. Unfortunately for Apple, I was holed up in the psych ward during the time of the conference.

Although Apple couldn't take advantage of my genius, international songwriters could and did; Shawn Mendes' "There's Nothing Holdin' Me Back" for example (the most popular song in

Iceland at the time), was written by me. Unbeknownst to Shawn, I had sent him a telepathic message with the song's lyrics and predicted that it would reach the zenith of its popularity around the time that I ascended to the acme of my mania. In reality, I was sending extrasensory messages to all the world's most famous musicians, inspiring their creativity—doling out fame and fortune to a chosen few. Likewise, "Sign of the Times" by Harry Styles was inspired by all of the changes that I had recently affected throughout the world, and Miley Cyrus' "Malibu" was a subliminal message in song-form indicating that I would be traveling to the song's titular location by the end of that summer.

High-Quality Cement

At Bæjarlind in Kópavogur, I strolled around and admired the many fine stores and businesses. Noticing a sign for the Lögmenn Kópavogur law office, I walked inside. A part of me had always wanted to file a lawsuit against the National University Hospital of Iceland for having made me the subject of illegal involuntary internment. But as none of the office's lawyers were present, I took it as a sign that I shouldn't sue*.

On the level below Lögmenn Kópavogur, there's a company called Aalborg Portland, which distributes cement in Iceland. Being in a fine mood, I decided to knock, without fully

* Fortunately, I knew better than to provide such information.

** It was clear to me that the currency would once again grow more valuable.

* Although I remain convinced that it is wise to investigate the legal basis for my treatment further.

understanding the nature of their business. When the woman in the reception greeted me, I inquired as to the company's operations. "We distribute and market high-quality cement," she stated. "Excellent," I replied, "can I have some?" "You want to buy cement?" she said, bewildered. "Yes," I said, iterating my request, and the woman—suspecting that something was off—encouraged me to speak to Steypustöðin, a retailer for Aalborg Portland. I thanked her for her time and took my leave. I have not, to this day, purchased any high-quality cement.

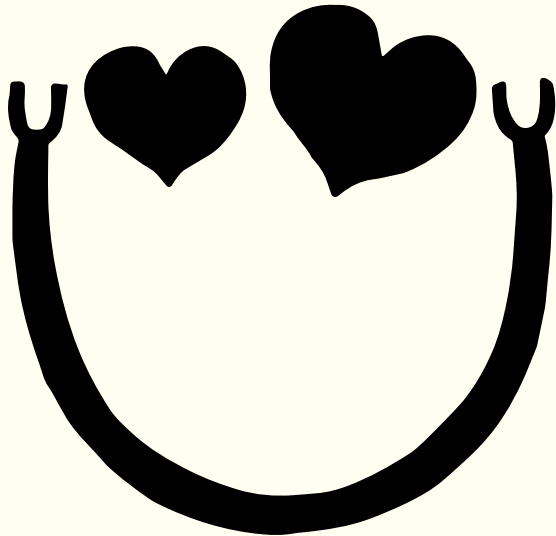
At InnX, a purveyor of high-class office furniture, I told the owner that I was hunting for office space and was on the market for a few luxury office chairs. He poured me some coffee and inquired if I was some kind of tech guru. "Yes," I replied, in what must have been a rather persuasive manner, for he proceeded to try to sell me some of his most expensive chairs. Optimistic, I told him that I would return as soon as I had officially launched my operations. Nothing ever came of it.

“I tried being normal once.

Worst two minutes of my life.”

–Ziad K. Abdelnour

Ingólfur Arnarson Reborn



After all my downswings and upswings, I began wondering if there was any purpose to these fluctuations—whether they were meant to inure me to hardship or confer additional powers akin to those possessed by the settlers of Iceland, who traveled across vast distances in difficult weather conditions. Many of them were incredibly tough.

On a Saturday night at the end of July, I began musing upon Reykjavík's many statues. Was I one of these men reincarnated? Needless to say, it did not take long for me to arrive at the conclusion that I was probably Ingólfur Arnarson reborn*. Other people, I believed, had come to a similar conclusion, as well. To consummate this collective epiphany, I struck a pose next to Ingólfur's statue on Arnarhóll: I had the power to grant eternal life, to heal the paralyzed, to give sight to the blind**.

Wanting to look the part, I used a whole can of Aloe Vera Vaseline, which I was carrying around in my pocket, to spruce up my appearance. It was something I was want to do when I was experiencing such thoughts and making such discoveries.

* Iceland's first permanent settler.

** It was an incredible feeling and one with which I don't ever want to lose touch; I wouldn't mind, however, if these ideas were slightly toned down. Being convinced that I'm Ingólfur Arnarson reincarnated isn't exactly something that I can use toward a positive end. I cannot soar so high; I must learn to control it.

The Weather Swings with My Mood

I have always thought a great deal about the weather. But I hardly feel like discussing it on a day-to-day basis like many of my countrymen. We always seem surprised when another low moves across the country or when temperatures dip well below freezing. My mother and my father, for example, watch two weather programs every day.

The weather is always fantastic whenever I'm manic, a fact that has led me to speculate if the weather swings with my mood: if it takes its cue from my emotional state and not the other way around. Once when I was experiencing an elevated mood state, my friend and painter Kalli Wehmeier called me and asked, "Kryddi, can't you alter the weather with your mood swings? I need like a straight week of sunshine. If anyone can do it—it's you." He was kidding, of course, but I'm quite literal-minded when I'm manic. I took his question as a challenge.

There were renovations going on in my tenement building at the time. As the chairman of the homeowner's association, I had put in an incredible amount of effort to schedule the repairs, placing myriad phone calls to craftsmen and filling out vast paperwork. I joked with the painters—Tómas Helgi Wehmeier (Kalli's brother), Eypór Guðnason, and Hjálmar Þór Arnarson—that the weather would improve as soon as I became manic. They laughed; it had rained for almost the entirety of June and

July that summer and they had become exasperated with the rain preventing them from doing work outdoors.

At the end of July, as the repairs were concluding, I brought the craftsmen a potent brew of coffee along with some cigars. "Boys, where would you like the sun?" I asked. They replied that it would be best if it shone down directly on the building. I strolled around the premises a bit, narrowing my eyes toward the sun before reverting my gaze to the building. Almost immediately, the clouds cleared, and the sun smiled down on the building for the remainder of the day. They nearly managed to finish the job before sundown. "The Icelanders will no longer speak of Ingó the Weather God*," I told them. "From this day onward, it'll always be Kryddi the Weather God."

Tommy Wehmeier could not fathom my incredible energy. One moment, I was preparing for a lecture, "dressed like a million bucks"—his words, not mine—and the next, I was barefoot doing wind sprints on the Fagralundur sports field. Tommy called his brother Kalli and told the latter that something strange was going on. "He's just manic, don't worry about it," he replied.

As I headed downtown later that evening, Kalli's words resounded in my ears: could it be that I was the man to alter Iceland's weather indefinitely? I had just written a rather manic blog post on Pressan under the heading, "My Prediction of Life

* A famous Icelandic pop musician.

in Iceland Over the Coming Few Months, the English Premier League, and the EuroJackpot this Friday.”

The blog post suggested the following:

1. That the temperature over the coming weeks would be somewhere between 44 and 73°F, slightly cloudy, with intermittent showers for the benefit of Iceland's flora.
2. That there would be earthquakes and/or volcanic eruptions.
3. That it would be best to leave the photography to the people in the helicopters.
4. That business would surge.
5. That we would party like it was the summer of '69.
6. That everyone should immediately embeverage themselves with a double cappuccino or a double latte while alternating between warm and cold baths and drinking plenty of liquids and also indulging in the occasional ice-cold beer: to keep the spirits high.

Finally, I told my compatriots that I was unwilling to reveal too much about the EuroJackpot. Contrary to this avowed reticence, I had sent quite a number of Facebook messages to friends, which read as follows: “I've got a good feeling about the number 15 for EuroJackpot next Friday. I'm wagering an even 15 dollars and 115 dollars on a few tickets with no Joker—I suggest you do the same. The bonus number will be 15 because it's my lucky number. I've got a strong feeling about this. Default selection at the next

sjoppa* or at lotto.is.”

On July 29th, at 4 am in the morning, I walked into a gas station and purchased several tickets totaling 332 dollars and 37 cents (I seemed to have forgotten my intention of investing only 15 or 115 dollars). I told the cashier that I was “definitely going to win.” He became interested in knowing how I could be certain, but I offered little in the way of an answer.

I won a total of seven dollars. That's life!

The Future

I'm naturally hardy against the cold, but on that evening, I dressed particularly well, suspecting that I would be engaged in some strange business well into the night. Sure enough, when the clubs closed at 4.30 am, I found myself standing on Vonarstræti, completely sober, quietly admiring Reykjavík's beautiful City Hall.

Walking up the fire escape, I peered inside the building through the glass. Feeling cold, I decided to sprint up and down the stairs to keep myself warm, eventually laying down flat on my stomach on the uncomfortable steel steps to admire the spotlights at the top of the building. As I looked into the light, I had a vision, and the deeper I gazed, the more incredible were the things that I saw. The spotlight illuminated my future—and I knew that my late brother Guðni was responsible for this mysterious power of

* Sjoppa is Icelandic for “small store.”

prognostication*: we were the only ones who could decipher the writings on the wall.

Sometime in my mid-thirties, I discovered, I would marry a wonderful woman—and together we would have three children. Two girls and a boy. Perfectly compatible, we would experience heaps of happiness and joy. This was only right, given that the first phase of my life had been a total rollercoaster: the other 50-60 years, on the other hand, would be much better, affording me the freedom of mediating my experiences to others.

Time flew by. At six in the morning, I was still peering into the future while continuing to run up and down the steps to keep myself warm. The vantage point from the top of City Hall was magnificent, and with the aid of the spotlight, I could see not only the city of Reykjavík but the entire globe as well—penetrating any neighborhood in the world. This was Guðni's way of illuminating the safe and dangerous places of the world.

It was then that I was granted permanent authority over the weather in Iceland, with the added caveat that I had to stay the entire night to keep my place at the helm. I was like Heimdall from Norse mythology: I could hear the grass growing and detect every tweet and twitter from the birds. "I must not fail the birds," I thought to myself, for they had struggled hard against the cold

of the Icelandic winter. The birds understood my task—they were literally calling for me.

Sitting down, I stared into the light and began to direct the motion of the sun with my head. I tried as hard as I could to pull the sun and the warm air to Iceland but to no avail; that winter was to be cold—and spring and summer wouldn't be that great either.

Although the downsides of bipolar disorder—i.e. depression and the downswings—can be quite terrifying, it is experiences such as these that constitute the extraordinary flip side of the coin. That night, I came to believe that Iceland's political class was watching me from afar and testing me. How far could I go? How tough was I? Did glorious Viking blood really course through my veins—the kind that was required to govern the country permanently? If I managed to pass their "test," I would be granted political powers. Ultimately, however, things did not pan out.

I finally went home between 7 and 8 in the morning—completely spent. Having walked briskly to my car, which was parked furtively near the statue of Ingólfur, I drove home to Kópavogur. I could barely keep my eyes open. The police would probably call an ambulance, I conjectured, given how I had tested the limits of my body.

* Since Guðni passed, I have always believed that he died to guide me in life. The feeling persists whether I'm manic or not. I realized that, sometime in the future, we would do something big together: he, watching me from afar, and guiding me – there, on the steps of City Hall, I could see into the future.

“The higher they fly,
the harder they fall.”

–George Ade

Not Allowed to Leave the Country



The Red Hot Chili Peppers were set to perform in Iceland on July 31st, 2017. I had bought tickets many months in advance but began to fear that I would miss the concert—seeing as I was admitted to the psych ward 16 days prior to their performance. My anticipation for the concert may have been one reason why I was discharged early.

On the days following the concert, I ascended even higher. At 3 am in the morning on August 4th—when the weather was pleasant and the northern lights were gleaming overhead—I grabbed a rag and headed outside to wash my car. When I was satisfied with my efforts, I took off to the Kópavogsvöllur stadium, where I recorded one of the most manic Instagram videos in history*.

Addressing my audience directly, I announced that my dream of playing professional soccer was far from dead. “Not a day has passed,” I declared, “that I have not lamented the effect that bipolar disorder has had on my soccer-playing aspirations—but the dream is still alive, my friends!” I was only 28, after all, and

* On a side note, aside from my soccer-playing ambitions, I was also determined to become a star on Instagram. I would do this by uploading myriad videos of myself and my native country. The idea was to attract foreign visitors to Iceland by the clever use of social-media hashtags and by paying to promote content via Facebook. Curiously enough, I sometimes targeted only the greater Dallas area in the US, owing mainly to my fascination with Dirk Nowitzki. I spent quite a bit of money on that.

now, finally, after years of struggle, it was my turn to, as I put it, “call out Bingo*.”

I laced my new Nike Tiempo Legend cleats, which had just arrived at Jói útherji on the day that I had bought them, suggesting that they had been put on the market just for me (especially given their name). Insinuating my broken toe into the shoes and howling in pain, I recorded myself standing next to various billboards—Herbalife, Coca Cola, etc.—before tagging these companies in my videos. I was in such great demand that my efforts would inevitably lead to many lucrative sponsorship deals.

Wanting to continue this manic Instagram story of mine, which I felt was progressing rather nicely, I stayed up the whole night. The idea was to provoke my audience, to exaggerate slightly. I shot a video of the fireplace in the spa at World Class and visited the headquarters of the Icelandic shipping company Eimskip where I made it look as if I was importing various goods to the country. Finally, I lit a cigar and predicted an imminent volcanic eruption—depending, of course, on my mood**.

* My dream of playing soccer again never died, although it was never as strong as during that first mania in 2009.

** A few months later, I discussed the Instagram story with friends and acquaintances. They said that they were fascinated by my exaggeration and melodrama.

All the World's Problems

During the middle of the night on August 12th, I was struck by the desire to move abroad. Preferably for good. I had had my fill of the darkness and the cold, which was in the offing, and I had grown sick of people worrying about my condition—especially my family. Losing no time, I packed three large suitcases and a few plastic bags as well.

As I had been living far beyond my means over the preceding few weeks, I was utterly broke. But I was not too bothered by this fact, for things would work themselves out if only I managed to leave Iceland: I would extend my credit with the bank or apply for a loan. Or maybe I could raise money by leasing out my apartment.

Before leaving for Keflavík Airport, I needed to resolve some unfinished business. All the world was in a great big tangle, and so I headed to the Fagralundur sports field to undo a few of the knots. The way to do this, I felt, was by mending the holes in the soccer nets and securing them in place with steel chains. It took a while, but I felt a lot better afterward: all the world's leaders would soon resolve all the world's problems because of my efforts.

