

Latibær for sale

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Magnús Scheving has been playing for Icelandic children for decades. He has created his own world, Latibær, which he is in the process of selling equipment to American corporations. He says that Latibær could become Disney Iceland.

Magnús Scheving is a wonderful man. I really do not know where to start describing him because Magnús is so much. He is a carpenter, aerobics master, writer, CEO, radio director, teacher, leader, actor, salesman and ‘entrepreneur’ which is an extremely cool word and has been translated into Icelandic as an entrepreneurial poet. Magnús is the CEO of Latibær which is a company that promotes health and wellness in the lifestyle of children.

Latibær is located at Lágmúli and there is a pool table in the office. In fact, it does not show books, magazines, CDs and other stuff that is all connected to Latibær. Latibær is not just a play or a CD or a book but a way of life and for the past eleven years Magnús has worked hard to make Latibær an export product. Most of the time has gone into the US market and issues are at a very sensitive level these weeks. Many well-known American companies in the entertainment industry are fighting for the heat.

“This will be a TV series of 52 episodes that would be broadcast to 90 million homes. This could be one of Iceland’s largest exports” says Magnús, “an attraction such as Legoland in Denmark, the Mummy in Finland, Disneyworld in France, Tintin in Belgium and so on.” Magnús and I sit at a table he made by himself. There is Latibær water on the table and a large plate, full of fruit. Magnús says he is going to explain to me some things in Latibær’s eleven year career.

About twelve minutes

“It takes about twelve minutes” he says with a smile, and then he speaks at eleven hundred rpm for 35 minutes without losing his rhythm. Latibær was created when Magnús gave lectures all over the place for children and adults. “I always got the same questions. How can I get my little one to do this or that without it getting boring? This is how it actually became one question in my mind: How can I manage to make learning about a healthy lifestyle fun. Is it possible? Then I wrote my first book, Áfram Latibær, 8 years ago.”

“We have given 3800 lectures in 52 countries on this subject. I saw that there was a huge shortage of materials like Latibær. I thought I saw ten years ago that inactivity and violence would be our number one problem and it has been. Parents in the UK are being fined if their children do not exercise. It is under consideration to impose a tax on food in New York, Finns are sending out a warning and the Medical Director of Health in the United States warns of obesity and inactivity as the main health problems of today.”

“It doesn’t have to be this way” says Magnús. “Exercise is an international language, children understand exercise in the same way in Korea and Brazil. When children are happy, they exercise. That’s why we created the Sports elf. Raising children is the same everywhere. A parent wants their child to be healthy, exercise regularly, eat healthy food, go to bed early, do not use any forms of violence, brush their teeth and so on” Magnús explains with a big gesture. “Based on these facts, we created the other characters in Latibær. (Siggi sæti, Goggi mega, Solla stirða, Nenni níski and Halla hrekkjusvín). It can be said that we have seen Iceland as a kind of experience market, when we tried this concept for eight years before we started trying to export it.”

Nothing written by athletes

Magnús says that he found it strange that there was nothing like this. “When I went to study the world market, I saw that there was almost no non-violent children’s material. I think the reason is

that those who write children's material are usually younger than 25 years old, have no children and therefore have no sense of responsibility towards raising children. After 200 meetings with people from the business, we have not yet met anyone who has children. After you have children, you start behaving differently and as a result write differently. The reason why no sports-related material is written for children is that screenwriters do not usually play competitive sports and the athletes are considered too stupid to write books. This is simply the image that athletes have."

Magnús has published 13 books about Latibær, written plays and has worked tirelessly for years to appear as the Sports elf. "We published a cookbook for a few grandmothers and it even got ahead of Harry Potter on the bestseller lists. All our books are sold out."

The plays about Latibær, two of them. The first, *Áfram Latibær*, was staged by Magnús on his own in Loftkastalur, while the other is *Glanni glæpur í Latabæ*, which has been shown at the National Theater. "In total, about 75 thousand people saw the performances *Áfram Latibær*, which was the most popular play in the year 1996 to 97, and *Glanni glæpur í Latabæ* became the most popular Icelandic children's play at the National Theater."

