

My maternal grandfather, Þorkell Magnússon, was the captain of a fishing vessel called *Gyða*. In early April 1910, he and his seven-man crew, including his eldest son, set sail from Bíldudalur, a small town in northwest Iceland. Their destination was the rich fishing grounds beyond the fjord. April was the beginning of the fishing season, which lasted until September. These were the “mild” months. In reality, the weather was often stormy and below freezing, pushing both the boat and men to the limit of their endurance. Three weeks later, on April 23, *Gyða* headed for home, her hull laden with cod, the valuable cash fish many fishermen had died for. Nearing their home fjord, the men’s hearts must have lifted. A hot meal, a warm bed, and the family’s embrace were within a day’s reach.

That night, a furious northerly gale pounded the region with snow and sleet, whipping the sea into a deadly cauldron of crashing waves. All hands would have scrambled on deck to wrestle with the wind, jibing and tacking to keep the gusts from capsizing the boat. The battle went on all night. The next morning, *Gyða* was still upright and staggering closer to home. Einar, my grandfather’s neighbor and a former crew member, attested to seeing her from shore during a visit to his family’s farm on the outer reaches of Arnarfjörður (Eagle Fjord). The wind was still howling, pummeling the boat from left and right. But Einar was confident the boat could hold herself together. After all, *Gyða* was a sturdy oceangoing vessel, one of the first to be built in Iceland with state-of-the art technology. In just a few more hours, she would reach the safety of the harbor.

The next day, Einar found berth on a vessel that took him home to Bíldudalur. As his ship sailed into the harbor, he looked out for *Gyða*. He knew she was no longer out in the fjord, for he had sailed the length of it and hadn’t seen another ship. The only place *Gyða* could be was home, at Bíldudalur. He scanned the half-dozen ships docked in the harbor. To his dismay, *Gyða* wasn’t among them. With a sinking feeling, he knew what must have happened. The fjord had swallowed *Gyða* and her crew.