There were a lot of clothes and empty containers strewn around the field. I found a pair of sweat pants and began filling them with refuse, persuaded that I had discovered my new

sponsors: company higher-ups were aware of my operations and had arranged these products on the field in anticipation of my arrival. If I had any doubt about this sponsorship conspiracy, not a shadow remained when I stumbled across a Jordan cap* and a Nike water bottle. “Jesus, Nike is obviously bent on teaming up with me,” I thought to myself, imagining that I would be handed a similar deal as Jordan. The logo would read “kRyddi,” and it would become the biggest sports brand in the world. I filled the sweat pants with products from my new sponsors (which, as it turns out, was mostly discarded trash and forgotten clothes). Not partnering with Nike was a great disappointment.

But who knows what the future holds.

Fleeing Icelandair

Following my sports-field operations, I packed my bags, ferried my belongings to the sidewalk, and hailed a cab. I did not tell anybody that I was leaving. When the taxi arrived, I expressed my conviction that tourists would soon flood the neighborhood as I planned on leasing my apartment through Airbnb. I asked for the driver's business card, intending to pass it on to my lessees in case they required his services to get downtown.

Arriving at Keflavík Airport without a ticket, I strolled into the offices of Icelandair to inquire about a flight. I wanted to go

to Dallas, Texas, but as there were no direct flights, I bought a ticket to Amsterdam instead. I would stay there for one night and then head west over the Atlantic. Paying the women at the desk, I said my thanks, believing that things would work out just fine.

I hit a slight snag, however, when I checked in my luggage. I had been told that I would need to ascertain the weight of my bags so that I could return to the office and pay accordingly. At the check-in desk, the agent pointed disapprovingly to my plastic bags, saying that I would need to tie them tighter—which I did. Not satisfied, she demanded I seal the bags with tape. “What the hell do you mean!?” I hissed. “What do you think I’ve got in these bags anyway!?” I was fuming. I sealed the bags in an exaggerated manner and asked if she was happy. She was going to charge me 270 dollars for the bags—but that couldn’t possibly be right, I said. Walking away in a huff, I knocked down one of the legs propping up an adjacent table, which was when a couple of security guards, who had taken their position nearby, asked if all the commotion was really necessary. Apologizing, I qualified my rage by pointing to the “hag who had tried to fleece me.”

When I returned to the office, the employees, who had become somewhat suspicious, revealed that I could purchase special Icelandair bags for the reasonable fee of 12 dollars and then transfer the contents of my luggage into these bags. They expressed their disbelief that the representative at the check-in desk hadn’t informed me of this possibility while also

* I have Michael Jordan's number, 23, tattooed on my arm.

apologizing for not having suggested the option themselves. I bought two bags, transferred everything into them, and returned to the check-in desk for the sole purpose of making the agent confront her mistake. The price had taken a sharp dip after I bought the Icelandair bags, which cost only 51 dollars in total. She was greatly taken aback, for I was quite harsh with her, announcing to her colleagues that she—not being equal to her job—deserved marching orders.

Turning casually toward two pilots who were standing near the check-in desk, I said: “Boys, beware the dangerous forests in Canada. My brother died there ten years ago. He was training to become a pilot.” Startled, they nodded their heads and continued on their way.

A Nervous Pilot

On the top floor of the airport, I got into even more trouble. I had a carry-on bag with a laptop, which wasn't supposed to be an issue, but security demanded a more thorough examination of one of the compartments of my bag. I was asked to wait. There was a smiley terminal nearby, where travelers are encouraged to rate their service, just like at the banks. After I left, I slammed down on the red angry face button, indicating that the security service had been egregious; there was nothing unlawful in my luggage*.

* As I mentioned previously, I was rather obsessed with security at the time, and this visit to the airport did not serve to assuage my concerns. I had been told that the airport security was quite robust, but as the compartment in question could not be opened, the examination was deemed necessary.

When I arrived at the duty-free store, I was greatly relieved; finally, I had escaped all the stress and worry. I received a phone call from Kalli, who is generally supportive of all my endeavors and who is not known to engage in gratuitous worrying. This time, however, I could tell that he was nervous about my leaving the country without a plan or a dollar to my name. I tried convincing him that everything was fine, and he expressed incredulity at my fearlessness: I seemed incapable of perceiving obstacles.

As I waited for my flight, which was not set to depart for another few hours, I strolled around the airport and visited the duty-free shops. Admiring the 66°North products, I became suddenly charmed by the idea of wearing Icelandic brands because I was moving abroad. I tried purchasing clothing for roughly 1,000 dollars, but my credit card was declined. I told the sales representative that I would buy the products online and have them shipped overseas.

As it was not written on the ticket, I wondered from which gate my flight was departing. At a nearby gate, I noticed a few attractive WOW air flight attendants. Above them, the word Amsterdam was displayed on the screen. I thought that I had arrived at my gate, but the stewardesses redressed my misunderstanding by pointing out that I was flying with Icelandair—and that that flight wasn't due to depart for another two hours.

The long wait ahead would only serve to exacerbate the situation. Instead of returning to the duty-free area, I headed

onward to the Icelandair gates, where once again, security, or the lack thereof, meddled in my business. Having spent considerable time thinking about the tragedy in the past, my mind drifted to 9/11, and I began to feel that Iceland's universally sub-par security could spell disaster for the country in the future. So displeased was I with the state of things that when I arrived at the gate, I came to believe that no security measures had been taken at all: anyone could access the computers*. Turning to the departing foreigners, I apologized effusively for the airport's lack of security, pounding down on a few computer keyboards to make my point. I no longer cared whether or not I made it abroad; deep down, I knew that I had lost the run of myself.

I was listening to music on my headphones when I spotted a female police officer in the hall. She stood slyly at a distance, trying to evade my attention—but I knew that she was there because of me. Removing my headphones, I yelled: "If you're here on my account, you can leave. I haven't done anything wrong!" Judging by her expression, my yelling at her in the middle of the airport made her exceedingly uncomfortable, but she remained silent. Putting on my headphones again, I walked away, intermittently glancing out the window toward the plane that was to carry me to Amsterdam.

When two police officers approached, I shook my head and

sat down on an adjacent bench. I knew that I had reached the end of my journey. One of the officers informed me that I was to come along with them. As they escorted me through the terminal, I conceived of an escape plan: I would lose the guards by hewing close to the walls as I walked, while the officers slowly drifted away into the crowd. Having lost sight of me for several seconds, they asked me to cut it out. After a short walk, I was led into a room designed for detainees. When I asked them what was going on, they replied that the captain was uneasy about having me aboard his plane in light of my strange behavior. They had been monitoring me on the security cameras, they revealed, and had recognized me as soon as I had entered the airport. It seemed as if they aware of my past.

I kindly asked them not to involve my family, for there was no need to compound their worries. They asked whom they should call to pick me up, and I replied that they should phone my friends—although none of them would be at liberty to come and get me because all of them were on vacation. I suggested that I hail a cab or that one of them drop me off in town. "We'll figure something out," they said. I waited in the room for an hour and a half, and the cops and I had a rather pleasant time of it. We had plenty to discuss. I informed them that local security was in want of many improvements and gave them my bank account and social security number so that Icelandair could refund my tickets and the cost of my bags.

* Of course, everyone had already passed through security, and so I was making mountains of molehills.

Eventually, they told me that I was free to be on my way and escorted me to the luggage area where all of my bags had been gathered. Walking alongside them, one of the officers asked me how best to navigate through a throng of people with a trolley (he knew that I had recently endeavored to teach my compatriots to drive). We walked past the offices of Icelandair, and when we had arrived halfway between the check-in desk and the offices, I shouted that I would never again seek the services of such a shit company, which was trying to fleece its passengers, shooting my “friend” at the check-in desk an evil look. One of the officers tugged at me, entreating me to cease with the antics immediately*.

When I stepped outside, my brother-in-law Davíð was waiting for me. I became enraged and directed my rage not at Davíð but at the police—who had failed to respect my wishes: to keep my family out of it. I screamed expletives at the officers and slammed the passenger door before trying to calm myself down. I told Davíð that it wasn't his fault, and he didn't take it personally**. He explained that there was nothing that the police could have done. Given that none of my friends had been able to pick me up, they had phoned my father, Davíð explained, at which point he had been quick to jump into his car when asked if he could fetch me.

* I was angry with the Icelandair staff for several days afterward, although I decided not to bear a grudge. I later learned, however, that the staff had gossiped about the incident, which is perhaps understandable—or is it? The company lacks professionalism.

** We have known each other since 2001 and are quite close.

We ate sandwiches at Subway in Njarðvík and on the drive home, engaged in deep conversation about life. We discussed the relative age of the mountains, why it rained so much in Iceland, whether there was life after death, what it was like during the first years in Iceland, why human beings were so excessive in their use of plastics, and why in the world we were still powering our ships and vehicles with gasoline.

Davíð dropped me at Furugrund, where I lugged all of my baggage inside.

My Future Wife in Waiting

At midnight on the following evening, I tried to leave the country again. As Icelandair had been slow to refund my ticket, and being entirely broke, and not wanting anyone to drive me, I decided to take my own car. Packing only a small bag so as to avoid any unnecessary trouble, I headed to the airport under cover of darkness. I was convinced that a secret convoy of vehicles was ensuring my clear passage out of the city; they knew that I was tired and that I needed to avoid the authorities*.

When I came to a poorly lit segment of the road, near the aluminum smelter at Straumsvík, where significant construction was taking place, I had to slow down to a crawl to navigate. I was

* Similar feelings had come over me during the day, as well: I seemed always to be surrounded by luxury vehicles that were trying to make life easier for me on the road.

so exhausted that I could barely see the road*.

I arrived at Keflavík Airport at 2.45 am and parked near the Hertz car rental, thinking that I could lease my car while I was away. Stepping inside the airport, I checked myself in at the kiosk and scanned my passport to see if there were other flights available**. I had the strong intuition that something would materialize—and so I was relatively unsurprised to discover two tickets to Geneva, Switzerland. Not knowing that the Icelandic word for Geneva is Genf, I misconstrued Geneva as some sunny destination where I could recharge my batteries. The tickets were registered to a Kristján Kristjánsson, which, given that my name is Kristinn Kristinsson, I took as an error in the system. The other ticket belonged to a Guðmunda Birna, which made me think that someone had arranged a rendezvous with my future wife. She would appear when I took my seat on the plane.

I passed through the security gate with my backpack without a hitch, commenting to the staff that they had obviously learned their lesson from last night. They had no idea what I was talking about.

Somewhere deep in my unconscious, perhaps, I knew that I was about to embark on a stylish adventure in Switzerland, for I tried to buy an expensive pair of gold-coated Dior sunglasses at

the duty-free store. I believed that I still had some credit with the Icelandic loan provider Netgíró, which turned out to be another misconception.

Aware that I was probably being monitored on the security cameras, I kept on my best behavior, and with four hours until my departure, I sat and observed the people—wondering where they were coming from and where they were headed. The Icelanders who were arriving from sunny destinations seemed to quiver from the cold inside the airport, whereas I looked forward to greeting the sun in Geneva with my future wife.

The airport was bustling with activity; wherever one looked, interesting people were arriving from far-off places or on their way to other destinations—very often by making a run for it. Finding myself in an exceedingly elevated mood state, I experienced reality in a completely different way from everyone else. I asked travelers where they were headed and encouraged them to visit Prague, suspecting, perhaps, that I myself would wind up in the city before long.

I had no money, with the exception of 10,000 Czech crowns, which I was unable to use. Recognizing this, I gave away my Czech crowns to various aid organizations that had set up charity boxes around the airport.

Having asked for ice water at several places in the airport, I was obliged by staff who asked me to exercise discretion on account of their trying to sell bottled water to foreigners. I told

* It called to mind a difficult race course; how was one to navigate? I knew that Icelandic motorists were in no way prepared for the challenge—especially not in the dark.

** Given that I was banned from traveling to Amsterdam.

them not to be ridiculous and poured water for passing travelers. I then began to chew the ice rather conspicuously to prove to the foreigners how much of an “iceman” I was.

A number of wealthy individuals, I believed, were coming to Iceland because of me—they had received my telepathic messages. This feeling was greatly substantiated when the song “Billionaire” with Travie McCoy and Bruno Mars began playing on the airport’s speaker system. Something extraordinary was about to happen. I was sending the travelers at the airport all around the world so as to exercise an increased influence upon it. Later, all of us would unite in Prague. At times, I would even alter their itineraries telepathically, with little notice, and watch as they scurried to their gates so as not to miss their flights. I sat and laughed at my own mischief and observed other people, who were in the know, smile sardonically too.

As my flight to Geneva drew nearer, I took my place in the queue. Feeling that the queue was progressing too slowly, I walked to the front of the line and inquired if it wasn’t at all possible to “move things along more quickly.” The woman at the gate replied that she would do her best. When I finally arrived at the desk, the agent scanned my ticket and notified me that I had been checked in already. I strolled onto the jet bridge, surprised. When I walked onto the airplane, a flight attendant said: “Have a good trip. Enjoy Genf.” Registering my confusion, she asked if I wasn’t going to Genf, whereupon I mumbled, “Yes, I suppose,”

in a rather uncertain tone. This was when it dawned on me that I was going to Switzerland and not to some sunny, exotic place called Geneva—which I could not have pointed to on a map!

As I edged along through the aisle, I took note of the passengers’ fashionable dress and thought to myself: “Kryddi’s being sent to the haute couture in Switzerland.” I was among the last passengers to board the plane, and all of the seats were slowly becoming occupied. The flight attendant inquired as to my seat number, and I walked over to my designated seat and discovered none other than one Kristján Kristjánsson and his wife, Guðmunda Birna. As it turns out, Icelandair’s computer system had malfunctioned, leading to this incredible mix-up*.

The flight attendants were shocked and asked if I had purchased a ticket to Geneva. I told them that I had been at the airport yesterday headed for Amsterdam, but as I had been unable to board the plane, I had been compensated with a ticket to Geneva. Unable to wrap their heads around it, the flight attendants’ bafflement caused a delay. When the pilot addressed the passengers over the PA system to apologize for the wait, I could tell that he didn’t completely understand what was going on himself. I asked the flight attendants if they couldn’t find

* The incident was reminiscent of me and my father’s trip to Old Trafford in Manchester in 1999 when two other people were sitting in our seats in the stadium. Someone had sold us stolen tickets, and we were escorted off the premises by the police. The travel agency that was supposed to secure our tickets had run into some trouble and had tried saving face by going to the black market, which turned out poorly for my father and me, along with some of our fellow travelers.

me another seat, to which they replied that they could not: all passengers required a designated seat of their own. I told them that the whole thing was rather embarrassing: that everyone on the plane had begun staring at us and were becoming quite impatient. After a brief meeting among themselves, they apologetically announced that they would have to escort me from the plane: if I were to travel abroad, I would be completely uninsured. I decided not to make a scene but declared aloud to the other passengers as I left: "I will see you all later!"

I began wondering what in the world I had to do to leave the country—perhaps I needed to charter a boat. Returning to the duty-free store, I asked the cashier how to leave the airport. She told me to take the escalator down to the baggage claim. And so it was that I strolled through customs without having left the country—I wasn't even pulled aside by the agents!

Upon arriving at the parking lot, I looked around for my car, but it was nowhere to be found. I had parked in complete darkness. To make matters worse, the lot was packed with rental cars, and more cars seemed to be driving in by the minute*.

