

## THIS HOUSE OF SKY

## BOOK REVIEWS

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SEATTLE TIMES MAGAZINE	SEPT. 17, 1978
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SEATTLE WEEKLY	OCT. 1978
SEATTLE P.I.	OCT. 1, 1978
EVERETT HERALD (SUN)	OCT. 14, 1978
NEW YORKER	OCT. 16, 1978
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR	OCT. 23, 1978
EBBTIDE	OCT. 26, 1978
SEATTLE TIMES MAGAZINE	OCT. 29, 1978
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DENVER POST	OCT. 22, 1978
WASHINGTON POST	OCT. 29, 1978
SEATTLE SUN	NOV. 8, 1978
UW ALUMNUS	AUTUMN 1978
COPLEY NEWS SERVICE	SEPT. 26, 1978
THE PLAM DEALER	OCT. 8, 1978
PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER <sup>R</sup>	OCT. 29, 1978
HOUSTON CHRONICLE	OCT. 1, 1978
U.W. DAILY	DEC. 1, 1978
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BOOK REVIEW DIGEST	JANUARY 1979
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SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE	March 19, 1979
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View of Puget Sound Hudson Review Gazette	December 1979

BOOK REVIEWS:

THIS HOUSE OF SKY  
by Ivan Doig

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PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY

July 17, 1978

BOOKLIST

September 1, 1978

**THIS HOUSE OF SKY: Landscapes of a Western Mind**

*Ivan Doig*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$9.95 ISBN 0-15-190054-X

This poetic and moving memoir details the life of a young man from his earliest recollections to the death of his last close relative. It is the story of a family, but more than that, it is a picture of a part of the country, the lonely ranchlands of Montana. The son of a ranch foreman, Ivan lost his mother when he was six. He was raised first by his father and then by both his father and maternal grandmother, an oddly assorted couple drawn together by their love for the boy. Ivan grew up on isolated ranches and in small towns where he boarded in order to go to school. He helped herd sheep, read widely and, when he got to high school, met a teacher who steered him toward a writing career. Then came work at Northwestern, the start of a journalistic career, a return to academe and life as a freelancer. But always there was a closeness to his Montana roots—the people and the land. [September 18]

★Doig, Ivan.

This house of sky: landscapes of a western mind. 1978. Harcourt, \$9.95 (0-15-19005-4). Pub. date, September.

YA

A memoir, wound tight with emotion, that tells of growing up in Montana during the 1940s and 1950s. Doig was raised by his father, a hardscrabble ranch boss whose own break-even life here achieves the deeper resonances of a hymn. In a truce with time, he was nursed through adolescence by the knowing hands of his mother's mother. Doig has drawn together his remembrance of a particular place, weather, and people into an appreciation of life and death that stands by itself. A work of deep affection and adult wonder, told with grace. Highly recommended. DZ.

978.6'612 Doig, Ivan || Doig family || Meagher County, Montana—Biography [OCLC] 78-53897

Kirkus Reviews  
August 1, 1978

▲ Doig, Ivan  
THIS HOUSE OF SKY:  
*Landscapes of a  
Western Mind*  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich  
\$9.95  
9/18 SBN: 15-190054-X

Ivan Doig begins with his mother's death, when he was six in 1945, and ends with his grandmother's death—and a close call of his own—nearly 30 years later. In between: a dazzling, lyrical summoning of his Montana childhood. "Memory, the near-neighborhood of dreams, is almost as casual in its hospitality," but Doig firmly gives us the rhythms of the valley—"the pinwheel life of a ranch," lambing time demands, a murderous summer storm—and the lives that flamed around him. His father, bruised with grief, moved seasonally from one job to another, tried life with a second woman ("a slow bleed of a marriage"), and then made a deep sacrifice, inviting his dead wife's mother, whom he disliked, to join them. These two, an embattled odd couple, stuck it out for the boy ("Ours remained a brink of a family") and in time arrived at a truce of unstated affection. Ivan was regularly boarded out: "I had some knack then for living at the edges of other people's existences." Dupuyer was a favorite town, basic and secure, where he lived with a gentle landlady and thrived on the support of a bedrock English teacher. (Mrs. Tidyman was so much the grammarian that she could say of another woman, "Once you get used to her split infinitives, you'll find she's a nice person.") Doig pursues "blood hunches," reads meaning into old photographs (two sisters with "mouths straight as bible lines"), and recalls with unerring strokes a scabbed land where "even starts don't seem to count for much." The years after—journalism at Northwestern, newspapering, graduate school—lack the diamond-sharp edge of his youth, but the necessary assumption of responsibility for his aging father and grandmother completes a loop of loving protection. The stirring debut of a gifted writer: Doig spins straw into gold.

## Books

## Patterns

THIS HOUSE OF SKY: LANDSCAPES OF A WESTERN MIND

by Ivan Doig

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich;  
314 pages; \$9.95

*Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.*

*The remembering begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all.*

These opening words of *This House of Sky* whisper up a big promise. They say, on top of all else, that a real writer is at hand. Yet the bright prospect may, at the outset, seem at odds with the vehicle he has chosen for his first book: a personal memoir. The form, after all, is notorious for snaring even gifted writers in thickets of anecdote and sentiment.

