

# Summers with Baba Isfjord in South Beach, Gimli

Written by Debbie Torbert Mate, February 14, 2021

Katie and Norman Isfjord were my grandparents. We called them Baba and Gedo. They lived in a tiny four room house at 8 Hansson Ave in South Beach, Gimli built by Norman himself.

Norman Lawrence Isfjord was the son of **Thordur (Thordarson) Isfjord** (1876-1954) one of the pioneer Icelanders, coming to New Iceland in 1893 as a teenager. Thordur married Margaret Jonsdottir Howard, also an Icelander (1876-1934). They had one son and five daughters.

*Norman L. Isfjord*





*Katie and daughter Katherine*

In 1931 their only son Norman married Kataryna 'Katie' Slywka. She was born in Austria and came to Montreal on a ship. They had nine children: Norma (my Mum), **Thelma**, **Margaret**, Elert, **Gavrock**, **Marvin**, Herman, Katherine, and Patricia. My great grandmother, Katie's mother Helen Rudyk Slywka (born in Ukraine 1886 – died in Gimli 1977) lived in a house behind them.

Like his father before him, my grandfather was a fisherman all of his life until his death in 1957. By the time they moved from Fjoni, the Isfjord homestead west of Gimli to South Beach the children were getting married and Patricia was the last to live there.

There was no plumbing in their little house. Water was put in a big milk can usually carried on a wagon from the artesian well at the end of the street. There was only an outhouse.

My mother Norma met **Donald Torbert**, while he was stationed in Gimli training with the US Air Force. They were married on November 18, 1949 and together they raised me and my brother **Lorne** in the United States for 27 years. But I spent summer vacation with Grandma Katie in South Beach.



*Katie at South Beach*

My favourite memories are us coming to Gimli for two weeks each summer so my mother could see her family. My father was a pilot and he would fly us in our Cessna 172 airplane and land at the Gimli airport.

South Beach was adventure at any age. Washing in a pan, getting water from the well and having a breakfast on a wood burning stove. Spending the day at the beach was the best. We bodysurfed and swam all day. We would go to **Mrs. Evans store** and get bologna for sandwiches, Freshie, plums and penny candy. My cousins and I met an older gentleman in a house tucked back in the woods (Moonlight Bay). It was one solitary room and he was so kind, telling us stories, that we made cookies for him on Katie's wood stove. I wish I knew his name to honour him.



*Isfjord house is in the background as viewed from Carter's cottage, ca 1961. Notice the cords of wood stacked for wood stove and winter heat.*

Next door to Katie were the **Carter's** at 6 Hansson Ave. Coincidentally to our surprise their daughter **Sylva**, who married an American, Bill

Benkelman, lived in Cleveland, Ohio as well. We shared boating on Lake Erie, skating on the river by their house near Rocky River in Lakewood, and flying with them. One summer we got a ride with them to Gimli in their Cessna.

After my father's medical retirement from the F.A.A. he and Mum moved to Camp Morton and built a house, bringing her back home to her Isfjord family.



*Great Grandmother Helen Slywka and great grandchildren*

South Beach is a special place for good memories. The beach was our friend, the smells of campfires burning in everyone's yard. Those were the days my friend.



*8 Hansson Ave, 2021*

Ref. *Gimli Saga*, pp. 574-6 for Isfjord Family.