Economy and the energy book (orkubók)

On Thursday, the Lató economy was opened by the Minister of Finance. In this economy, all children who deposit money in a bank receive Lató money and can use it to buy healthy food for eating but also for the bus, swimming or the zoo. Magnús jumps up and shows me a book he is working on. "This autumn we are going to launch a national campaign that aims to get children to eat healthy food. All children in the country are allowed to send an energy book and the parents an envelope with 700 stickers and a contract. The kids and parents make an agreement to change the home's diet for the next 30 days. The family keeps track of what they eat by pasting the stickers into the book every day. We have been raising money for this for 2 years, I have had many municipalities join me and I am trying to get the ministry along, but it is not going well."

Latibær with the largest radio station

Latibær also runs a radio station. It is a matter of great concern to Magnús. "The reason why we started a radio business is that the radio stations were not interested in playing children's songs. It's frustrating when you are creating a good children's album in 8 or 9 months, but it's not played on the radio. For example, Gunna Þórður and Björggi's reference albums are the best-selling albums in Iceland, but they are never heard. I wanted to change this, so I rented one radio channel 102.2 and founded *Útvarp Latibær*. I got Máni Svavarsson to join me and we have made 260 plays for children about important things such as traffic rules, courtesy and the Icelandic language and much more, all in Icelandic. That's more than Ríki's radio can handle" says Magnús "and it's really on the air. It has been so successful that recently listening to the radio was measured at 34% every day, while it is not even allowed to measure children under 12 years of age. It's just Disney and Latibær who run radio for little ones in the world."

"I want to run a part of Latibær like the so-called 'non-profit organization' in America. We can do this with radio and projects like the Lató economy. It's about giving back to the community, but it does not seem to have been very popular here. We have traveled around the country twice with the Children's Olympics, without any cost to the participants. It was nice that when we came to Klaustur, 360 people came, even though only 90 people live there. We have received thousands of letters from children which is always so much fun. We have even sent the Sports elf's menus to Icelandic children around the world, for example to Germany, Australia and the Nordic countries. I remember how boring it was to hang out in hospitals as a kid and not get out. So I use every opportunity I can to rush to a children's hospital and cheer up the kids. It gives me a lot to see what a great influence the Sports elf has on these children."

Latibær has undergone some changes in the complex development process that has been going on for several years and the result was to focus on American television with a combination of puppets and acting. Three characters in Latibær will be played by actors, while the others are puppets that need four people to manage each. The sales process has taken three years and the first step was to

get hugely well-known screenwriters, designers and experts on board to create the final versions. As a result, a detailed version of Latibær is now on the table, as it will probably eventually appear on American television, both in the form of elegant brochures and a short promotional film. “I do not care if someone says that I take it seriously, but Latibær could become Iceland’s largest export product sooner or later. For example, no tourist with children comes to Iceland, but Latibær could change that even better.”

Landed in a wheelchair

Magnús has not taken a holiday for nine years and Latibær’s sales and development work in America has required him to travel frequently. He has been tightening his bow quite a bit lately and tells me a story about it. “I was forced to have my tonsils removed even though I did not have time for that operation. Then I was not allowed to rest and after fourteen days I got an infection in everything. The night before when I had to go to an important meeting in New York, I started to bleed. I still went on the flight but got so sick on the flight that a doctor came to me on the plane and I was put in a wheelchair. I had come there to sell the Sports elf and was in a wheelchair.”

This is Magnus. He does not give up and all his stories show that there are more hours in his day than most others. “I was once the athlete of the year. Still not a traditional athlete. I’m never a writer, even though I’ve sold 68,000 books. I’m not an actor, although I’ve acted in hundreds of shows. I’m not an entertainer, though I’ve performed thousands of times, including as a stand-up comedian and party director. I’m not a businessman even though I’m into business. Maybe I’m just a Sports elf.”

An old elf, or what?

Magnús will be forty next year, which sounds a bit confusing for sports elves. Is it good for the market?