Ivan Doig avoids such traps. Exercising a talent at once robust and sensitive, he redeems the promise of those first fetching sentences. His mother's final breath came in a remote Montana place where "a low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up, watchfully, and atop it, like a sentry box over the frontier between the sly creek and the prodding meadow, perches our single-room herding cabin." They were, he and his parents, "secure as hawks with wind under our wings."

Then came "that fierce season of bewilderment," and suddenly there were only two breathings in the cabin. The boy's world was filled entirely with a ghost and a father who would for a long time remain "in the dusk of his grief" over the loss of a wife when she was only 31. The father was short, wiry, horse-stomped, work-scarred, a ranch hand, a sheep tender, a survivor of scratch-hard mountain life who cherished the few years he and his bride had followed their flocks among



Author Ivan Doig at family home in Montana  
*Remembering a secret and peopleless land.*

the timeless hills. He faced life with a "dry half-grin" and wore for good a scar on his chin—"a single quick notch at the bottom of his face, as if it might be the first lightest scratch of calamity." And now—

"The clockless mountain summers were over for my father. Forty-four years old, a ranch hand, now a widower, Charlie Doig had a son to raise by himself. He needed work which would last beyond a quick season. He had to fit us under a roof somewhere, choose a town where I could start to school, piece out in his own mind just how we were going to live from then on. It tells most about my father over the next years that I was the only one of those predicaments that ever seemed to grow easier for him."

In his telling of it, Doig lifts what might have been marginally engaging reminiscence into an engrossing and moving recovery of an obscure human struggle. There is defeat and triumph here, grief and joy, nobility and meanness, all arising from commonplace events, episodes and locales. The narrative rides mainly upon the father, but another protagonist of the book is memory itself. Moments from the chastening region of southwestern Montana haunt Doig:

"Rote moments, these, mysteryless perhaps in themselves. It is where they lead, and with what fitful truth and deceit, that tantalizes. If, somewhere beneath the blood, the past must beat in me to make a rhythm of survival for itself—to go on as this half-life which echoes as a second pulse inside the ticking moments of my existence—if this is what must be, why is the pattern of remembered instants so uneven, so gapped and rutted and plunging and soaring? I can only believe it is because memory takes its pattern from the earliest moments in the mind, from childhood."

Thus does he offer, as the title says, the landscapes of a Western mind. Strange—his remembering, like any well-told story, makes events seem as though they happened long ago, or in some timeless place. A reader may be surprised now and then when the book brings a reminder that the author was born only in 1939 and grew up in contemporary Montana. Still, Ivan Doig's youth is good news. An ex-newspaperman living in Seattle, he has a lot of time remaining in which to remember and write. — Frank Trippett

## THE BOOK REPORT

## Ivan Doig: Hewn From Montana

BY ROBERT KIRSCH

Times Book Critic

**This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind** by Ivan Doig  
(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: \$9.95)

*This set of sagas, memory. Over and over self-told, as if the mind must have a way to pass its time, docket all the promptings for itself, within its narrow bone cave. A final flame-lit prism of remembering . . .*

—Ivan Doig

Language can come out of territory as well as individual experience. One enriches the other. It is no accident that the Lake District energized the romantic poets or New England Robert Frost or Wales Dylan Thomas. Ivan Doig grew up in Montana, was shaped by that land, its mountains and grazing lands, its shadows.

It is a memoir of his life and times, from the death of his mother shortly before daybreak on his 6th birthday to the present in the Pacific Northwest. It is like all sagas, not only his story, but that of his Dad, Charlie Doig, his family, his grandmother, Bessie Ringer, and a gallery of other people, black and white, classmates and enemies, his step-mother, a tale of hard-scrabble ranchers, of saloons and corrals and of sheep-herding, enough for a sprawling novel, though it reads better than most because of the language. There is poetry here, not self-conscious and abstract but rooted in the way things are: the slow spin of colors out of a barroom jukebox; the "sound of hidden water—the south fork of Sixteenmile Creek diving down its willow-masked gulch"; even the years of his education at Northwestern catch the rhythm.

Of course, there are other influences. They are declared in the narrative. Literature is an extension of experience, part of experience. The journeys from Montana to Chicago and Chicago to Montana suggested Thomas Wolfe: "Trains cross the continent in a swirl of dust and thunder, the leaves fly down the tracks behind them." But Doig's style is his own, of his own times and places, of the memories of homesteading Scots who settled the raw, harsh, high (over a mile above sea level) South Fork of Smith River valley, the place they called the Tierney Basin.

They came to raise sheep and to graze them on mountain grass which cost nothing but the hardest work, an ordeal of work. Charlie Doig thought his family had come from Dundee to the gray Montana foothills because of Scots mulishness: "Scotchmen and coyotes was the only ones that could live in the Basin, and pretty damn soon the coyotes starved out."