I was going to take a rental into town, knowing that I wouldn't need to pay the fare immediately. All I needed to do was provide a credit card number, which wouldn't be charged until

later. Considering that I didn't have my driver's license, my plan didn't exactly pan out. And so I decided to take a taxi, hoping that my mother or my father would pay my fare when I arrived home.

I was completely exhausted during the ride home, nodding off during my conversation with the cab driver about Manchester United. Both of us were big fans. During the drive, I expressed my surprise that people were sweeping the streets so late at night. I felt that I had been at the airport for much longer, failing to recognize that it was morning and not night.

My parents had just got up when I arrived. I asked them if they would pay my fare. My mother asked, "how much?" and I replied, "one fifty." Hearing the price, she was relieved but surprised and asked, "a dollar fifty?" to which I replied, "No, 150 dollars!" When my father appeared in the doorway, I knew immediately, without him having to say a single word, that he was furious. My mother asked him to calm down, and he handed me the 150 dollars before instructing me to take a seat inside. I asked if I could take a little nap first, but he said, "No." This was usually the way of things at my parent's house: worried caretakers calling a meeting with me. They inquired what in the world I had been doing at the airport again. I said that I had been trying to fly abroad but that my seat had been double booked and that I needed some sleep and would talk to them when I woke up. By the time I arose, two hours later, my parents had left the house. I was still far from rested but was unable to fall asleep again.

* Initially, I thought that I had parked the car near Hertz, but I was mistaken. My father and Ingi looked for it on the following day, and it took them a whole hour to find it.

Thirsty and hungry after a long night at the airport, I went to the grocery store and bought two Red Bulls, a Gatorade, a 7 Up, and a muffin. I wolfed down everything I had bought in a matter of minutes.

City Medical Officer on Standby

Later that day, on August 14th, my father visited and asked if I was willing to admit myself to the psych ward. He wanted me to go of my own volition as opposed to being the subject of compulsory internment, knowing that such a thing could prove hazardous given the events of the past few days. Earlier that day, a doctor from the emergency psych ward had tried contacting me, and so I was well aware of the seriousness of my situation. I decided to do the reasonable thing and heed my father's advice. I told him that I was only doing this for him and my mother, considering that they were worried sick*.

Knowing that I was in for a few weeks in the psych ward, I packed two bags. I wouldn't be discharged so quickly this time around. When we arrived at Hringbraut, I could feel my parents' anxiety gradually dissipate. My admission afforded them incredible relief, allowing them to return to their normal lives.

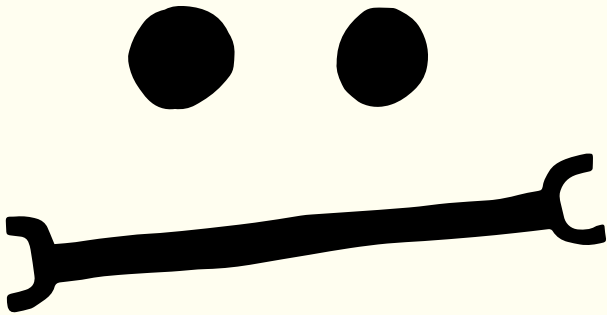
When I met the on-call doctor in the interview room at ward 32 C, he was surprised that I had arrived by myself instead of being escorted. He thought that I had been accompanied by the Reykjavík City Medical Officer, having been told that my parents had tried to solicit his advice; furthermore, they were expecting the Reykjavík City Medical Officer on that day, all of which goes to show how close I was to being subject to compulsory internment—to being picked up by the police and taken to the psych ward.

* My parents tend to obsess whenever I'm manic. They stop living their lives, and I thought that it was a little unfair: putting them through all of this. I sometimes wish that they could be tougher whenever I experienced an elevated mood state. I have a saying whenever I'm manic: "Parents all grumpy, cops all jumpy." This was especially apt in light of the events of the day.

“If you think anyone is sane, you just
don’t know enough about them.”

–Christopher Moore

Life in an Icelandic Psych Ward



I have written several blog posts about the psych wards in Iceland. I have asked many questions but received few answers. I published my first blog post on the subject in March of 2016. It was initially written as a Facebook post, but it was later published on DV.is. The inspiration for the post was an email I had sent to the chief physician of the emergency psych ward 32 C, Halldóra—to which she had not responded.

The subject line of the email read “A Few Thoughts,” and in the letter, I gave her and her colleagues a piece of my mind regarding the “egregious state” of the emergency psych ward—where they crammed manic individuals together and expected them to recover. Among other things, I asked her to stop incessantly pumping her clients full of drugs. The doctors would have to start treating the underlying symptoms instead of relying on drugs and injections. I also encouraged her to modernize her approach to psychiatry, for her methods—that of relying solely on drug therapy—would not be approved of in 20 to 25 years. I went so far as asserting that drugs were the most overrated therapy in history.

When a reporter from DV contacted her, Halldóra stated that it was impossible to generalize regarding what was best for the patients: each person was examined on a case-by-case basis. She added that there were many different methods employed and that since the advent of neuroleptics, it had finally proven possible to



discharge patients grappling with difficult mental illnesses.

When I was admitted again in July of 2017, Halldóra took me on as a patient. During our first interview, I apologized for my blog post, acknowledging that I had been overly critical. She was a good physician, I told her, and confessed that I had directed my words toward the wrong person. I thought I discerned Halldóra grow slightly teary-eyed, and we parted ways on good terms.

What I wrote in 2016 was tinged with too much anger, although it had been important to get things off my chest. I just felt that we, the patients of the ward, were being treated unjustly—but it is rarely wise to sit down and write when one is angry. Nevertheless, I sensed that many were happy with what I had written, happy that I had shaken things up a little. Several people sent me private messages in which they shared their own experiences.

For the most part, the system expects patients to shut their damn mouths and follow orders. Following my blog post, you could say that I received a kind of answer to my critique (i.e. that modern psychiatry should not be so heavily reliant on drugs and injections): a lack of funding made it impossible to construct modern facilities with more beds. Nonetheless, I have heard that the field of psychiatry is in a relatively weak position and that patients are rarely afforded the recovery for which they hope. I have often seen and read that doctors are overprescribing drugs, owing to the influence of pharmaceutical companies, who profit extravagantly from the status quo. I have also read that

the number of mentally ill individuals is actually a lot lower, as individuals are being diagnosed to sell more drugs.

The long-term use of psychoactive drugs has a detrimental effect on the body, especially if many different drugs are taken simultaneously in high doses. The drugs have only a limited effect, and patients rarely achieve full recovery by taking psychoactive drugs alone. But that's the current state of affairs.

Psychiatry should aim to heal patients completely as opposed to serving as a kind of Band-Aid. As many psychiatrists boast only book smarts and lack the requisite social skills, they prefer to administer large doses of drugs or injections. Some doctors are simply negligent.

Increased funding to the healthcare sector in Iceland would allow psychiatrists to focus their efforts on people while mitigating the staff's workload. The government must roll up its sleeves and legislate increased subsidies in order to make room for more beds. The ideal option would be to erect a brand new psychiatric ward from the ground up with state-of-the-art technology and facilities. Unfortunately, we appear to be lagging in this regard. Myriad mentally ill people do not receive the care they require and find themselves waiting endlessly for help. Some have grown so sick and tired of waiting that they have taken their own lives; the feeling that they will receive no support is overwhelming. I hate to say it.

2014 Admission

In the first chapter of this book, I described being sedated against my own will during my first admission in 2009. Five years later, in 2014—my most difficult admission to date—I agreed to a single sedative injection when I was first admitted; knowing that I would need some rest during the following days, I consented to a cocktail comprised of Cisordinol, Haldol, and other sedatives.

Still being considered “a tad overactive in the halls,” I was narrowly spared an involuntary injection later on in my stay. Such was my tolerance to the drugs that chief physician Halldóra commented that increasing my dosage was like “splashing water on a goose.”

Halldóra later told me that before being discharged, I needed to be carefully examined with regards to external stimuli, for I have always exhibited a low tolerance toward stress. However, I remain skeptical of her theory, for there were times when I grew excited because of environmental stimuli in the ward. Furthermore, it did not help having to wait for one-on-one sessions with doctors for longer than I was told. It was like they were testing my patience every single day. I was put on a rigid regimen to expedite my recovery, but it felt a little extreme; if I were to resort to a vehicular analogy, it's like the doctors had put me in park while pulling hard on the safety brake. I felt immobilized.

I protested in different ways, at times rattling the door on hallway B, for example, knowing that it could make the entire department rumble. During fits of anger, pummeling the radiators often proved cathartic: the noise resounded through the whole building. My behavior was probably far from admirable, but what did they expect—locking me up in the psych ward?

I began telling everyone in the ward that I had changed, that I didn't need any medicine, and that I had cured myself of bipolar disorder of my own accord. I was still gripped by the delusion that I was famous—that I was capable of saving the world if only the doctors would stop impeding my efforts. I told the doctors that I traveled to all of the 195 countries in the world with Herbalife: a fantasy that was conscientiously entered into my medical records.

The doctors wanted to sedate me and shut me down. Fortunately, I managed to convince the staff otherwise—persuading them to administer a larger dose of drugs instead. But it was a victory narrowly achieved. When I learned that an on-call nurse had decided to sedate me and called security, I arranged to speak to her privately. I told her verbatim: “If you sedate me against my will, you will regret it for the rest of your life.” She heeded my threat. If I become angry, I tend to channel my rage into words as opposed to physical violence. Shortly after that, security retreated from the ward. It was another small victory. I later apologized to the nurse for making the threat, and she forgave me.

During the final days of my stay, I began complaining of stiffness in my legs, owing to the high drug dosages that I had been ingesting for the past four weeks. I spent a total of 27 days in wards 32 C and 33 C. The medical records state that I had not convalesced completely at the time of my discharge and that I was still in an “excitable state.”

Going against the doctor’s recommendations, I visited Prague two days after being discharged. Not going was not an option—although I promised to return to the ward for an interview with Halldóra when I arrived back in Iceland. I kept my word. Halldóra commented that compared to the week before I left for Prague, I seemed much better; I had been heavily sedated in the ward but managed to achieve an even greater state of tranquility in Prague.

2015 Admission

Earlier in this book, I described, in some detail, the first day of my stay at the psych ward in 2015. There are a few things that I would like to add:

Nine days after being admitted, I grew so anxious for the outdoors that the doctors called security. If depriving an individual of fresh air for nine days isn’t a human rights violation, I don’t know what else qualifies. When I pleaded to be allowed outside, one of the staff members suggested that I try breathing through a cracked window—why didn’t I think of that!? Needless to say, as I

was not particularly amenable to this “solution,” and possessing a flair for melodrama, I pretended to faint. It worked like a charm. I was escorted to a small enclosed garden by two security guards carrying walkie-talkies. As I descended the stairs, along the somewhat hazardous wall of the University Hospital, one of the guards said to the other on the walkie talkie: “We’re about to reach the bottom of the stairs. Stay on your toes and make sure that he doesn’t make a run for it down the hall.” I half wanted to scream, “Thanks so much for the faith, boys!” for I have never tried to abscond from the ward’s premises, and neither have I done anything to suggest that I am considering it. Nevertheless, filling my lungs with fresh air was pure ecstasy; it ultimately salvaged the day, although it was a little like a dog being briefly let out to pee against a neighboring tree*.

Halldóra once told me that I had mastered the art of confinement at the psychiatric ward. She was right: I knew the workings of the ward like the back of my hand. I could tell that the staff chose their words carefully when speaking to me, aware that I would be quick to pick holes in their assertions, whether in regards to the day’s program, my interviews with doctors, or ward policies.

* Not everyone was bothered by their confinement. A young man whom I made the acquaintance of in the ward, for example, was locked up for 15 days without being allowed outside and many have spent much longer cooped up inside. As far as the first days of confinement are concerned, I imagine that the emergency psych ward is not dissimilar to solitary confinement.

In 2015, halfway through my stay, my father ratted me out. He revealed to the doctors that I was making calls all over town to my friends and trying to convince them to smuggle a phone into the ward during their visits. Subsequently, I was only allowed to phone my father, and only my closest relatives were allowed to visit. My father is often keen on exercising a certain measure of control. At the time, and unbeknownst to me, he told Halldóra that I had not entirely recovered from my previous manic episode, which led Halldóra to consider an additional six months of compulsory internment after my three-week confinement concluded to ensure a fuller convalescence. The two of them were in constant contact. Ultimately, however, such extreme measures were never seriously considered, probably because Óttar Guðmundsson and his team at ward 33 C could see no reason for detaining me for longer.

After my fainting episode, a few days passed without my being allowed outside. It was upsetting. Escaping from the ward is extremely difficult*, and yet, as they felt uncomfortable letting me outside, I was to be confined to the interior of the ward.

On the twelfth day of my stay, five security guards were dispatched—all of whom I had become acquainted with—because the doctors determined that I was in a state of “wild agitation.” The arrival of the guards did not bode well for our relationship,

and it was clear that our “friendship” would suffer a setback. Trying to appeal to their collective conscience, I asked them whether they were really going to go through with this—did they not understand the abhorrent nature of these injections?

Following a struggle, I eventually succumbed to their strength. I recognized that I was outmatched, and while standing up, panting in the middle of the floor, following the vigorous tussle, I was injected with Cisordinol and Haldol. One of them barked that I should behave like a man—but patronizing me in that manner was not wise. I know for a fact that he was reprimanded for his behavior afterward as it served only to escalate the tension (speaking the wrong words to a manic individual can have serious consequences). I told him to go to hell prior to kicking him rather forcefully in the backside. This was the first and last time that I acted violently toward a staff member—but he deserved it; some people should keep quiet as opposed to saying idiotic things.

I have never seen the adverse long-term effects of these injections mentioned nor discussed online. It has usually taken me about eight months to recover from my manic episodes, and I am convinced that the senseless administration of drugs and injections has played a significant role in that regard.

* To climb over the garden fence, one would need to be in peak physical shape—like that of a gymnast. Which I most certainly was not.

2017 Admissions

During the summer of 2017, I was admitted to the psych ward for the fourth and fifth time, respectively. Earlier in this book, I described the events that unfolded briefly, but I shall go into greater detail below.

During the first days of my confinement, I was not particularly inclined to communicate. I was upset by how much I had revealed to the doctors when I was on an even keel; doctors are always angling for information, and during the year previous, my unnecessary blabbing had resulted in a protracted stay at the ward.

On the second day of my stay, however, I apologized to the doctors for being so reticent, explaining that I had been energized by the sun during the previous weeks but burdened by the mental weight of various projects. I added that during the days leading up to my admission, I had probably reached a nine—on a scale of 0-10—as far as elevated mood states were concerned.

When I pored over my medical records later, I learned that I was not considered a suicide risk at the time. This information came as a surprise. I had previously thought that bipolar individuals were only at risk for suicide during depressive phases. This is not the case. In fact, when manic individuals are admitted to the ward, psychiatrists commonly begin their evaluations by assessing whether the patient is at risk of taking his or her own life. My records state that I was slightly suspicious

toward the hospital staff upon arrival, although I gradually became “calmer and more courteous” as compared to previous admissions. Apparently, I was also more insightful. I did lose the run of myself a few times, however, expressing my discontent in rather forceful terms.