“No, in my mind he’s about 25 years old so I’m more than 20 years behind schedule. I trusted myself best in my time, and I would never have dared to hire anyone to play the elf who would then be seen drunk downtown or something like that. Then everything would have been useless. I trust myself but have had to deny myself many things that I might have wanted to do, but I enjoy jumping for children. But I’m too old and we have to look at actors to measure them in the costume because otherwise I’m stuck in the roll. “

Do you work hard to stay in shape?

“I have never really trained so much. I never had a coach and I was always teaching others and bought my first sportswear when I was 37 years old. I actually practice on the spot, or something, and sometimes lift weights a little and run. I just do not have time because life is so complicated at the moment.”

I’m terrible

Now 15 people work for Latibær, but when most of the theatrical performances took place, there were 90 people connected to the company. But what kind of boss is Magnus?

“I am just scared. I make insane demands on everyone as much as on me. There is no tomorrow and it is often best to finish the job today. I have great staff who sacrifice themselves for me and the company. But I’m down on everything and it’s probably not always fun. But we are building a ‘concept’ and that does not mean allowing it to flow in all directions. I am good for Latibær but bad for the people. But many people have worked here for a long time and over time people speak the same language. I want Latibær to be the best concept in the world and that is difficult. But when you are in charge of the band, you turn your back on the audience and you can become completely unpopular.”

No interest in wealth

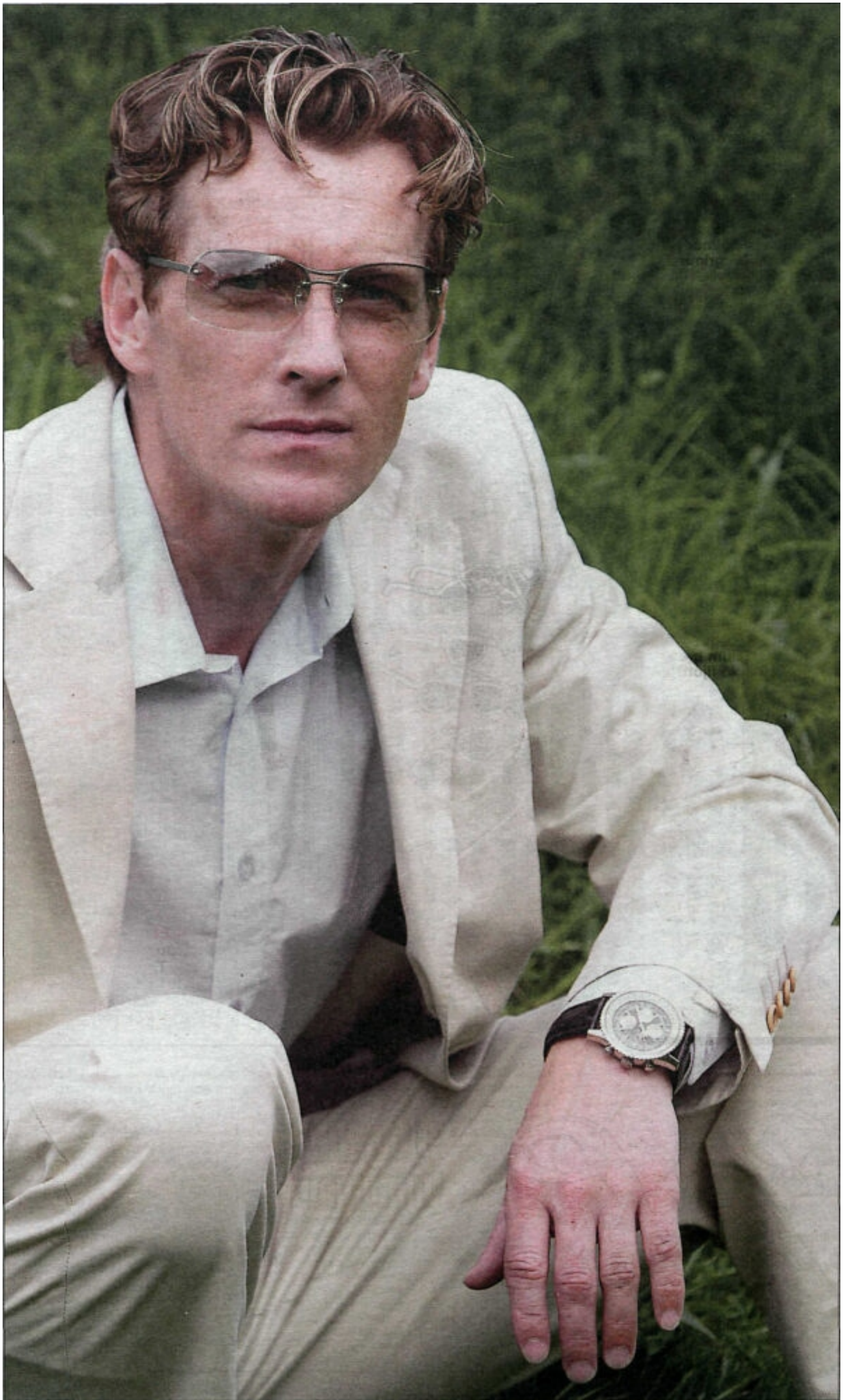
When you listen to Magnús’ enthusiasm, you see that he is a huge competitor. It is therefore tempting to ask him what exactly drives him forward. Does he want to get rich?