There were blizzards and bad years, the howling of wolves and coyotes—thunder rolled like the drums of gods and lightning sworded down the sky. The homestead tracts of 160 acres couldn't begin to feed a proper herd. That was the story of Ivan's grandparents. His father was 9 when Grandfather Peter died four months short of his 37th birthday. The country broke people. The onetime tailor's helper from Dundee, the homesteader in Montana, was buried by his family and neighbors in the cemetery at White Sulphur Springs.

"That is as much as can be eked out—landscape, settlers' patterns on it, the family fate within the pattern—about the past my father came out of." Doig writes. "I read into it all I can, plot out livelihoods and chase after blood hunches. But still the story draws itself away from the dry twinings of mapwork and headlines, and into the boundaries of my father's own body and brain. Where his outline touched the air, my knowing truly began."

The portrait of Charlie is powerful, one of the best evocations of a person I have read. The reason is not hard to see. The stronger the ground, the stronger the figure against it. This is the special notion of an American hero: He doesn't look like a hero. But he is there nevertheless, "not more than five and a half feet tall," with "the small man's jut of jaw toward heaven." Little, but tough. A great herder. And a man who loved his dead wife so much that when he told Ivan stories about her and said, "Your mother . . ." the pair of words would break him, and fool that I could be, I would look aside from his struggling face."

Yet, Charlie had wit and a sense of mischief, knew well

his trade and the big sheep outfits he worked for, told Ivan stories the way the sagas of old must have been passed on. That is the pleasure of this exploration, to see that the old ways have not lost, have never been lost.

In our arrogant worship of the new forms we sometimes forget that the treasures of memory and the linkage of the young with the old are the ingredients of saga. This remarkable work begins "somewhere beneath the blood," where the pulse of the past, the memory of childhood, of parents who behave down toward us as if they are tribal gods, as old and unarguable and almighty as thunder. Other figures loom in from next door and the schoolyard lessons of life they brandish, then ghost off . . . Just so does life blaze and haunt around us before we learn we are sober creatures of civilization.

So, too, from this beautifully written, deeply felt book do we recognize that other step toward the universal. The language begins in western territory and experience but in the hands of an artist it touches all landscapes and all life Doig is such an artist.



bles an anarchistic Mary Wollstonecraft: religiously devoted to her cause, productive of voluminous essays and poems, and personally very unhappy. American anarchism during its heyday comes to life again through this study. Avrich has availed himself of nearly all written primary sources as well as some 150 oral memoirs that he collected. He writes well and enthusiastically. A specialized study of graduate school level, recommended for academic and large public libraries.—*Laura E. Sutherland, Milwaukee, Wis.*

**Behr, Edward. *Bearings: a foreign correspondent's life behind the lines.***

Viking, Oct. 1978. 288p. ISBN 0-670-15149-1. \$12.50. MEMOIR

This memoir by a man who has covered the foreign news scene from the struggle for Indian independence in the 1940's to the Tet offensive in 1968 and beyond is both interesting and informative. The book is somewhat less ambitious than Theodore H. White's *In Search of History* (LJ 8/78), to which it bears some similarity; Behr is generally more interested in relating stories drawn from his reportorial experience than in seeking their relation to the broader currents of history. Still the basic substance is there and his comments are significant. His basic theme remains his fascination with his profession, and he handles it with wit and verve. Recommended.—*Scott Wright, Coll. of St. Thomas Lib., St. Paul, Minn.*

**Browning, Norma Lee & Russell Ogg. *He Saw a Hummingbird.***

Dutton, Sept. 1978. 125p. color photos. LC 78-2559. ISBN 0-525-12225-7. \$8.95. PER NAR

This is the miraculous story of Russell Ogg, a well-known photographer, and his struggle with diabetic retinopathy, a degenerative disease which left him legally blind. During the advanced stages of the disease, Ogg became fascinated by the flashing colors of hummingbirds. Unwilling to surrender to despondency, he developed a process whereby the birds could trip the camera shutter as they flew through a narrow beam of light. Remarkably, he built the system from spare parts and did the dark-room work himself. Photographs of hummingbirds in flight previously had been quite rare, and Ogg succeeded

where his sighted colleagues had failed. The accompanying photographs are magnificent and a true tribute to the human spirit. The book is well worth the price and will interest bird lovers and photographers alike.—*William A. McIntyre, New Hampshire Vocational-Technical Coll. Lib., Nashua*

**Cleaver, Eldridge. *Soul on Fire.***

Word Bks, Sept. 1978. LC 77-83335. ISBN 0-8499-0046-8. \$8.95. REL/AUTOBIOG

A most unusual companion piece to Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, this work includes an overview of his life and activities, culminating in his conversion to "born again" Christianity while living in exile in France. The book is repetitive, choppy, and almost wholly without the gusto and strength that made its predecessor so outstanding. Cleaver's account of his conversion offers very little insight, and disillusionment with Marxism-Leninism as practiced seems an inadequate explanation. A disappointing book.—*Robin Masters, formerly with Placentia Lib. District, Calif.*