During my earlier stay that year, I was admitted to the open ward 33 C on two occasions. I was also admitted into ward 32 C twice. When I discharged myself, I was still considered quite ill. In light of this, it was important for the psychiatrists to follow up on my condition. As Chief Physician Halldóra was due to go on vacation, psychiatrist Guðrún Dóra Bjarnadóttir was assigned to my case. On August 2nd, I met with her for a 30-minute interview. I showed up 15 minutes late. Guðrún said that she wanted me to concede to another voluntary admission, but I refused. I told her that I was somewhat preoccupied at the moment, stating, somewhat oddly, that I was so restless that I could not read the newspapers—preferring auditory transmission of the news instead. She asked if I was behaving in a “scandalous manner:” spending money extravagantly or experiencing an increased libido. These were unusual questions, to be sure, but rather good ones. Nonetheless, I did not show up at our next scheduled interview and began screening her phone calls.

My second stay at the psych ward in 2017 was voluntary and undertaken as a show of respect and concern for my family. I stayed at the emergency psych ward for 17 days.

Believe it or not, during those two admissions in 2017, I was only involuntarily committed for a total of three days—and that at the behest of a medical student. I was not happy, to say the least. Fortunately, the internment was lifted a day later by Halldóra. One possible explanation for the relative brevity of my confinement was my criticism that such treatment is, very often, plainly illegal. During my latter admission, for example, I was repeatedly threatened with police action if I checked myself out again: the cops would apprehend me. Simple as that*.

Owing to my constant questioning of authority, I remained aware of my condition and my circumstances. In my medical records, Óttar wrote that I had harped on being discharged but, following his objections—agreed to remain in the ward. As I had been released after only ten days during my former admission, all of the ward's staff were on their toes. This wasn't my fault. It was to be chalked up to the on-call doctor who failed to vet me properly; having learned the ins-and-outs of my condition, I was able to feign normalcy during our interview. Even in the psych ward, my insight remains keen, and I am always conscious of my state of mind: a self-awareness that, I am told, is relatively rare among bipolar individuals.

I did not receive a sedative injection during my second admission in 2017, and the staff was discrete to the point of

concealment whenever other patients were injected. They told me not to be upset. I understood the need to sedate patients who, week after week, remained agitated, but I felt that administering a sedative injection to a patient for little or no reason was unjust. Whenever such a thing happened, I wanted to scream at the doctors. This habit of mine would, at times, make for something of an electric atmosphere. Furthermore, I enjoyed throwing a monkey wrench in their plans during “rapport,” a half-hour staff meeting and debriefing session where the next shift was planned. If incidents came up during these meetings, everything was thrown into a state of disarray—and I did not suffer any guilt for my actions if I was unhappy with their treatment. The same held true whenever I felt that the patients were being treated like murderers. It varied by day how strictly the rules were enforced, but if I felt that we were being violated, I would let my feelings be known. I would raise my voice and ask whether this was a psychiatric ward or solitary confinement. It was my way of appealing to their conscience. It always worked.

In the summer of 2017, two patients at the ward on Hringbraut committed suicide. Even though the suicides had occurred in the open wards, surveillance was tightened, and strict rules continued to be enforced at the emergency psych ward: laces were removed from clothing articles, wired headphones were not allowed, and shaving was banned. I could sense a palpable nervousness among the staff, with their superiors hoping to

* These were the orders from Óttar Guðmundsson, my psychiatrist on ward 33 C, who passed on his orders to his colleagues as he was vacationing abroad.

tighten the rules even further in the wake of these tragic deaths.

The differences between individual staff members are stark, whether in terms of their character or their interest in their jobs. The best of them know every patient by name and where their personal items are kept. The worst of them can neither be bothered to learn their patients' names nor their locker numbers. I would sometimes use this to my advantage. If a competent employee escorted me to my locker, they would open the locker without asking for the number and ask what I wanted. Those who knew nothing inquired as to the locker number and allowed me to retrieve what I needed myself, failing to notice when I snuck my phone out along with whatever else I was retrieving. I would then stash my phone in my sock during routine checks in the evening. The same held true for patient phone calls. Patients of the ward are allowed two phone calls in the mornings and two in the evenings. There were two phones available, and I always asked those employees less concerned about the rules of the ward for permission to call because they paid little attention to the ten-minute rule.

During my first admission in 2017, there was an incident in the open unit in ward 33 C. The unit was at capacity, and the staff was in no way equipped to handle the load. I noticed that when drugs were administered, the employees did not know the patients' names. I snapped at these employees to open their eyes and do their jobs. Afterward, I proceeded to recite all of the

patients' names in the ward to help them better prepare.

It was around this time that I became quite worked up. I felt the need to clear the air—with a bang. After my father had delivered my food and soda late, I decided to call him and give him a piece of my mind instead of screaming at the staff. We had a 30-second conversation, which was equal parts theatrical and cathartic. I screamed as loud as I could into the receiver, noticing that everyone in the ward was visibly shaken. One individual, who did not have “sidewalk permission,” even fled the area without the staff knowing that he was in violation (he knew that the ward was a mess). To the outside eye, it may have appeared as if the two of us had planned it, but that wasn't the case*.

Needing boundaries, I knew that I needed to be transferred to the emergency psych ward; the arrangement at 33 C didn't help me, but I know that after the incident, the staff partially blamed themselves. Before heading over to 32 C, I sincerely apologized to an older woman for all the racket, explaining that I wouldn't have made such a scene if I had been aware of her presence. She replied that it was okay. “Sometimes, you just need to shake things up a bit,” she said. I was thrilled with her response. It sounds strange saying it, but I feel better in the emergency psych ward because it is more tranquil there (except for the occasional ruckus). In the open unit, there is little privacy, and it is difficult

* We were, however, acquainted, and it was as if we were able to read one another.

to obtain private quarters. If I am made to share a room with another patient, I sleep on the sofa in the TV room, finding it a more favorable alternative. There are only private rooms in the emergency psych room, however, and fewer individuals roaming the halls, which is why I am more content there.

During my second admission, there was significant unrest for several days, and everything was done to keep me out of it. One day, panoplied special forces were dispatched to the ward. I was told by chief physician Halldóra that it was the first time the police had arrived with guns, pepper spray, and batons into the University Hospital on Hringbraut.

Halldóra ordered the staff to sequester me in my room. They knew that I needed to be kept from witnessing the scene, as I have been frank in my reporting about mental health issues. I stayed in my room briefly but sensed that something extraordinary was happening on the other side of Hall B, which is often on lockdown.

As it turned out, one male patient had constructed a makeshift weapon from a screwdriver and exhibited threatening behavior. I ran into special forces in the hall, struck my open palm against my forehead, and asked, outraged, whether this operation was really necessary. Not saying a word, they marched past me into the locked staff office: it only served to scare everyone in the ward. I was told that this was necessary and was asked to calm myself and entreated not to write about the incident. I decided to refrain from posting about the affair but felt that it would be

cowardly not to mention it in this book.

If the staff were unable to cope with this young man, who weighed in the neighborhood of 180 pounds, the police would have been more than capable. Dispatching special forces was one of the most absurd and excessive responses that I could imagine.

A Sign of Psychosis

The worst thing about my two admissions in 2017 was the comments made by the otherwise fine psychiatrist, Guðrún Dóra. According to her, the fact that I sensed my late brother's presence was a sign that I was still in a state of psychosis—that I was delusional. I did not take kindly to her words, retorting that I sensed his presence, whether I was psychotic or not*.

On that day, there were exactly ten years since my brother passed, a tragic anniversary that left me struggling, and being locked up did not serve to improve matters; it was hard being unable to spend the day with my family. I have nothing against Guðrún, but she must learn to address such sensitive issues with greater care. Guðrún also asserted that I was skilled at concealing the symptoms of psychosis and capable of pulling myself together nicely during interviews. In reality, it's difficult to sit still when one is manic, but it is something that one must

* Admittedly, I am more sensitive to my brother's presence when I am manic, but it was brash of Guðrún Dóra to make such a statement, given that she did not know me well.

be able to do during interviews with doctors if one is to stand any chance of being discharged*.

I had another run-in with Guðrún Dóra when she wanted to examine my phone. All of my personal items had already been confiscated, and I felt that taking my phone as well was a bit much. I pounded the wall with all my might before returning to my room and trying to calm down. Tryggvi Ófeigsson, my closest ally during these admissions, followed me and tried to talk to me. He told me that it was incredible how quickly I could revert from rage to restfulness. He compared it to 20/20 vision, which, as he explained, meant that I was capable of seeing everything clearly in retrospect.

I did not authorize an inspection of my phone, and no further attempts were made. The reason why Guðrún wanted to examine my phone was that she knew I had taken photographs inside the ward.

On the previous day, I had taken a photo of my Dallas Mavericks' jersey resting on my bed in the ward before posting it to Instagram and Facebook. The jersey was number five and belonged to one of my favorite players, Jason Kidd. It was simply too symbolic not to post: I had just been admitted to the psych ward for the fifth time, and I had the number five on my back. The photo's accompanying text stated, among other things, that I had

had enough of the police, who refused to let me leave the country because I thought outside the box. I added that I would soon meet everyone in Dallas and asked my audience to let me live my life without all the gratuitous worrying. I had never harmed another human being and had always managed on my own.

Staff Worthy of Praise

The quality of individual staff members in the ward varies greatly: some are of considerable assistance while others seem only to exacerbate conditions by getting under the patients' skin. The ratio is approximately 70% good employees, 30% bad, the latter of which are in dire need of introspection and, possibly, relocation. The employees also need much better training, which is difficult, considering that the average employee of the emergency psych ward lasts only a few months in what is a very demanding profession.

Aside from the psychiatrists and doctors, most employees of the ward are so-called "support representatives" or "advisers," and there are also practical nurses and healthcare assistants. There are some truly extraordinary people in the ward who have worked under incredible stress in an understaffed environment for years on end—not to mention the countless overtime hours. These people deserve special praise. There are two employees who have been there since I was first admitted in 2009, a few others that I have seen since 2014, and some during my three

* She also said that I had a habit of answering questions indirectly, although, most of the time, I was amenable to reason.

stays since 2015. Those employees who endure in their jobs are those who are truly committed to helping others: stress and low wages are beside the point. When I saw all of them last summer, I swear someone began chopping onions.

I would like to extend special thanks to the following employees: Gyða Björg Þórsdóttir, Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, Marteinn Ingason, Tóti Möller, Theodór Ingi Ólafsson, Sverrir Þórðarson, Þórir Björn Sigurðarson, Brynjólfur Gauti Jónsson, and Kristinn Geir Friðriksson. Thank you sincerely for your contribution to mental healthcare and for the time you have given to me and countless others. Despite being locked up, the time we shared was, at times, fun. If all of the employees of the ward were like you, fewer injections would be required. You know what to say to your patients and manage to find the right words during difficult times.

I am in the habit of complimenting individuals for a job well done—and screaming at those who perform poorly; I once called an under-performing member of the staff a time-pervert after he refused to admit me into the smoking-room at 11.01 pm (the smoking room closes at 11 pm). In my anger, I encouraged him to search for another job. I did apologize shortly thereafter, however.

Some people are too sensitive to work at the emergency psych ward, mostly the nurses. It is obviously less than pleasant being called all kinds of untoward names by the patients in one's care; however, if you choose to work in the field, you have to

learn to tough it out. Having been made to brook such insults, nurses have often broken down in tears and scuttled off into locked rooms. The stress is extraordinary, and the conditions are too difficult for many to bear.

A Letter to the Minister of Health

In 2017, I sent an email to then Minister of Health, Óttarr Proppé, to apprise him of the egregious state of mental healthcare in Iceland—in case he had not figured it out himself*. I have always liked Óttarr, but at the time, I felt that he was not adequately executing his duties as Minister. Some say that you can't expect much from a minister's first year in office, and it was evident that most of the power lay with cousins Bjarni Benediktsson and Benedikt Jóhanesson; I think that Óttarr lacked a sense of ruthlessness in order to wrest some control.

As a patient at the open unit 33 C, I agreed to an interview on the afternoon program *Magasín* on the radio station K100 during a short leave of absence from the ward. Only three days remained of my stay, and I was advised to relax during my leave. As radio interviews can be rather stressful, it was difficult to remain relaxed, but I simply couldn't refuse a request by radio personality Sighvatur Jónsson. Earlier that day, the media outlet *Pressan* had published an opinion piece of mine in which I

* I had previously sent him a private message on Facebook but had received no reply.

discussed my summer admissions in a candid manner. I spoke to Sighvatur and his co-host Hulda Bjarnadóttir about mental health issues in Iceland. During our conversation, I mentioned Bjarni, Benedikt, and Óttarr, stating that they needed to pull themselves together and take action, especially given that two individuals had committed suicide in the psych ward on Hringbraut during the previous weeks. I asked what more needed to happen for the government to roll up its sleeves and allocate greater funds to the issue.

Two weeks later, the government collapsed due to unrelated matters. Bjarni Benediktsson's coalition was doomed to failure right from the start.

Reforms

During the summer of 2017, the state of the emergency psych ward was egregious. Inside, patients grappling with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia were experiencing extremely elevated mood states while construction workers engaged in noisy masonry and cement work outside their window. From dawn till dusk, this incessant commotion, even during weekends, only served to exacerbate the strain on the ward's staff; a few employees confessed that they were edging closer toward insanity themselves.

To make matters worse, patients could not go outside for fresh air because the yard was filled with construction workers and various machinery—a fact that I found out-and-out unacceptable. Why I wondered, was construction taking place at such an inopportune time? Why not in April or May? Furthermore, I mused, why was there no staircase from the ward's balcony so that patients could descend into the garden without needing to be escorted like criminals? Halldóra explained that they had only received funding for “summertime construction”—a rationale that, to this day, remains beyond my comprehension. Once again, management appeared lacking in powers of foresight.

There is plenty of room for improvement within our flawed mental healthcare system, especially with regard to food. It's terrible. Every other meal consists of boiled and soggy fish balls, a measly portion of a fish filet, or dry meat. During my many days in the ward, I can recall only a single memorable meal: a succulent turkey that was served up one Sunday evening.

For many years, the ward has suffered from that notorious budgetary hacksaw commonly referred to as downsizing. It's difficult to express just how unfortunate this under-investment has proven; one must experience these conditions first hand in order to believe them. Take the noise, for example. In the psych ward, doors are constantly being slammed shut. During each shift, key-carrying staff members seem always to be opening and closing the same doors. Halldóra once told me that shock

absorbers and key-card sensors have long been the norm in more progressive nations and that Iceland trails far behind countries like Denmark. Needless to say, this incessant slamming of doors, combined with the beeping gadgets of security guards, who are always running to and fro, greatly disconcerts the already unsettled patients*—not to mention the claustrophobia and the universal lack of oxygen.

