It has always been a big part of my self-image to be “half Italian and half Icelandic”, although not in a negative way; quite the opposite. I have always been proud of my background and have often wondered if and to what extent it has moulded my personality. Growing up I always felt a bit different from my “pure” Icelandic friends, in a subtle way, perhaps a bit more extrovert at times, certainly a loud and rather gregarious person; all in all classic stereotypical Italian characteristics. But for personal reasons my sisters and I did not cultivate strong ties with Italy initially. Later, my older sister and I have begun a pilgrimage of sorts, attempting to contact our relatives to the extent possible.

In my view it is important for those persons that have multicultural roots to attempt to understand from where they come from, as it is clear that one will better understand oneself in that way. Fortunately, I have not, directly, suffered prejudice during my life, due to being “half” Icelandic, despite having lived most of my life in Iceland. However, I could describe many amusing anecdotes that are related to my family name, which is certainly not a common one in Iceland. One of my favourites comes from the time when I worked as a Deputy Judge in the District Court of Reykjaness. I presided in a case where I had to appoint assessors in a real estate dispute. I later heard that one of the assessors, during an examination of the real estate in question with the parties to the case, read aloud from my court order appointing him for the job. Slowly he began by stating that in the District Court a hearing was held by… and then he paused, clearly having problems with the name of the judge, ending up by saying: “… held by Róbert R. Shampoo deputy judge”!

Currently, I work in a very international setting as a judge in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. In the Court, almost 700 staff members from all over Europe work together in a very interesting and collegiate atmosphere. I have already felt that my international background is an immense asset in this environment for many reasons. Firstly, having lived abroad myself when I was younger, both in Canada and in Italy, makes it easy to identify with others, their differing viewpoints on various issues and on the way they

approach certain problems based on different starting points. Secondly, I have been very fortunate to work closely with my good friend and colleague, the Neapolitan Guido Raimondi, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Court and the judge elected with respect to Italy, and all the wonderful Italian lawyers in the Court. This experience has brought me closer to home, so to speak. I can converse with them in Italian and have dealt with many Italian cases for which I am, happy to say, well equipped.

I have four wonderful children, my foster daughter Rán, Karítas Diljá, Egill and Atli. They all have very Icelandic names and, with the exception of Karítas Diljá, they are light-haired and bluish-eyed like their mother, my wife, Arna Gunnarsdóttir, a very talented artist. My older sister, Ásdís Mercedes, is also an artist and a mother of two lovely boys. Unfortunately, Ásdís and I have not been very effective in teaching our kids about their Italian heritage, but hopefully that can be amended in the future.

Last summer my wife and I travelled to the Amalfi Coast to spend a week hiking in the hills, starting off in Ravello and ending in Positano. As I walked through the streets, sat in the cafés, ate pasta and pizza in the restaurants and drank some great red wine with my wife in the evening, I felt at home. It has always been like that, I think: living in Iceland, but sensing, to some extent, that I also have another home, far away to the south. It is a comforting feeling!