“I don’t know. I have no interest in getting rich. I enjoy creating. Maybe what drives me is that I never give up. It does not matter if I say no. I find another way. If the current is too strong, I can

turn around in the middle of the river, but I can find another way across the river.”

Aren't you just hyperactive?

“My wife says I'm not hyperactive. I think overactive people are people who fly from one to another and do nothing well. I've been dealing with this for eleven years. If I'm hyperactive I'm just fine and I'm very happy with that. I want to be like this and have never taken anything for granted. You can never play someone else or lie. I'm just like that and I do not think I will change.”



ÞRÓTTAÁLFUR Í JAKKAFÖTUM: Magnús hefur árum saman reynt að selja amerískum stórfyrirtækjum Latabae. Nú liggja tilboðin á borðinu og aðeins eftir að skrifa undir.

THE SPORTS ELF IN JACKET: Magnús has for years tried to sell Latabær to large American companies. Now the offers are on the table and only after signing.

THE LATABÆR ADVENTURE

1995

The aerobics master Magnús Scheving releases a book and multimedia CD, Áfram Latibær (Go LazyTown)

1996

Latibær á ólympíuleikum (Lazytown at the Olympics).

1996

The play Áfram Latibær premiered at Loftkastalinn Theater. The most popular play of the year.

1997

Latibær í vandræðum (Lazytown in trouble).

The CD Áfram Latibær.

1998

Hardcover books about the characters of Latibær.

1998

Latador, game about Latibær.

1999

The play Glanni glæpur í Latabæ premiered at the National Theater. Lazytown Olympics are held all over the country. Also in the summer of 2000.

2000

Latibær's cookbook.

Film and distribution companies in Canada, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain are beginning to show great interest in Magnús Scheving's Latibær and declare their readiness for contracts. Those issues are at a serious stage today.

2001

Jól in Latibær CD (Christmas in Latibær).

The Lató economy will first start 4 summer months. This year (2003), the third Lató economy is launched.

Krakkabanki opens webpage online in collaboration with Búnaðarbanki.

2002

Latabæjar radio goes on the air first.

Latabíó in Smáralind where the children enjoy themselves while the parents shop in Hagkaup.

Latabæjarskór (LazyTown shoes) etc. come to market.

Since the beginning of the Latibær adventure, Magnús Scheving has been traveling and flying for stage performances and all kinds of events all over the country and also abroad. Various information can be found on the website www.latibaer.is.

MAGNÚS'S CAREER

Born November 11, 1964

Began to practice aerobics in 1984

Four-time Icelandic aerobics champion, first in 1992

Nordic Champion 1993

European Champion 1994

Silver at the 1994 World Cup in Seoul

Athlete of the Year 1994

European Champion 1995

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