The first emergency psych ward in Iceland opened its doors at the University Hospital on Hringbraut on May 30th, 2014. The date was symbolic because it happened to coincide with my 25th birthday. Unlike other wards, the emergency psych ward is entirely closed off, and patients may only meet with friends or relatives in a locked visitation room. The windows and doors are reinforced so as to make them nearly impossible to penetrate.

The emergency psych ward has 12 rooms: 10 individual rooms and 2 temporary quarters. During summertime, the emergency psych ward is a kind of “manic ward,” admitting patients in the most extreme manic states. As space is limited, the psychiatrists generally try to discharge patients as quickly as possible: that’s simply the way of things. When these individuals experience bouts of deep depression weeks or months later, however, the chickens come home to roost.

* The mood of patients varies greatly between days. During one weekend in 2017, four employees were punched by the same patient—a young man who had a hard time coping with his mental state—and were subsequently taken to the emergency room in Fossvogur for treatment.

As noted in an article about the new emergency psych ward published on DV.is in April 2015: “The ward aims to provide improved service for those sickest of patients and to reduce their time of confinement.” In case you need help deciphering the terminology, the phrase “reduce their time of confinement” is a roundabout way of saying that the administration of drugs and potent injectable sedatives is the norm. I can testify to this fact first hand.

When patients are administered injectable sedatives, not only do they tend to become completely out of it, their speech becomes slurred for three or four days afterward as well. Forming complete sentences becomes near impossible, and it is only after considerable practice that patients succeed in stringing together coherent sentences: a feat that never fails to engender a sense of triumph. But there is also the humiliation that goes with injectable sedatives—especially when they are administered with force. I have often tried to obliterate the memory of these experiences and the accompanying emotions. To no avail. I will take these experiences with me to the grave, but I like to believe that they have made me stronger*. Those friends and family members who have paid me a visit in the wake of such injections have confessed that they have been greatly taken aback: I strike them as unrecognizable—my entire body tense,

* This is why I am always so affected by the sight of another patient being injected—I know what they’re going through.

my mouth incapable of coherent speech*.

There is no exact formula that dictates how often patients are tranquilized. Some patients are not given any injectable sedatives while others are injected a dozen times during the duration of a single stay: it all depends on the elevation of the patient's mood and whether or not they exhibit violent behavior. If a patient refuses an injection, a fight can break out, which is understandable given how abhorrent these injections can be. During my five admissions, I have only received roughly 20% of the injections that were intended for me, owing primarily to my stubbornness. If, on the other hand, I agree to an injection, or if such an injection is forced upon me, they are, without exception, highly potent owing to my tolerance (of which the doctors and nurses are well aware). These measures trace their origins to a lack of funding within the healthcare system, and it is the sick that must bear the brunt of these imperfections.

When the new unit was formally opened in 2014, then department head of 32 C, Eyrún Thorstensen—whom I have always liked—declared that it was “of the utmost importance that management drastically reduce outside disturbance in the ward: the slamming of doors, foot traffic, and other noise negatively impacts patients and serves to delay their convalescence. In other words, we want quiet and not a riot. Thus, it is our hope that we

can gradually improve conditions within the ward in order to mitigate indisposition and conflict.” While these are certainly admirable goals, I cannot say that I was directly aware of these ambitions during my four admissions after the emergency psych ward was opened. It is certainly difficult to establish a sense of peace and quiet during peak summer months when the patients are flying high. You just have to believe that the staff is doing their best.

As I have been quite manic during all of my five admissions, I have always been a patient of ward 32 C*. When patients are admitted against their own will, they are essentially deprived of their freedom for 24 days. If in the opinion of the psychiatrists, the patient has not fully recovered or has failed to follow a strict regimen during these 24 days, they are involuntarily interned for three months**. The psychiatrists have yet to resort to such drastic measures in my case—although such a thing was discussed in 2015.

Being locked up in the emergency psych ward with 11 other manic individuals is a terrible thing. It's like throwing a dozen mad dogs into a cage and hoping that they'll eventually regain their wits. One's condition rarely improves during the first ten days, and sometimes it deteriorates. Patients are at times encouraged

* For the longest time, I avoided discussing these experiences with my friends or family, for I wouldn't wish it upon my worst enemies.

* The name wasn't changed even though it became an emergency psych ward.

** It used to be six months.

to stay in their rooms and cultivate a sense of boredom—which is some of the worst advice that I have ever received.

There is a distinctive atmosphere to the emergency psych ward. The patients' mania sometimes rubs off on the staff. This can lead to deeply frenetic, philosophical conversations between patients and psychiatrists (and sometimes even among the employees themselves). It's at once strange and powerful.

Despite everything, my memories of the emergency psych ward are not entirely bad. I have sometimes parked outside the ward in a normal state of mind and tried to make peace with the past. In June 2017, I did a five-page interview with MAN Magazine and requested that all of the accompanying photographs be taken outside the ward. They turned out great.

Pack-a-Day Smoker

During my second admission in 2017, I was not allowed outside for days on end. This owed primarily to the fact that there was a shortage of employees but also because patients are usually kept inside during their first few days in the ward. When I complained of enfeeblement, I was allowed into a storage room and told to open a window. Given that this was something of an unspeakable luxury, the staff had to smuggle me inside while all the other patients were made to settle for the nailed-shut window cracks of the ward.

There was, in fact, so little oxygen that I once woke up in the middle of the night and found that I had trouble breathing. Unable to calm myself, I stepped into the hall for assistance. It was only after guided breathing exercises by an on-call physician that I was able to return to sleep.

Like most patients of the ward, I usually sleep for six to eight hours a night, which leaves open the question what one should do for the remainder of the day. If you are not allowed into the garden, cannot step inside the gym, nor pop outside for a game of basketball, there is not a whole lot to occupy your attention. And because there is nothing to do—and as psychiatric drugs tend to increase your appetite (with the doses in the ward often being quite generous)—I eat, often putting on as much as 20 pounds in less than a month*.

To kill time, I walk the halls, flip through the available magazines, or engage the staff in conversation. Sometimes, I phone local businesses, mainly sports stores or car dealerships, and ask for information about their products. Every once and a while, I do sprints in the hall to vent, which is not allowed. But I always listen when I am asked to stop.

I am not a regular smoker. I only indulge in the occasional cigarette when I'm drunk. But even then, I take no particular joy in the act. Despite this fact, I have smoked during all but one of my

* There is some entertainment available in the ward. Most of it is rather uninspiring, but I nonetheless avail myself of it at times.

stays in the ward*. Being my usual manic self, I commonly grab two cigarettes and puff away right down to the filter. Sometimes I burn my fingers. As these “coffin nails” provide a heady relief from the repressed physical tension, the first cigarettes are always the hardest. Patients of the ward are allowed to smoke once every hour, but after persistent requests in 2017—and endless counting down of minutes—the staff ultimately conceded to allowing me to smoke every half an hour: I inhaled two packs every single day. Such are the profound effects of confinement. When I was discharged from the ward, my craving for cigarettes quickly subsided**.

With the exception of having once kicked a condescending prick in the rear end, I have never become violent with the staff. Whenever I'm angry, I tend to direct my rage at doors or windows, and my relationship with most of the ward's employees is good. I would like to think that there exists a kind of mutual respect.

Illegal Involuntary Commitment

Compulsory internment is illegal unless stringent conditions are met. Even though these provisions are rarely satisfied, mental healthcare officials in Iceland resort to it over 100 times a year.

The act of indefinitely depriving an individual of their freedom—which constitutes the most serious government intervention and one that can have grave repercussions*—requires only a single decision made by a single doctor who does not need to be intimately familiar with the patient's circumstances**. Very often, the doctor is acting on behalf of the patient's family.

Compulsory internment can be defined as the “act of committing an individual into an institution or a hospital against their will for treatment against serious mental illnesses.” These individuals don't always have a serious mental illness, but as many are unable to, or do not know how to, stand up for their own rights, they must yield to this measure passively.

Icelandic law on compulsory internment—which can be found in chapter three of the Act on Legal Competence 71/1997—fails to meet the minimum requirements of the Human Rights Covenant, of which Iceland is a party; the law discriminates against the mentally ill and does not safeguard the rights of those who are involuntarily committed. The law is also far from clear on the rights of those who are subject to compulsory internment: failing to protect their freedom, their right to a fair court procedure, and equal legal competency. It's nothing more than a lawful form of compulsion and violence.

* In 2009.

** Although it took four months for the longing to completely disappear after my episode in 2017.

* It is, undoubtedly, a tough decision to make for all parties involved and a recourse that has caused many a family rift.

** More often than not, they are not.

As I have quite strong opinions on the subject, I gave a speech at a symposium hosted by the Icelandic Mental Health Alliance (Geðhjálp) at the Reykjavík University in May of 2017. In my talk, I discussed my experience with compulsory internment, hoping to convince then Minister of Justice Sigríður Á. Andersen, who was in the audience, to amend the Act on Legal Competence. I wanted her to make the law clearer and make it more difficult for individuals to be committed against their will*.

There's a long path to recovery from the emotional wasteland of compulsory internment. It is an experience that one does not easily forget. Over the years, I have grown convinced that involuntary commission is a violation of human rights and have decided that I will not tolerate such treatment again. For the life of me, I cannot understand why we punish creative individuals, or those with abundant imagination, by locking them up. As soon as people begin to think and act outside the box—they are hemmed in again. I hope that we begin assisting these individuals in channeling their energy toward more productive ends in the future, which will require more resources and better facilities.

Many patients who are involuntarily committed file a complaint while they are still in the ward. I have done so myself. It makes you feel better afterward. Most patients drop

the charges later on, however, knowing or having been told that it is a lost cause*. I only know of one case—among probably many thousands—where the courts ruled in favor of an individual against the government.

If we lived in a just world, it would be the other way around.

Preventive Measures

In June of 2018, the current Minister of Health, Svandís Svavarsdóttir, published a report on mental healthcare in Iceland. While the Minister made a few decent points, her report was a disappointment. Much of the writing, which was rather vague, was dedicated to a glossy overview of current cases, with the Minister resorting to timid circumlocutions as opposed to spelling things out explicitly. A few of the claims made by the Minister were simply false. In my opinion and the opinion of many others, Svandís' most serious offense was not dedicating a single word to the coercion that takes place at the National University Hospital every day—whether in the form of compulsory internment or other more subtle iterations. She was also remiss in failing to mention the good work that many organizations are doing.

Thirty-five to fifty mentally-ill individuals commit suicide in Iceland annually; it is the most common cause of death among

* I was interviewed three times that day: for the website Mbl.is (Morgunblaðið), for the radio station Rás 2, and on the 10 o'clock news on RÚV (the national broadcaster); it was considered quite unusual for someone to discuss their own compulsory internment publicly.

* Patients can, however, file for damages.

young men*. According to statistics from 2014, men—who usually resort to more extreme measures than women—accounted for 75% of suicides in Iceland. Women, on the other hand, attempt suicide more frequently but often employ less drastic actions. While six young men between the age of 18 and 25 commit suicide in Iceland annually, only one woman in the same age group takes her own life every other year. The difference is stark.

Psychiatrists must do a much better job of raising awareness among the public. Icelanders who have not been diagnosed with a mental illness or who do not know anyone who has received treatment seem mostly ignorant on the subject. To this day, mental illnesses are given the silent treatment in this country; we inch forward with baby steps—and the occasional leap.

Statistics on drug-use among Icelanders illustrate that prescription drugs are the most common way to treat mental illness. In a review of the OECD's *Health at a Glance* report from 2017 by Statistics Iceland, it is noted that in 2015, Icelanders ingested on average more than twice as many antidepressants per capita than residents in other OECD countries. They consumed 130 recommended daily doses of antidepressants per 1,000 residents as compared to 60 daily doses in other OECD countries. To claim that mental illness is twice as common in Iceland than in other OECD countries is implausible; rather, it is

likely that prescription medication serves as the primary form of treatment in Iceland, whereas citizens of other OECD countries take recourse in other, and sometimes better, forms of therapy. There is much room for improvement.

The emergency unit of the National University Hospital of Iceland's Psychiatric Division, for example, does not offer year-round, 24-hour service. But whenever an individual requires treatment at the psych ward, it's always an emergency. We don't tell someone who breaks their arm on a Friday to drop by at the hospital after the weekend. The emergency room is always open. According to the National University Hospital of Iceland's website, the Psychiatric Division's emergency unit on Hringbraut is open between noon and 7 pm on weekdays and between 1 pm and 5 pm on weekends. In case of an emergency, individuals are encouraged to visit the emergency room in Fossvogur, which specializes in the treatment of physical injury but not mental healthcare. This status quo is unacceptable.

Take depression, for example. It's not enough for a person to grapple with suicidal thoughts to be granted admission to the psych ward in Iceland. You have to have made a decisive attempt at suicide or be visibly injured from self-harm to be admitted. In other words, admission requires the individual to be an "immediate suicide risk." Within the current system, it is impossible to help everyone. Doctors are left trying to save those

* Globally, over 800,000 people take their own lives every year.

who are the most seriously ill*.

Sadly, prevention is rare with regard to mental healthcare in Iceland, especially in comparison to traffic safety. A fatal car accident occurred on Reykjanesbraut** every 99 days before the road was widened in each direction. Subsequently, not a single fatal accident occurred in the ten years following the expansion. By employing similar principles, we could dramatically reduce the number of suicides with increased awareness, improved facilities, and better psychiatrists.

I'm looking forward to improvements in mental healthcare in Iceland, although I cannot comprehend the government's lack of ambition and initiative. We can do so much better.

Brighter Days (Hopefully)

In 2016, I received a phone call from Sverrir Þórðarson, a former employee of psych ward 32 C. He told me that some of the ward's employees would be attending a conference in England on how best to reduce the number of forced injectable sedatives. He asked whether I would be willing to share my experiences at the conference's conclusion.

Honored, I gave three blunt lectures to a group of enthusiastic listeners, who asked myriad follow-up questions, which ultimately

resulted in a casual 90-minute, round-table conversation. I appreciate their enthusiasm for doing their utmost to improve conditions, and I hope that my perspective was helpful. Likewise, I hope that there are brighter days to come with regard to mental healthcare in Iceland, which is so dear to the hearts of many Icelanders. I will continue to be optimistic. Hope shall never die.

* Furthermore, very few psychiatrists in Iceland, if any, accept new clients.

** One of Iceland's busiest roads.

“Don't be ashamed of your
story. It will inspire others.”

–Anonymous

Mental Health Awakening



In 2016, I launched Mental Health Awakening, a project that traces its origins to an inquiry made by an old basketball acquaintance, Torfi Guðbrandsson. Early that year, Torfi asked whether I was interested in giving a talk at the community center Jemen at the Lindaskóli school in Kópavogur. Although I had given little thought to lecturing at the time, I agreed immediately—and the ball started rolling.

During the next few weeks, I prepared for the lecture by compiling photographs for a slideshow and by composing a brief script to go with each slide. Wanting the project to have its own logo, I contacted graphic designer Helgi Einarsson—who is a longtime friend of my brother Ingi—and together we crafted our version of the Greek theater masks (Melpomene and Thalia), which date from 500-300 BC and have long been associated with bipolar disorder*.

