

In Memoriam – Ágúst Þór Árnason, 26 May 1954–11 April 2019

Ágúst Þór Árnason, known to most of his friends as Gústi, came to the University of Akureyri in 2002 as a project manager and worked, amongst other things, to establish the BA programme in law, which admitted its first students in 2003. From 2007 until his passing in 2019, he served as adjunct in the law department. He worked with Guðmundur Alfreðsson, Timo Koivurova, David Leary and others to develop the Polar Law master programme and to organize the first Polar Law Symposium, which was held there in 2008. The concept of Polar Law was then virtually unknown, but a decade later there have been eleven Symposia, eleven Yearbooks, dozens of Polar Law graduates



and an ever-expanding collection of textbooks and anthologies on Polar Law. Ágúst Þór organized some and attended ten of the eleven Symposia. In recent years, he lost his heart in Greenland where he worked closely with a number of local scholars and politicians. He was struck by the magnificent landscapes, moved by the warmth of the Greenlanders, and fascinated by Greenland's constitutional evolution.

Ágúst Þór studied philosophy, law and political science at the Free University of Berlin and the Johan Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. He worked in journalism in Germany, as a reporter with two radio stations, and as a journalist and editor at one of the main newspapers in Reykjavík, before founding and directing the Icelandic Human Rights Centre from 1994–98. He was the consul of Germany in Akureyri. He served on the boards of several NGOs, primarily in the human rights field, and he authored a book and several articles on related subjects. He believed strongly in the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to legal scholarship, preparing students not simply to read and apply “the laws” but to have a firm sense of the nature of law, based on historical, philosophical, political science, international and comparative approaches and contexts. He was active in Icelandic politics, both at a theoretical level and with *Framsóknarflokkurinn* (The Progressive Party). He served on the official constitutional committee of seven experts in 2010–2011, tasked with analysing and explaining the Icelandic Constitution to assist the Constitutional Council with a major review.

To describe Ágúst Þór as a “people person” is like saying it sometimes gets a bit cold in the Arctic. Ágúst Þór made friends and built connections everywhere he went. He was always to be found in the middle of the chattiest, warmest and friendliest group of new and old friends at international gatherings such as the Polar Law Symposia. He secured support for the Polar Law programme from politicians, generous benefactors, and expert teachers who generously offered their time and other resources to help develop and build the programme. Ágúst Þór always made them feel welcome. He was active in the local Rotary chapter and the first to invite visiting Rotarians and also non-Rotarian academics to the Eyjafjörður meetings. He was a natural athlete – a keen basketball player and runner. He ran the full Reykjavík marathon twice, in 1991 and 2014, and completed the half-marathon six times, most recently in August 2018. He was likewise practising and competing in basketball until a few months before his passing. With his enthusiasm and energy in everything he turned to, Ágúst Þór made friends through all these activities and was well-known throughout Iceland and in many countries beyond.

Ágúst Þór could not stop for death. On the morning of 10 April, he was working on finalizing a book project on constitutional processes. That afternoon, he slipped out of consciousness and passed away peacefully the following day, at his home in Akureyri, surrounded by loved ones.

Ágúst Þór is survived by his partner, Margrét Elísabet Ólafsdóttir, his three children, Guðmundur Árni, Brynjar and Elísabet, and seven grandchildren. He is greatly missed by his colleagues at the University of Akureyri.

Rachael Lorna Johnstone and Guðmundur Alfreðsson