**Cordelier, Jeanne. *The Life: memoirs of a French hooker.***

Richard Seaver: Viking, 1978. 368p. tr. from French by Harry Mathews. LC 77-28565. ISBN 0-670-42814-0. \$10.95. MEMOIR

The author was a Paris prostitute for five years. She was no Xaviera Hollander; instead she led the sordid life of a "used" woman. She relates her family background and what led her to a pimp and thereafter to many madams and the all-too-real variety of men. The book is not a diary but a rambling recollection of "the life" in Paris streets, hospitals, jails, and "houses." Its verbose stream-of-consciousness style is most impressive in presenting stark realities, but the book is much too long, making reading it boring.—*Dianne Wikowski, Schiff Hardin & Waite, Chicago*

**Doig, Ivan. *This House of Sky: landscapes of a Western mind.***

HBJ, Sept. 1978. 348p. ISBN 0-15-190054-X. \$9.95. HIST/MEMOIR

These are memories of 30 years in the early life of the author. They are the story of the hardscrabble lives of the last of a generation of aging cowboys, sheepherders, and other ranch hands in rural Montana, particularly the author's father and grandmother, thrown together in reluctant armistice by the calamity of his mother's death when he was six. It is a depressing tale of worn-out people working worn-out land, yet somehow finding solace among themselves and stubbornly persevering to the end. This is not an exciting book. It is too long, and reading it is a chore. Yet the book preserves for us a convincing bit of fast-dying rural Americana.—*Roger Woelfel, Los Angeles County P.L.*

**Duveneck, Josephine Whitney. *Life on Two Levels: an autobiography.***

William Kaufmann, Sept. 1978. 400p. intro. by Wallace Stegner. illus. LC 78-17903. ISBN 0-913232-36-4. \$10. AUTOBIOG

Slow moving and occasionally illumi-

nating, this book will not be of much interest to the general reader, but it may find a home in special collections involving the Whitneys, the Duvenecks, and the Peninsula School of northern California. Born into a privileged family in 1891, Josephine found little joy until she began her own family of husband Frank, four children, numerous foster children, and an entourage of servants, friends, and students. An old-time liberal, Duveneck moved through the 20th Century as the quintessential volunteer committed to progressive education, brotherhood, and the enjoyment of nature. Duveneck's "second level" is spiritual. She is devoutly sincere in her quest for truth, which she finds finally in the Society of Friends.—*Betty Burnett, Springfield, Mo.*

**Goldmann, Nahum. *The Jewish Paradox: a personal memoir of historic encounters that shaped the drama of modern Jewry.***

Fred Jordan Bks: Grosset, Sept. 1978. 224p. tr. by Steve Cox. intro. by Leon Abramowicz. ISBN 0-448-15166-9. \$12.95. MEMOIR

Goldmann's memories reflect more than 80 years of Jewish history. This collection of reminiscences, clustered by topics rather than chronology, is an excellent companion volume to *The Autobiography of Nahum Goldmann* (LJ 9/1/69). Ranging from Goldmann's boyhood in street gangs and Zionist youth organizations, to his presidency of both the World Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress, the anecdotes reveal the personalities and politics behind many events of this century. This volume could be useful in political biography collections as well as in large Judaica collections.—*William N. Borkon, Yeshiva Univ. Libs., New York*

**Hackett, John Winthrop. *I Was a Stranger.***


Houghton, Sept. 1978. 225p. map. ISBN 0-395-27087-1. \$8.95. MILITARY STUDIES/MEMOIR

In September 1944 the author, then a brigadier in command of the Fourth Parachute Regiment (Royal Army), was gravely wounded and left behind when the remnants of the attacking force at Arnhem, Holland, were forced to withdraw. His recovery from his wounds, the whole-hearted assistance given him by the Dutch Resistance, and his eventual escape to England make up this memoir, and its quiet tone and reflective air understate the daily danger to all the participants and highlight their courage. World War II biography is enriched by this unassuming account.—*Mel D. Lane, Sacramento, Calif.*

**Hastings, Michael. *Sir Richard Burton: a biography.***

Coward, Sept. 1978. 275p. illus. bibliog. index. ISBN 0-698-10936-8. \$10.95. BIOG

A man of Renaissance cut who found himself decidedly out of place in the Victorian era, Burton defies convenient capsulation and thus presents special problems, but on the whole this is a convincing, well-written life. However,



**AN AMERICAN CRUSADE**  
By Frances R. Keller  
Cloth, \$12.95

This new biography is the remarkable story of Charles Waddell Chesnut, America's first black novelist, one of the first to champion the cause of civil rights, and a recipient of the NAACP-Spingarn Award.