On February 16th, 2016, I formally launched the project by giving my first lecture on my life with bipolar disorder at the Kópavogsskóli school, which has strong ties to my childhood. This new chapter of my life began with three consecutive talks for 8th, 9th, and 10th graders.

At a track and field training session a day later, a young



* The outcome was extraordinary, which is no surprise given Helgi's talents.

man who had attended my lecture asked my brother Ingi if he knew that “bipolar kid.” Ingi howled with laughter at how the boy had phrased it; he was still thinking about the talk, and it had obviously moved him.

Since then, things have progressed rather quickly. I have given lectures to every 10th grader in Kópavogur three times and remain interested in lecturing in other municipalities*.

Only 6.5% of kids in 8th, 9th, and 10th grade have been familiar with the term “bipolar” when I have asked about the concept at the beginning of my lectures. In light of this general ignorance, the urgency of the project dawned on me immediately**.

In the future, I foresee that other individuals dealing with different kinds of mental illness will collaborate on the project by sharing their stories and helping to lift the shroud of silence for the Icelandic citizenry***.

* I have also visited offices, secondary schools, and universities, and would like to give lectures at sports clubs—and such a thing is in the works. It is a rewarding endeavor that is a lot of fun. Furthermore, I sensed immediately that the project did me a lot of good; nevertheless, it can also be difficult: sharing one's experiences in public.

** While most people are familiar with depression, a familiarity with mania is much rarer.

*** I wouldn't mind working full-time as an educator and sharing my experience with the general public; it's my calling. There is a lot lacking when it comes to the sharing of information concerning these issues—and personal experiences and anecdotes are often the best methods of raising awareness. I have also heard from students that such narratives are much more interesting than statistics and graphs from academics.

Teachers and Mental Illnesses

Since I graduated from Kópavogsskóli in 2005, not much has changed with regard to mental health awareness among primary-school students. Many teachers have, however, confided in me that they never discuss mental health with their students. If it were up to me, the subject would be a fixture in the school curriculum.

Some teachers are more proactive than others. Gylfi Freyr Gröndal—who was my first basketball coach at Breiðablik and a total genius—is doing an excellent job informing teenage students at the Kársnesskóli school in Kópavogur of the issues. As an educator, he often discusses mental health in an honest and open manner, going as far as offering an elective course for 10th graders under the heading “Societal Taboos.” The course features regular guest speakers who discuss subjects that are rarely, if ever, addressed in today's society.

During my lectures, I am always conscious of the fact that I am essentially addressing a relatively small group of people: individuals who are dealing with mental illnesses themselves or who have loved ones who need treatment. I always emphasize to students and teachers* that when individuals return to school after long bouts of illness, they receive them with open arms and special affection; in all likelihood, these individuals are wrestling with mental illness.

* It is no less important to educate school administrators, teachers, and parents, and I sometimes give special lectures to them.

A Cup of Coffee with a Friend

Mental healthcare is inching in the right direction. Much progress has been made since 2009, when I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. The public discourse has improved, and many have opened up about their illnesses, which is a cause for celebration. Over the past four years, I've talked openly about my experiences and will continue to fight for myself and others in a similar position*. I look forward to seeing the progress we've made in a few years. I can't help but be optimistic and will keep fighting the good fight.

I only wished that I had had the courage and the guts to step forward and tell my story earlier. I kept my illness to myself for way too many years, certain that I would be judged negatively by others, but such worries were unfounded.

Through the years, engaging in candid conversations with my loved ones, publishing posts on Facebook, and speaking openly to the media have proven the most effective ways of maintaining my sanity—especially during these most recent years. A one-hour, frank conversation with a good friend at a coffeehouse has been so much more rewarding than a session with a psychiatrist. And even though medical professionals, with whom I spent much time when I was younger, can be of assistance, I've recently

begun seeking alternative remedies.

Although I don't have many close confidants, I do have a large group of friends and acquaintances who have supported me when I've felt down. Bumping into them at nightclubs or other places and sensing their support has been priceless.

Not too long ago, I quit seeing my psychiatrist of ten years. I had come to feel that he was old-fashioned and mildly apathetic. He may be competent in certain areas of his field, but his reliance on drugs has made him into something of a dinosaur. He was also strangely inaccessible. Whenever I needed to speak to him, I would call his clinic and leave a message. A few days later, he would get back to me from a blocked number, and I was never quite sure if it was him calling or some hacker from abroad. In the fall of 2017, he stopped returning my calls and emails altogether. I told him that I needed medication, but he gave no answer. Thankfully, a doctor whom I had met during a stay at the psych ward helped me out by prescribing the needed medicine. I later sent my former psychiatrist a letter in June of 2018 with the subject line "Disappointment," wherein I expressed my honest opinion of him. He replied, at last, and told me that it had all been a misunderstanding and asked whether we shouldn't meet. It was all very "persuasive." But I wasn't interested.

* I reckon there are few individuals in Iceland willing to speak as bluntly as me about mental healthcare; it's liberating: being able to discuss one's mental health as if one were chatting about a recent trip abroad.

Dale Carnegie

I can't recommend the Dale Carnegie training courses highly enough. They can be of great service, but only to those who are willing to step outside their comfort zone. During the three times that I've attended Carnegie courses*, I've witnessed incredible changes in myself and others. I've also met some fantastic people.

During a Carnegie training course in 2013, I took my first step in the direction of freedom. The assignment was to give a talk about a childhood incident, and I immediately considered addressing my depression. A little nervous, I asked my mother whether I should perhaps speak about something more general instead. Knowing, however, that my depression had been a much more formative experience, she encouraged me to open up: after all, she reasoned, it would serve not only to help myself but others as well. As an assistant during the training course, I addressed the group during our next session and revealed the impact my depression had on my childhood. During the entire day leading up to my speech, I trembled in fear. Truthfully, I remember very little of what I said, but my willingness to speak honestly inspired the other students to dive deeper.

During the course, my coach, Hjördís Ýr Johnson, explained that since I was willing to speak so candidly about my experiences, others would do the same. It was a big step to take, but I knew

that I had yet to make an even greater leap. It would occur a year and a half later.

Illness or Anomaly?

I'm not sure that I'm willing to agree to having a "mental illness." It's only an illness if regarded from a medical standpoint. This is not to suggest that I'm in denial, only that I find that I'm in a very particular state of mind when I'm depressed or manic; the majority of the time, however, I live a normal life. To label people "mentally ill" or "mentally impaired" or to say that they're struggling with an "illness," an "ailment," a "disorder," or a "genetic defect" is neither particularly inspiring nor healthy. Regardless of what others think, I choose to employ a different terminology altogether, finding words like "patient" absurd and preferring neutral terms like "people," "individuals," "persons," "parties," or "clients." Another phrase that irks me is "suffering from bipolar disorder." This may be the case—and has been the case for me for some time—but I don't find it especially helpful during everyday conversations; in our struggle to change the public perception of mental illness, the word "suffering" just doesn't move the conversation forward.

In 2016, I posted a status update on Facebook calling for alternative words to paint bipolar disorder in a less serious and more constructive light. My friends suggested words and phrases like "brainslick" and "mentally affluent," which stood

* In 2009, 2011, and 2013 as an assistant.

out. But I also enjoyed concepts like “psychological anomaly” and “emotional overcrowding.” To say that someone is dealing with “mental challenges” is also a nice way to put it: individuals who face such a challenge—whether in reference to bipolar disorder or something else—must, undoubtedly, assume greater responsibility for their lives than other people. They dance to a slightly different beat. To be “psychologically disparate” from the average Joe also has a nice ring to it, as does the idea of “deviating from the norm” (the latter of which ranks among my favorite phrases and is one which I regularly employ). On the other hand, the term “illness” evokes solemnity and may suggest a death sentence. This is not the case. Individuals diagnosed as bipolar or as having other “mental illnesses” can lead good lives. You just need to believe that such a thing is possible.

The phrase “mentally impaired” is justified in application to individuals who, having long struggled with mental illness, cannot function on their own and whose personalities have been significantly altered. The label is inappropriate in my case because I am independent (I live in my own apartment) and because my personality, despite my myriad mood swings, has not altered. This is not to suggest that my manic episodes have not affected me deeply; there are nights when I wake up in a kind of shock: convinced that someone is trying to catch me in a manic state and lock me up in the psych ward. I walk over to the window, open the blinds, and stare out into the distance until I come back to my senses.

By living responsibly and healthfully—i.e. eating wholesome food, maintaining an orderly sleep routine, exercising moderation in drink, and engaging in responsible talk and drug therapy—individuals who struggle against psychological challenges can stay on an even keel. So long as the individual makes sure to check the aforementioned boxes, the prognosis is always favorable*.

It goes without saying that talk therapy is more effective than thoughtlessly pumping an individual full of drugs. An experienced mental-health professional with well-honed social skills, who prescribes drugs in the right doses, is always preferable to a psychiatrist who relies solely on prescription medicine in high doses. Medication is not the most important thing, although admittedly, it can sometimes prevent frequent, and often times quite dangerous, mood swings. I've had a wide range of drug-related experiences myself, having learned that the wrong combination can make things worse, whereas the right combination may afford a sense of security. Nonetheless, one must tread carefully.

Today, I've settled on a combination of drugs that works well for me. By combining Lithium, a psychiatric medication, and Truxal, an antipsychotic, I don't feel dazed on the following day and don't experience physical stiffness. I hardly notice their

* I have also heard that mindfulness, meditation, and yoga are useful, and it's only a matter of time until I try these things for myself. Lastly, it is wise to familiarize oneself with all of the available resources, to select what works, and to know oneself.

effects. Most psychiatric drugs increase your appetite, and the two aforementioned drugs are no exception. But they are far from the worst. Through the years, whenever I felt that certain drugs weren't right for me, I asked my former psychiatrist to lower the dose or to prescribe something different: it's important not to take drugs just because the psychiatrist prescribes them. It's also important to ensure that the Lithium dosage is right by taking regular blood tests. Too high a dose can damage the kidneys.

Having read that the drugs could result in lower testosterone levels, I have also taken testosterone tests. For the better part of the year, my testosterone levels are way below average, which led my former general practitioner to consider prescribing a booster. He ultimately decided against it, however, in light of my mood swings; high testosterone and an elevated mood swing could prove a dangerous combination during summertime manic episodes.

Despite my low testosterone levels, I have felt no extraordinary change in my libido; sex is not something that I tend to focus on during manic episodes, although I am familiar with men who become quite lustful when their manic—refusing to let any of their extra energy go to waste. An acquaintance of mine, for example, engages in numerous and long-winded sexual sessions with women whenever he's in a manic state. His energy levels are through the roof. I sometimes think that it would be interesting to experience a fraction of this desire. I have spent a total of four months in a manic state—excluding the time I've

spent with doctors in the psych ward—but I have never slept with a woman when manic. I'm quite simply alone in my own world.

In the end, one must learn to strike a balance between controlling one's mood swings and regulating one's levels of testosterone—or else the effects tend to sneak up on you. Especially if you're on antidepressants. Administering drugs without concern for hormone levels is not uncommon, however, which may lead to a below-average secretion of testosterone. Such an imbalance tends to bleed into every area of the individual's life.

Prejudice

In previous chapters, I briefly touched upon the subject of prejudice, which I am convinced is steadily declining. But you can never be sure what people are thinking. It's not unlikely that prejudice is still quite common, although I've experienced much less bias after I opened up about my own experiences in 2014. People may still be saying negative things about me behind my back, although I certainly hope that they aren't.

Being diagnosed with a mental illness isn't as much of a shock for individuals or their loved ones as it was a few years ago—not to mention a few decades ago. In the past, these individuals were often labeled as “insane” for the remainder of their lives, even if they managed a full recovery. Being diagnosed with a mental illness should be no different than being diagnosed with the flu or experiencing male pattern baldness; we don't label those who

catch the flu as “flu patients” for the entirety of their lives, even if they seem to become infected every year, nor do we treat men who begin losing their hair at a young age any worse than others. It's my hope that we cease doubting individuals or the talents of individuals who have received a diagnosis.

I have noticed that some people—whether my own friends and acquaintances or journalists, more generally—often trip over their own tongues when it comes to talking about issues of mental health. I like to believe that such awkwardness owes more to ignorance than prejudice, the latter of which is more common among older people, who were expected to keep such things to themselves and carry on with their lives when they were younger.

It has been heartwarming to observe the changes that have occurred over recent years. It's not unlikely that the older generation is slightly taken aback by how openly these issues are discussed among young people. In the past, one would sometimes hear sentiments like, “We need to tie this person down in the psych ward no later than yesterday!” Although you still hear similar comments today, they're becoming much less common. I never miss the chance to correct these misconceptions whenever they pop up. I point out that straight jackets are no longer a part of the furniture in the psych ward and that such talk is absurd.

I'm certain that when I leave this world—hopefully not for another five or six decades—we will have seen much improvement

in the public discourse. Until then, I will continue to fight so that coming generations needn't be fearful or ashamed of their feelings. Which is how I felt for almost a decade.

Associations That Help

Geðhjálp and Hugarafl (Mindpower) have done an excellent job for the past few years and have managed to help many people struggling with mental illness. I cannot recommend them highly enough. Over the years, I've attended a weekly support group for individuals with bipolar disorder, which has been of great help. Although the group is not directly affiliated with Geðhjálp, we meet inside the association's building. Geðhjálp and I are on the same page when it comes to compulsory internment. Other associations, with whom I am less familiar, are also worth mentioning, e.g. Klúbburinn Geysir and Hlutverkasetur. Þíeta has also done a great job in recent years, helping people cope with suicidal thoughts and aiding those who have lost loved ones by suicide.

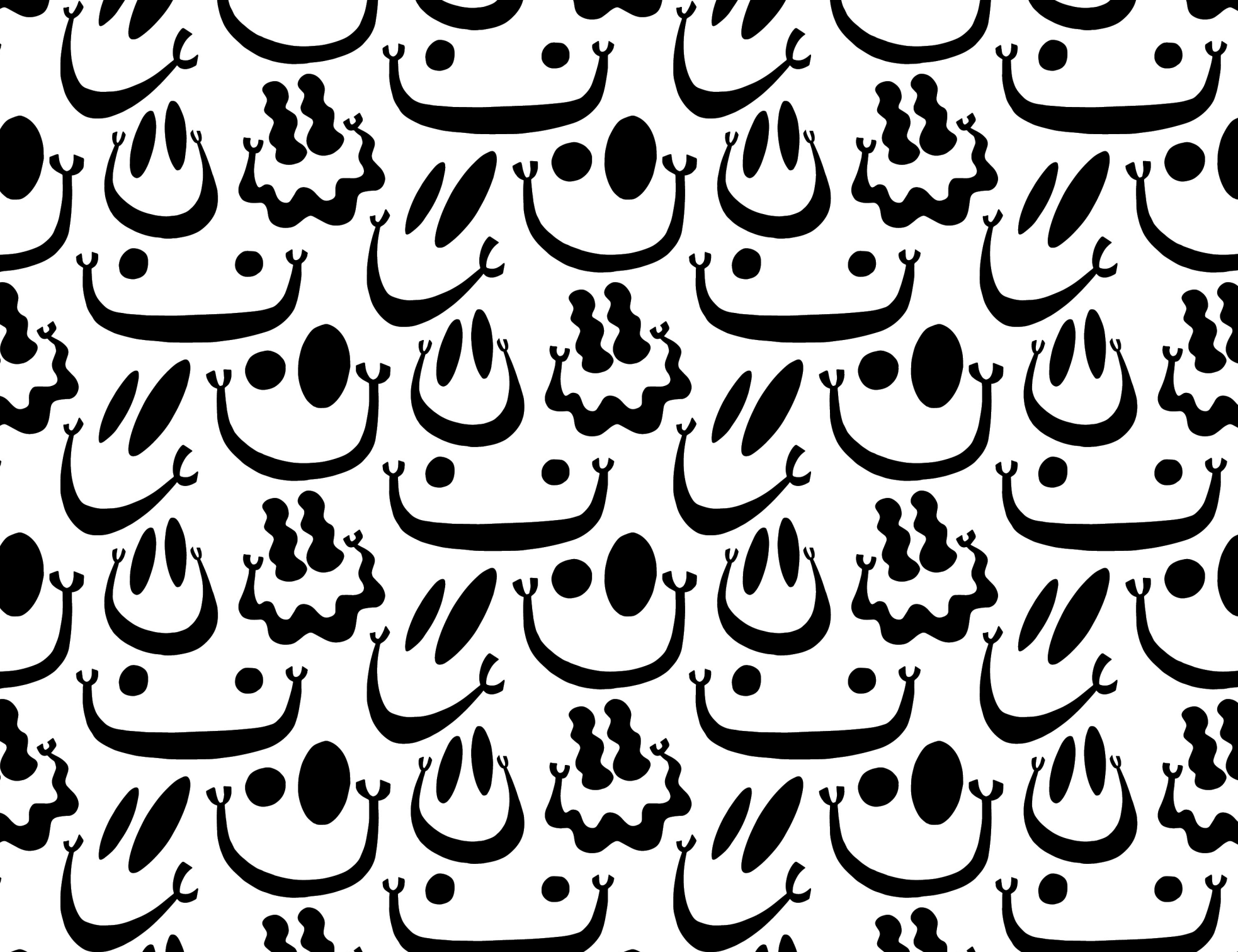
For those residing in rural Iceland, I recommend geðverndarmiðstöð Grófarinnar (The Grófin Mental Health Protection Center) in Akureyri; geðræktarmiðstöð Vesturafls (The Vesturafl Mental Cultivation Center) in Ísafjörður; and Ásheimar in Egilsstaðir.

The Red Cross' Help Line (1717) is open around the clock and so is their website, 1717.is. The Icelandic Red Cross has often

been a lifeline for individuals struggling with mental illnesses. The emergency hotline 112* is also worth mentioning as it is not uncommon for individuals to “freeze” during emergencies to the point that they don’t remember what numbers to dial.

Lastly, it’s important to be constructive in one’s dealings with individuals recovering from a mental illness. Be explicit in letting them know how important they are to you. The last thing that they need is feeling as if their loved ones are ashamed. Good, meaningful conversations can go a long way to improving their sense of self-worth, which can often be in a precarious state following a bout of depression, mania, or other illnesses. Show them the empathy and love that they deserve. Don’t dive into difficult conversations until the person is ready.

* 112 connects callers to all response parties, whether in terms of accidents, fires, crimes, search and rescue, etc.



Epilogue

It's September 5th, 2018: the deadline for submitting a manuscript to my designer Helgi. As I mentioned in the introduction, I began writing this book on November 20th, 2017, and it has taken me ten months to finish. If I had written the book in three months, it would have comprised 30,000 words. Instead, it's approximately 70,000 words long. When it comes to writing, it's essential to take one's time.

As I wrote, I found that memories constantly bombarded me; if the brain is given a single task, e.g. that of recalling the past, it tends to do so rather effortlessly. This incessant state of remembrance, combined with my time-consuming perfectionism, served to delay the publication of this book by a month. Fortunately—having become rather well acquainted with myself through the years—such a delay was not entirely unexpected. In truth, the process of finalizing the book—piecing it together, making the necessary alterations and edits—proved more time-consuming than the writing. Roughly speaking, I must have re-read the manuscript over 30 times, not to mention the work done by my three other proofreaders and friends.

During the time that I wrote the book, I was on an even keel. It being important to avoid distraction, I often wrote at night,



and there were times when I isolated myself completely*. This is not to suggest that I was holed up for almost a year writing, for I sometimes took an occasional break and rejoined society, so to speak. During the home stretch this summer, I entreated higher powers for a sense of equilibrium so that I could publish my book this fall. In retrospect, I chose the best possible summer for publication, as it was, by all accounts—one of the very worst summers in Reykjavík on record. It served to cool my manic tendencies**.

As I am off my ADHD medication and in rather poor physical shape, I'm quite pleased with having managed to finish this book. Physical exercise and a healthy diet have not been my top priorities over the past year, but I intend to get back on track soon.

During the past few weeks—from the end of August to early September—I have experienced slightly increased energy levels and less need for sleep. In August, when I was putting the finishing touches on the book, I didn't sleep for 38 hours, something of a personal record. Subsequently, I ingested a hearty dose of a soporific to ensure that I would sleep well over the next 12 hours.

As I mention in the book, I've only become manic during the summers, and I don't entirely understand soaring to an elevated

mood state in the dark and the cold. The past summer, however, I've felt as if I could experience a manic episode in the fall after I finish writing; submitting the book after almost 1,000 hours of work will undoubtedly bring no small sense of relief and pleasure.

Convinced that I've already hit rock bottom, I don't imagine anything but brighter days ahead. I fear few things in life—it will give me what it wants to give me. It would come as a great surprise if the future held in store more traumatic experiences, which is what I fear if I fear anything.

If the reader sees me doing wind sprints in the Kringlan shopping mall, engaging in off-the-cuff traffic control on the highway, or purchasing expensive designer products on credit from Netgíró, they can be certain that I'm having an absolutely wicked time.

* I can usually only focus on a single task at a time.

** I sometimes joked that the weather was so miserable because I was so busy at home: I simply lacked time to influence the weather.

Thanks

I'd like to thank everyone who offered help when I struggled. First and foremost, I'd like to thank my family and my closest friends for their conscientious help and patience—although we don't always see eye to eye.

I'd also like to extend thanks to medical professionals and a few good old friends. I know that I haven't always been the easiest person to deal with, but without you, after almost two decades' worth of struggle, I never would have made it out intact. I know that I have worried many of you significantly and, at times, kept you up at night. Thanks for everything, and thanks for having looked out for me during times of trouble. And joy.

I also want to say a few words about my father. Perusing my medical records has significantly altered my history and my relationship with my father. This, in turn, has also changed my interaction with my family (at least during the time of this book's publication). However, I have never been one to sugarcoat the truth, and so I decided to tell my story as it is, despite knowing that my family wouldn't always be pleased by my criticism of my father. Nonetheless, my father has always been there for me. I will always love him. He's a great man, not without a sense of humor, and we have a deep connection. But there have been times when he has made my life more difficult. That's just the way it is. We disagree about many things, most notably



compulsory internment, for which he is a proponent and which I am fighting to end. I have told him that his stance on the subject would inevitably change if he himself were ever admitted to the psych ward against his own will. Only time will tell how our relationship will evolve in the future.

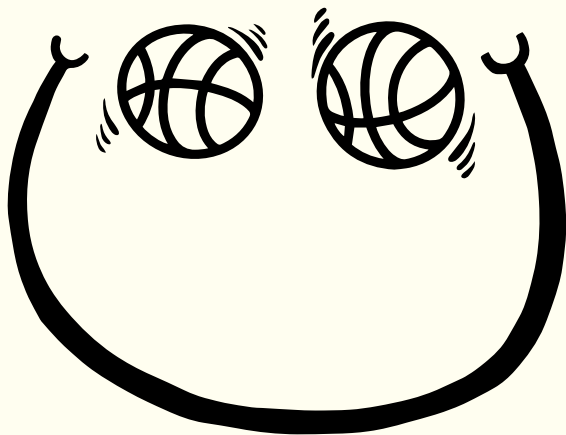
To all those who turned their back on me, and those whom I have turned my back on, I'd like to say just a few words: I'm grateful for your time in my life and for the experience. I have a strong memory and tend to hold grudges, which is something that will probably never change. Forgiveness is one thing; full reconciliation is quite another. This is not to say that things cannot improve. Life is full of surprises.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank everyone who helped with the publication of this book, whether in the form of giving advice or feedback. Without you, the book never would have become a reality.

– Kristinn Rúnar Kristinsson

“All dreams are crazy.
Until they come true.”
–Dirk Nowitzki

Bonus Chapter: My Dream Trip to Dallas



I had dreamed of seeing Dirk Nowitzki play basketball for the longest time. More than that, I had dreamed of meeting him in person. In 2018, as the Germanator, now 43, was preparing to play his 21st season with the Dallas Mavericks, I realized that it was now or never.

In that year, I met Hlynur Bæringsson—former captain of the Icelandic national basketball team—at the Laugar Spa. Wondering if my Dirk dream was realistic, I asked him whether I was being quixotic. “Where there’s a will, there’s a way,” he said. “You just need to capture his attention, and your plan might work.” Maybe he’s right, I thought.

Some weeks later, I was watching the NBA at my friend Andri’s house when we settled upon a reasonable plan: before flying to Dallas, I would send a few emails announcing my imminent arrival, post a few tweets on Twitter, and then show up to the Mavericks’ arena, the American Airlines Center, holding a conspicuous poster. It just might work, we conjectured.

I booked the trip in early 2019 and asked Helgi Einarsson* to design an eye-popping poster to capture Dirk’s attention from the stands of the Mavericks’ arena. I had already composed a rather catchy headline with my friend Kjartan (“HEY DIRK! I’m

* He helped me design the layout of this book.

your biggest fan all the way from Iceland. I've traveled 5,706 miles just to let you know, YOU'RE STILL THE MAN!!") and settled on a suitable picture. In consultation with the printshop Pixel, I printed a 26 x 40 inches large poster, which I intended to fold and stuff into a 26 x 20 inches suitcase, which I thought was a standard size. Learning later that this was not the case, I finagled a sizable duffel bag from my parent's basement and squeezed the poster into the bag along with all of my luggage.

On March 28th, 2019, having convinced my father to give me a week off at Mathofið, I departed for Dallas to attend two games: one against the Philadelphia 76ers and another against the Minnesota Timberwolves. I spent every last dollar I had to make the trip a reality*, investing more money in good seats and caring less for the quality of my hotel room. On the way to the airport, my father suggested that I prepare for the possibility that my poster would be too big to take into the Mavericks' arena. After a quick Google search, I learned that fans could not take posters larger than 22 x 28 inches into the stadium; I could do little else than hope for the best.

Despite two earnest attempts, I hadn't left the country in four years, a fact that left me a bit nervy. To make the situation seem even more precarious, I spotted a police vehicle parked outside

the airport when I arrived and nervously joked to my friends that "the authorities were watching me." Despite my nerves, everything went smoothly. I was sitting on a plane bound for Seattle before long.

When I arrived in Seattle, I asked for directions to the baggage area and was instructed to follow the arrows on the floor. Having retrieved my bags, I headed over to the service desk to check in my luggage, thinking that I would fill out my ESTA forms at the same time. Once there, however, I learned that I was to have completed filling out the documents before arriving and that somehow I had managed to cross through border security without having the necessary paperwork. Learning this, a security guard escorted me and my giant bag to the customs area where a long queue had formed. Fortunately, an obliging security guard by the name of Jessica helped me skip ahead of dozens of people in line to ensure that I wouldn't miss my flight. Having explained how I had managed to retrieve my luggage without filling out the ESTA forms, which was supposed to be impossible, I apologized. I was tired and unaccustomed to navigating large airports, I said. Subsequently, I was bombarded with questions by a rather stolid border guard*, which was stressful. Against all odds, I managed to elicit hearty laughter from the agent. When he inquired as to

* A few days before I left, my mother asked why I was obsessed with this athlete whom she knew so little about. I told her that it was mainly due to his skills on the court but also to his character: he was completely down-to-earth.

* Border patrol agents always ask every arriving passenger probing questions. One is not allowed to have too much money on one's person, and entering into the country in a business state of mind is frowned upon.

the purpose of my trip, I told him that I was here for one reason and one reason only: to travel to Dallas and meet Dirk Nowitzki. Having made this declaration, I casually removed my sweater and flaunted my Dirk tattoo.

I arrived at my hotel in South Dallas, located approximately four miles from the Mavericks' stadium. I had only been there a few hours when I was advised to stop hailing cabs and start doing business with Uber or Lyft instead. Such a thing, they said, was two or three times less expensive and no less safe. I was surprised to learn that the Americans, unlike their European counterparts, had almost managed to do away with taxis entirely. Finally, I was advised to stop wandering the streets of South Dallas late at night by myself; not only was the northern part of the city much safer*, but Texans are also known to carry concealed weapons (although they are discouraged from doing so when under the influence of alcohol). Generally speaking, the weather in Dallas was pleasant, although temperatures sometimes vacillated by as much as 20°F. One evening, I asked an Uber driver why the city streets were so quiet and empty. "Because it's pretty cold outside," he replied—it was 65°F!

When I asked the Americans to guess my age, most of them replied that I must be somewhere in the vicinity of 22 to 25 years old—and many were taken aback when they learned that I would

* Dirk is also much more famous in the north than the south, as I soon came to realize.

turn 30 next month. When they inquired where I was from, I sometimes said that I was from Texas to mess with them. Some of them believed me, right up to the moment that my accent proclaimed me as a foreigner. Asked to venture a guess as to my nationality, many reckoned that I hailed from Switzerland or the Netherlands. When I revealed that I was from Iceland, many of the locals seemed quite familiar with the country (although there were some who believed that Iceland was a part of Alaska or that we Icelanders were a nation of 30 million people). It was clear that many Westerners had become more informed about Iceland over the past decade or so*.

On the second day of my trip, I met the inimitable Corey Cates at Christies Sports Bar & Grill. An avid sports fan, Corey supports all of the local teams in Dallas, but his love for sports extends far beyond the city limits; when he learned of my nationality, he said that he owned an Aron Gunnarsson jersey—Aron is the captain of Iceland's National Soccer Team—which meant that we got along royally. Despite Corey's avowed fandom, he had never met a person with a Dirk Nowitzki tattoo before. I found this surprising. Impressed, Corey took a picture of the tattoo and posted it on Twitter, hoping to utilize his social

* This increased familiarity owes undoubtedly to the volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull (which stopped air traffic around the globe), the feats of the men's national soccer team during the 2016 Euro and the 2018 World Cup, and to Iceland's increasing popularity as a travel destination. Some may have even heard of the bankruptcy of Icelandic airline WOW air.

network to make my meeting with Dirk a reality. When I learned that meeting Dirk would prove a daunting task, for, despite his humility, he was a verified superstar in Dallas, I became a little disheartened. In retrospect, I had been a little naive, thinking that a few emails, my tattoo, and a large sign would constitute a Golden Ticket to meet my idol.