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IVAN DOIG

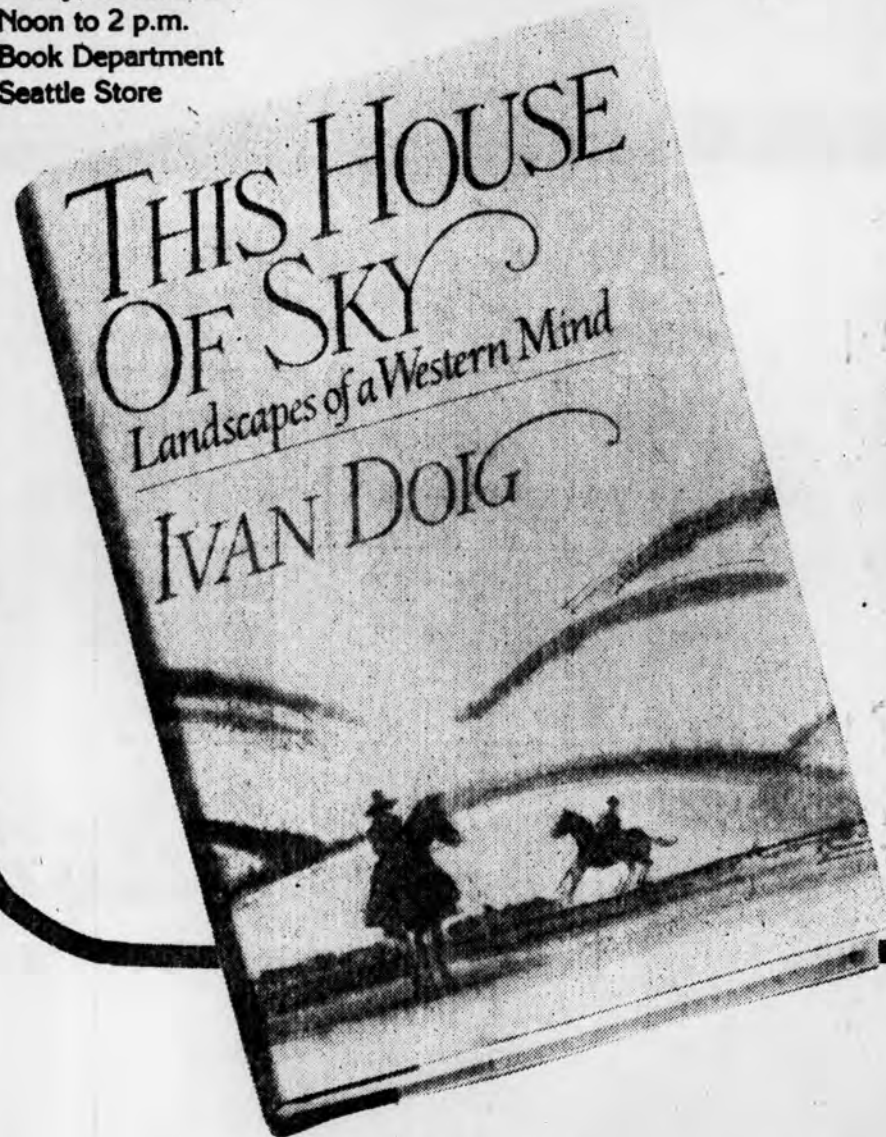
**AUTOGRAPH PARTY**

Friday, October 27,

Noon to 2 p.m.

Book Department

Seattle Store



**This House Of Sky, Landscapes of a Western Mind,**  
by Ivan Doig takes place in the wilderness  
of Montana. Doig deciphers from his past  
how Montana once was, and how it shaped the  
lives of those who lived and worked there, **9.95**  
Books, All Stores

SEATTLE TIMES MAGAZINE SEC. SUNDAY  
SEPTEMBER 17, 1978

END OF THE HUNT

## End of the Hunt

bold among the garpy shuffl  
And again we would se  
with him, up or down the id  
cal floors of the clinic to the  
probing test.

My father had come to Se  
that midsummer of 1967 with  
preliminary diagnosis that  
trouble burning beneath  
breastbone might be emph  
ma. If that verdict was corr  
the queer clumsy word wo  
spell the soon-to-come end  
more than I could bear to l  
about.

Of the two decades we  
shared since my mother's de  
had left my father with a 6-y  
old son to raise. Of the allia  
he had formed, 15 years a  
with my grandmother —  
mother's mother — so th  
would have a household to g  
up in. Of the life linked r  
directly to my own . . .

Now he arrived back to  
again and again in the clir  
reception areas, often in  
prise:

"That wasn't so bad, they  
had me lay down under su  
machine. Could of had a  
except it was so damn cold."

But other times, he bec  
pale and grim and taut.

"They gave me one of th  
barium deals, and I heave  
right back up."

My grandmother would  
her resentful "Hmp!" aga  
the medical profession for c  
ing such torment into any  
and I would try to talk him ca  
keep him seated with us until  
whiteness went from that ha  
some uneasy face.

Then the three of us wo  
move through the clinic o  
more, like a search party of  
the next lair of apparatus  
Dad to patrol into for us.