On Monday, April 1st, I attended the Philadelphia 76ers game. I had been to two NBA games in Los Angeles in 2012, but this time, I had bought much better seats. Excited, I showed up to the arena a full 90 minutes before tip-off, worried that I wouldn't be allowed entrance with my sign. When I arrived, I made sure to fold the sign so that it looked half as big. Undeceived, I was told to unfold the sign by security. One of the security guards told me that it should be okay but asked his superior for a second opinion. Perusing the sign, the two of them said that they approved the message but asked me not to raise the sign above my head to avoid disturbing the other spectators.

When I had located my seat, I walked down toward the court to see how close I could come to the players warming up without being stopped by security. I came as close as the court-side seats but was told that Dirk never showed up until 15 minutes before tip-off. Standing there, the official Mavericks' photographer snapped a photo of me and my sign. Thirty minutes later, Tamara Jolee, a Maverick's press agent, posted the photo to Twitter under the heading: "There's a man in Iceland with a fabulous

Dirk tattoo. That's all." Tamara's tweet received 2,000 likes, and the Mavericks later posted the photo on their Twitter account, which led to many other media outlets reporting that one of Dirk Nowitzki's biggest fans was in the audience for tonight's game*.

When Dirk arrived for his warm-up, I was still standing near the court, but as he didn't notice me, I called out to him. I began to feel as if he were ignoring me; I was the only person in the stadium holding a sign, and, besides, he hadn't answered any of my emails nor responded to any of my Tweets. Undaunted, I asked the security guard if it was okay if I stepped a little closer to the court, but he said no. When the national anthem began playing, I was asked to return to my seat. Despite my annoyance, I decided to shake the bad feelings off, and only a few minutes had passed when I decided that I needed to attract more attention to myself. Walking up to the sidelines, I screamed, "Dirk!" "Germanator!" while holding my sign aloft, which resulted in my being reprimanded by security. I was told that such a thing was strictly forbidden while the game was going on, for it served to distract the other members of the audience. "You do it again and you're outta here."

Dirk Nowitzki was well past his prime when I visited Dallas to watch him play. Nonetheless, he did have a few old tricks up

* I later learned that the photo was printed in a few newspapers, and it would have been nice to have taken a cut-out of these articles back to Iceland. The photo was disseminated more widely than I had expected, and many patrons of the local pubs mentioned that they had seen the photo.

his sleeves, which I celebrated more than anyone else in the stadium, and the Mavericks wound up winning the game by 20 points. I captured some video from the game from my seat, for I've always enjoyed trying to capture the atmosphere at games (whether at soccer games at Breiðablik or basketball games with Haukar). It proved something of a challenge trying to get a rather dull crowd of 20,000 people going being accustomed to 1,500 people in the stands in Iceland. Realizing that I needed to time my singing well, I usually began to chant whenever a foul was called, which was when the crowd fell silent. Once when Dirk was sitting on the bench, I began to chant, "We want Dirk!" and in about 30 seconds, the entire stadium was singing with me. It was incredible.

After the game, I returned to my hotel room and wondered what it would take to score a meeting with Dirk.

Later that evening, Helena Sverrisdóttir—the greatest women basketball player in Iceland—reached out to tell me that Lovísa Falsdóttir was also visiting Dallas with her family. Lovísa's sister worked for the Mavericks' assistant coach, Jenny Boucek, who won two trophies with Keflavík in Iceland in 1998. Jenny is only the third woman in history to become an assistant coach to an NBA team. Sensing an opportunity—admittedly, though, something of a long-shot, given that I barely knew

Lovísa* and that I didn't know her sister at all—I decided to roll the die and sent Lovísa a message via Facebook. I was unsure if she would be willing to help me but took some solace in the fact that Icelanders generally help each other, especially abroad.

The Mavericks were to play three home games in a row: on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I went to dinner on Tuesday evening alone. Wanting to treat myself to one real steak meal during my trip, I asked Corey to recommend the best steakhouse in Dallas. Among the four restaurants that he suggested, I picked the one with the best-sounding name: Bob's Steak & Chop House. When I arrived via Lyft, I noticed a row of luxury cars lining the street outside the restaurant. Strolling inside wearing shorts, a Mavericks' hoodie, and a cap, I learned that I had probably managed to pick the most expensive restaurant in Dallas. It was a beautiful, dimly-lit establishment, and every patron was dressed to the nines. Uncertain if I'd be allowed to enter, I rather timidly asked the host for a table for one and was obliged at once. I ordered a 14-ounce Ribeye steak, which turned out to be one of the most delicious meals of my lifetime. When the waiter asked what I was doing in Dallas, I replied that I was here to see Dirk and the Mavericks and showed her my tattoo. She revealed that Dirk was a regular at the restaurant and proceeded to launch into various anecdotes; such was her enthusiasm that I could

* Lovísa is a friend of my friend's (Kristinn Marinósson) girlfriend, and I had only spoken to her once—during a night out on the town.

hardly finish my meal in peace. She went so far as calling Bob himself over, and I asked him to send my regards to Dirk the next time he visited. I was getting closer. I could feel it.

On gameday, Wednesday, April 3rd, Lovisa and her sister decided to attend the game, as well; they had initially intended to attend two games that week—the one on Monday and the one on Friday—but as I had told Lovisa that I would be leaving Thursday morning and that I hoped to go all out on Wednesday's game in hopes of meeting Dirk, they decided to lend me a hand (while emphasizing that it was a long-shot). Feeling that the odds were stacked against me, I arrived at the stadium much less enthusiastic than before. Nonetheless, Lovisa said that her sister was going to ask the assistant coach whether I would be allowed into the player's tunnel, of which the coach rarely approved.

Even though the Mavericks wound up losing by two points, the game against the Timberwolves was highly enjoyable. I showed up with my sign again, and Dirk, having in all likelihood seen me on social media, waved to me immediately during the warm-up and smiled. "Maybe this is as close as I'll get to meeting him," I thought to myself*.

During Monday's game, the Mavericks' photographer had handed me his business card and stated that he wanted to shoot

some video of me for Dirk's tribute video. Declaring that Dirk would definitely autograph my sign, he asked me to meet him in the arena before Wednesday's game. Despite these plans, he had not returned any of my emails, and when I asked him why he had been making promises that he could not keep, he became quite embarrassed. He excused himself by saying that he had not received any of my emails, but, as proof, I showed him the sent items on my phone, confirming that I had indeed sent him an email on Tuesday evening. Furthermore, I had also called him and sent him a message on my phone. He offered his sincerest apologies but said that there was no time for shooting video as the game had already started and in light of the fact that I would be leaving in the morning.

After the game, I waited in the stands for an update from Lovisa. Barring a special pass, however, I was told that I would need to leave the arena, and it took all of my powers of persuasion to convince security to allow me to stay. I waited for 30 minutes until, finally, I received word that the assistant coach would escort me through the player's tunnel. "But I can't guarantee that you'll meet Dirk, though," Lovisa said. "He's often quite tired after the games and interviews with the media*."

* During halftime, I was approached by a couple who said that they had managed to snap a picture of Dirk waving to me. They said they were going to send me the pictures on Facebook, but they never did. During the game, a lot of people posed with me for pictures, enamored of my tattoo and my sign.

* It did not help either that Dirk had set aside an hour after the game to meet a 17-year old cancer patient, which, as I had been told on the day previous, might serve to make my dream rather impossible.

Lovisa took me over to see assistant coach Jenny who was waiting for me near the tunnel. We talked for a few minutes, mostly about the Mavericks and her time in Keflavík, when Tamara Jolee—the Mavericks' press agent who had posted the Tweet about me—stopped by to say hello. Mid-conversation with Tamara and Jenny, a woman approached whom I recognized as Jessica Olsson, Dirk's wife. She said that she had seen the articles about me and wanted to help me meet Dirk. She even posed for a few photographs with me. Half Swedish and half Kenyan, Jessica first met Dirk in 2010. Turning to the security guards after our conversation, I said, "It makes sense that Dirk's wife is a total mensch; not a chance that the Germanator would date some fame-hungry egoist."

Following our conversation, Jessica walked into the locker room to speak to Keisha Wyatt, then Director of Player Relations. It was then that I knew that something was about to happen. I was about to meet my hero. Having learned to curb my expectations, however, I anticipated that Dirk would briefly step into the tunnel, autograph my jersey and my sign, pose for a few photographs, and leave. But I was in for a pleasant surprise.

Keisha opened the door and invited me into the locker room. Waiting for me, in all his glory, was Dirk Nowitzki, who greeted me with a huge smile. All I could muster in terms of speech was, "Ooooh shit!" before we fell into a warm embrace. Trying to recall what I had learned in German from my time at

Kópavogur Junior College, I declared: "Ich heiße Kristinn und ich bin neunundzwanzig Jahre alt. Ich wohne in Kópavogur, Island und ich bin dein Nummer-Eins-Fan Dirk!" Dirk seemed delighted by my German, although we quickly began conversing in English. I showed him my tattoo, which he perused with a smile on his face (it was an incredible moment), before inquiring about Icelandic basketball player Jón Arnór Stefánsson, who had been with the Mavericks during the 2003-2004 season. Although I don't know Jón Arnór personally, I told Dirk that Jón Arnór was the Icelandic GOAT (Greatest of All Time) just like he was the Mavericks' GOAT*. Dirk inquired if I had been in the audience during Germany's match against Iceland in the 2015 Eurobasket tournament. I replied that, unfortunately, I had been unable to make it, but I had sacrificed everything to see him play this week before he announced his retirement from the Mavericks.

Dirk autographed my jersey and my sign and retrieved a pair of bespoke basketball shoes, marked with his name and jersey number (41), in size 16. He wrote "To Kristinn" on the shoes before autographing them. I spelled out my name for him as he wrote, and it struck me that it was a little strange that he neither knew my name nor who I was—despite the fact that I knew everything about him and had been following his career for 20 years. Some

* If I had known Jón at all prior to my trip, I would have asked him for help, but the whole thing seemed too much of a stretch. In retrospect, it may have been a mistake, and I know that I would have regretted not reaching out if I hadn't managed to meet Dirk.

people say, “Don’t meet your idols,” as such a thing often results in disappointment. In the pictures that I would later receive from the Mavericks, however, one can hardly tell who is happier: Dirk or me. A one-of-a-kind athlete, Dirk Nowitzki is incredibly warm-hearted, and there is not a trace of celebrity-induced haughtiness in his demeanor. That’s how he’s always been. I told him that he was the epitome of “Loyalty,” a word that I had tattooed around his picture on my arm. “If you look up Loyalty in the dictionary,” I said, “your picture should appear.” No other player in history had been as loyal to his team as he or sacrificed as much money for the sake of making the team better*.

When I thought that our meeting was over, Dirk asked if I wanted to see the Championship trophy from 2011. Needless to say, I replied in the affirmative, saying that I had cried tears of joy when the Mavericks had been crowned champions: I had been so happy for him, after years of disappointment. Standing next to Dirk and the trophy, I shook his hand while posing for a photograph. He seemed extremely proud, showing me the trophy, which was entirely understandable, considering that this was his greatest athletic achievement. If I had translated my book into English before the trip, I would have given him a copy, but as time flew by quickly, I didn’t have an opportunity to mention it**.

* Dirk was willing to settle for lower wages to make room in the budget for other players.

** Maybe we’ll discuss it one day at Bob’s Steak & Chop House.

During my meeting with Dirk, I also met coach Holger Geschwindner, who has been of great assistance to Dirk during his career. When I was finally escorted out of the tunnel by a security guard, I was completely ecstatic.

Still floating on cloud nine, I rendezvoused with Corey, his girlfriend, and a few friends at a local sports bar. Corey knew that I had gone “all in” that evening trying to meet my idol, and he must have suspected that my dream was about to become a reality when I sent him a picture of me and Dirk’s wife. He was quite excited on my behalf. After about an hour at the bar, Corey mentioned that I had spent the entire time smiling from ear to ear, sweating profusely from my forehead, and talking much less than usual. Everyone seemed to be living through me vicariously, this being the first time that anyone they knew had met privately with Dirk Nowitzki. Other patrons of the bar wanted to look at the shoes that Dirk had given me and my sign. I acquiesced rather passively, wanting nothing more than to return to my hotel room to stash my treasured mementos away safely.

When the Mavericks were crowned champions in 2011, approximately 160 individuals affiliated with the team were given Championship rings, which is pretty much as cool as it gets. One of those 160 employees happened to be at the sports bar that evening, and he allowed me to try on his ring*. It was an eventful

* To this day, I still dream of acquiring an NBA Championship ring. Maybe one day I’ll work for a Championship-winning NBA team. Only time will tell.

trip, to say the least. April 3rd, 2019, was the best day of my life. Simple as that.

When I returned to my hotel room at 2 am, I was overcome by a painful headache with only six hours until my flight to Seattle. It seemed to me that it had been momentarily deferred until I managed to accomplish my goals. I laid down, took two Treo tablets, and tried to relax: it had been one hell of a ride. I eventually took a shower, packed my bags, and posted the photo of Dirk and me on Facebook, which was an incredibly pleasant thing to do. Many of my friends had been following my adventures on Instagram and Snapchat, and some of them had even grown a little impatient: “When the hell are you meeting Dirk!?” Having failed to manage my friends’ and my own expectations, I would have returned home mightily disappointed if I hadn’t managed to meet Dirk.

I didn’t sleep for a single wink before my trip back home. But I wasn’t tired—and I wasn’t manic either. There are many experiences that are conducive to manic episodes, and my meeting with Dirk is certainly no exception. It could not have helped either that spring had arrived in Iceland, which could have made my entering into an elevated mood state even more likely. In the end, however, I was not afraid of becoming manic.

The trip home went well. I slept for 30 minutes during each of my two flights and arrived home on a Friday, almost entirely unrested. I managed to sleep for nine hours that weekend before

showing up for work on Monday morning—in rather excellent spirits but not at all manic (it would be a little strange if my mood wasn’t at all elevated following such a trip).

I would later learn that a few of my loved ones didn’t believe that I would manage to pull it off: meeting a superstar in America without having established any meaningful connection beforehand.

Since then, I’ve come to the conclusion that something big happens in my life every ten years. I was born in 1989. In 1999, I made the Dream Team of the Shell Soccer Competition and visited Old Trafford for the first time (where I met one of my idols). In 2009, I visited Prague, experienced my first mania, and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. In 2019, I met Dirk Nowitzki.

A week after my visit, Dirk announced his retirement from basketball. He bade farewell to Dallas with a 30-point game at home against the Phoenix Suns and with a 20-point away game against the San Antonio Spurs. It would have always been hard to accept that it’s over, but the news was a little easier to bear, having seen him play and met him in person.