At last the tests were finis  
In the doctor's office, side  
side, Dad and I waited. This  
Grandma had not wanted  
come, had said I should  
alone with Dad.

The slim room was as neu  
and toneless as if we were  
first visitors ever, newcom  
into a vacuum chamber. But  
side the single thin window  
below the clinic's roothold o  
hill, the towers of Sea  
marched to the dockside,  
then the blue of Puget So  
pooled, rimming far off a  
shore of timber and glac  
whetted peaks.

My father, my one clos  
pulse back into time, sat look  
at the towers and the blue  
the stabbing mountains. Fir  
he said, in the worrying bu  
had heard fret over vanis  
sheep and surprise blizza  
and much else:

"Ivan, I'm just afraid of w  
he's gonna say."

One earlier instant, my fa  
and I had been beside each  
er this way, in the sight of m  
tains and under the shadow  
what was to come. Five ye  
before, in Montana . . .

At dawn, the pewter sky t  
ginning to warm to blue ab  
the Castle Range across the  
ley, the two of us already

**E**ach day and all day, the  
pair of us lobby-sat at the  
clinic. I thumbed maga-  
zines and tried without showing  
it to watch my grandmother be-  
side me. She kept her eyes on  
the waiting patients, studying  
the ones who could barely puff  
their way across the room to the  
reception desk, who sat  
hunched with their chests mov-  
ing for each windy breath, who  
toddled into the waiting elevator  
with a nurse balancing them at  
an elbow.

When my father appeared,  
there was the relief, a quick lift-  
ing in the both of us, of seeing  
that he was so much sturdier  
than the others, his Montana  
ranchman's stride almost too

Seattle Times  
4 MAGAZINE SUNDAY, September 17, 1978

# End of the hunt

By Ivan Doig

Each day and all day, the pair of us lobby-sat at the clinic. I thumbed magazines and tried without showing it to watch my grandmother beside me. She kept her eyes on the waiting patients, studying the ones who could barely puff their way across the room to the reception desk, who sat hunched with their chests moving for each windy breath, who toddled into the waiting elevator with a nurse balancing them at an elbow.

When my father appeared, there was the relief, a quick lifting in the both of us, of seeing that he was so much sturdier than the others, his Montana ranchman's stride almost too

bold among the gaspy shuffles.

And again we would set off with him, up or down the identical floors of the clinic to the next probing test.

My father had come to Seattle that midsummer of 1967 with the preliminary diagnosis that the trouble burning beneath his breastbone might be emphysema. If that verdict was correct, the queer clumsy word would spell the soon-to-come end of more than I could bear to think about.

Of the two decades we had shared since my mother's death had left my father with a 6-year-old son to raise. Of the alliance he had formed, 15 years ago, with my grandmother — my mother's mother — so that I would have a household to grow up in. Of the life linked most directly to my own.

Now he arrived back to us again and again in the clinic's reception areas, often in surprise.

"That wasn't so bad, they just had me lay down under some machine. Could of had a nap except it was so damn cold."

But other times, he became pale and grim and taut.

"They gave me one of those barium deals, and I heaved it right back up."

My grandmother would give her resentful "Hmpf!" against the medical profession for dosing such torment into anyone, and I would try to talk him calm, keep him seated with us until the whiteness went from that handsome-uneasy face.

Then the three of us would move through the clinic once more, like a search party off to the next lair of apparatus for Dad to patrol into for us.

At last the tests were finished. In the doctor's office, side by side, Dad and I waited. This day Grandma had not wanted to come, Dad said I should be alone with Dad.

The slim room was as neutral and toneless as if we were its first visitors ever, newcomers into a vacuum chamber. But outside the single thin window and below the clinic's roothold on its hill, the towers of Seattle marched to the dockside, and then the blue of Puget Sound pooled, rimming far off at a shore of timber and glacier-whetted peaks.

My father, my one closest pulse back into time, sat looking at the towers and the blue and the stabbing mountains. Finally he said, in the worrying burr I had heard fret over vanished sheep and surprise blizzards and much else.

"Ivan, I'm just afraid of what he's gonna say."

One earlier instant, my father and I had been beside each other this way, in the sight of mountains and under the shadow of what was to come. Five years before, in Montana.

At dawn, the pewter sky beginning to warm to blue above the Castle Range across the valley, the two of us already were

stepping from the Jeep at timberline on Grassy Mountain. Grandma had climbed out of bed when we did, given us coffee and sweet rolls, slabbed together sandwiches out of her thick crisp-crust bread, then saw us out the door with:

"Don't bring home more grouse than all of the town of Ringling can eat."

September frost underfoot, a testing frost, the lightest dust of white on the broad bunchgrass crest of mountain. Dad handed me the single-shot .22, then the small box of cartridges to put in my jacket pocket. I shook out a cartridge barely longer than my thumbnail, clicked it into the breech. Carrying the light rifle underhand on the side of my body away from Dad, I started along the mountain slope beside him.

He had a hunter's voice, which could soften just enough not to carry far and yet be heard clearly. My own nosedived in and out of mutter as I answered him.

He showed me sheep-camp sites remembered from three decades before, game trails angling up and across the summit like age lines on a vast forehead, homestead splotches on the saged skirts of our home valley far below us.

In trade, I told him everything I knew of my half year ahead, now that journalism school was behind me: basic training at the Air Force base in San Antonio, a technical school probably elsewhere in Texas for the rest of those months.

The first grouse caught us both in midstep as it flailed like a hurled wad of gray leaves into the air in front of us.

"That must've been one of yours," I said.

"And who's carrying the gun along like a crowbar froze to his hand?"

As ready and free a laugh as I could ever remember flowed from my father.

"Ye could at least have thrown it at him."

In minutes, I shot the next grouse before it could fly. I handed Dad the rifle.

"Here, see if you learned anything from that."

I put the bird in the sack, he held out to me, followed it seconds later with the one he shot from the top of a log 50 yards away.

"I like to give mine a bit of a chance, ye see, instead of sneakin' up till I'm standin' on their tail feathers."

The rifle traded back and fourth, we each missed shots, made more. At midmorning and four birds apiece, we knew the hunting was over, but kept walking the mountainside. At early noon, we sat on a silvered log and ate our sandwiches dry.

"You leave for the service — when, day after tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Scared any of the plane ride?"

"Some. You know I'm like

Grandma on that, leery about heights."

"Unh-huh." His instant slant of grin. "As the fellow says, what if you get up in that thing and it comes uncranked up there?"

"Thanks a whole helluva lot for the idea."

"I was up in one once, ye know. Nothin' to it."

Disbelief as if he'd said he's been to Afghanistan.

"When was that?"

"When I was a punk kid about your age, at a rodeo or a fair or some kind of doin's. A guy had one of them planes with wings top and bottom, and he'd take ye up for a little ride. My brother Angus and I bet each other five dollars about goin' up, and we're both so damn Scotch we didn't want to lose that money. I went first; I was the oldest. That guy turned that plane every which way, I'm here to tell ye. Well, how was it? Angus says, 'If ye see my stomach up there,' I says, 'bring it back down with ye.'"

"You're a world of encouragement."

I pitched a stone at a snag below us on the slope.

"What about after this Air Force business? Are ye gonna be able to look for a job out here?"

I faced around to him slowly, as if the motion hurt.

"Dad, I don't think so. The jobs for me just aren't here. I think I'm pretty much gone from Montana."

"I figured ye were."

My father's straight, clean-lined face broke open in a tearful gulp, the wrenched gasp I had seen all the years ago in the weeks after my mother's death. I helplessly looked aside, swallowed, pulled at my lower lip with my teeth. I heard the breech of the .22 snick open, saw Dad palm the tiny cartridge out and finger it into the shell box. His face was steady and square again.

"Don't say anything to your grandma yet. She'll miss ye enough these next months without knowin' beyond that."

That had been an ending of sorts, my leave-taking from the years we had spent together. It had been rehearsed in smaller partings — when I went off to my first job as a ranch hand, then when I had gone away to college — and so carried itself

off in those quick mountain moments.

But now, here atop the Seattle skyline, this tunnel of uncertainty within my father's chest . . .

The doctor spoke the harshest first. The diagnosis was confirmed as emphysema. Dad's life would be more and more labored. Several times a day he would have to breathe deep into his lungs a medicine misted out of a machine. He would have to walk only in short stints, learn to pace himself with extreme care.

The doctor paused, went on. If possible, Dad should move to an altitude much lower than his mile-high Montana valley. Sea level would be best, and the drier the climate the better. Dad at once, said:

"No, it isn't possible. I'm too far along in life for that."

The doctor nodded as if he had known what that answer would be, went on with his medical judgments. Dad's heart as yet showed little damage, not yet the expected overwork caused by weakened emphysematous lungs. It pounded in him as strongly as that of a man half his 65 years.

So strongly, as matters turned out, that it would throb four more years of life for him, even as his lungs eroded and eroded until each breath became a desperate struggle.

The emphysema aside, Dad's physical condition was remarkable for a person who had gone through his lifetime of battering from Montana broncs and blizzards.

That was it, then. In my methodical way, I already had found out all I could about emphysema, knew what was ahead in the inevitable cycle of deterioration in the deeps of lung and heart. We said little on the way from the clinic. No words seemed available yet.

As we arrived home, my grandmother demanded the news. I watched Dad to see how he would deliver it, how drastically the prospect of his hobbled and doomed life was going to veer him.

He gave his cocked grin.

"This doctor now, I don't know about him. If I was in as good a shape as he says, I wouldn't be sick at all."

And with that, he began for the three of us the last ending of all.

(Copyright, 1978, by Ivan Dolg)

This month Harcourt Brace Jovanovich will publish "This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind" — a memoir set in the Puget Sound area and the Montana Rockies against a backdrop of three generations by Ivan Dolg, a Seattle writer. This article is adapted from the book.

Ivan Dolg



Sunday September 17, 1978



## Mustangs, barbed wire, and lyric

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### This House of Sky

Landscapes of a Western Mind

By Ivan Doig

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 314 pages, \$9.95

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### From the High Plains

By John Fischer

Harper & Row, 181 pages, \$10

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Reviewed by Robert Gish

The fascinating thing about autobiography and its preoccupation with youth, aging, and the family of man is that there is no final ending as there is in life, in biography, or even most novels. The author of an autobiography is still living, growing, giving birth to the former and future self through what Jung called the "spermatocytic word," and in the process somehow parenting both writer and reader. In autobiography there are numberable beginnings. But there is no end.

That is why the American West lends itself so readily to autobiographical writings. It lives and dies and is reborn as various individuals — including book travelers, pioneers of the page — pass through it, experience it, imagine it: The archetypes of youth and age, primitive and civilized, East and West, landscape as heaven and hell, hunting and hunted, exodus and the promised land, questing for self identity, the cliched but still apt metaphor of life's "journey" — they all fit the geographical and ideational myth-reality known in various old, new, far, and near guises as the West.

Because of this, Ivan Doig's "This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind" just might enjoy much success. It should. For it's in many ways the equal of Hamlin Garland's "Son of the Middle Border," Wallace Stegner's "Wolf Willow," and Frank Conroy's "Stop-Time," three classic American autobiographies with which it variously mixes fact and fiction and shares art-

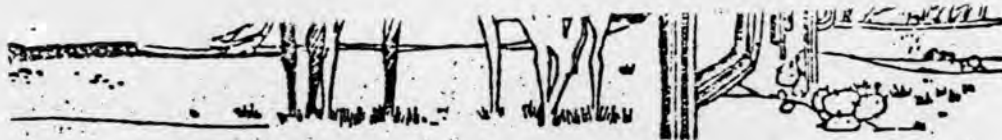
istic excellence. John Fischer's "From the High Plains: An Informal History" is an ordinary history-story, unique in that Fischer is an individual like the speaker in a dramatic monolog involved in revealing rather ironic things about himself. And his is not the organically conceived and written book that Doig's is. "This House of Sky" has all the poetry and lyricism, all the "blood being" of a mustang running on open range. "From the High Plains" is more the stabled horse, plain but saddled for show. But vitality pulses in both of them in their concern for what it means to be a "Son of the Western Border."

Ivan Doig's West is the Big Sky Country of Montana. And paralleling that "statehood" throughout is Doig's internalization of geography — metaphorically his state of mind, the roamings of an imagination through an autobiographical house of memory and dream as he faces his typewriter, family photos, and his own middle age. He muses about the people, sounds, and places in his mind's ear and eye: the mountains and valleys, his father and mother, grandmother, stepmother, his ancestors, the jobs attendant to sheep ranching. He looks back at his childhood bookworming, cafe- and tavern-hopping with his father, his adolescence, driving, heavy equipment, playing football, discovering girls; his years at Northwestern (where he majored in journalism). He recalls the time spent in the Air Force, his marriage, his editorial writing for Lindsay-Schaub Newspapers in Illinois, his decision to give up teaching — American frontier history at the University of Washington — to become a free-lance writer. But mostly he wonders about the death of a family responsible for his existence.

Doig's "wonderments" (dream and memory) provide the bases for the book's beautifully transcendent lyric quality and the means by which he eulogizes his mother, Bernetta Ringer, dead of asthma at 31 — the event which in "stop-time" fashion frames Doig's consciousness, frames his first memories of being 6 and awakened by a father's voice saying, "She is dead. . . Ivan, your mother is dead." These wonderments also work toward the poignant eulogy for his dad, Charlie Doig, a top hand who knew sheep and men and Montana and was able to face life after his young wife's death because

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Robert Gish, an associate professor of English at the University of Northern Iowa, is the author of "Hamlin Garland: The Far West."



## evocations of the West

of a friendship with a boy, a son destined eventually to become a father's father in Charlie's old age when emphysema began its creeping and ironically familiar attack on his lungs and life's very breath. A frame completed.

Those wonderments amount to a thank-you to Bessie Ringer, his grandmother who claimed Ivan as both son and grandson, and simultaneously provided a surrogate "wife" for Charlie Doig, whose sidekick bond with his son made the ultimate terms of such a family affair clear to all.

And in a larger sense, the author's wonderments are a tribute to the people and ambiance of the Smith River Valley, White Sulphur Springs, Ringling, Dupuyer, and Livingston, Montana — the house of sky, of friends as family, of the West as home — what Christopher Lasch has recently termed, in relation to the besieged family, "haven in a heartless world." Doig's prose-poem thus becomes a timely affirmation of the West not as a place for the pursuit of loneliness, but as a staging for the pursuit of togetherness. All of this despite one of the loneliest of all possible final sentences, which poses Doig as man-child — without any real offspring other than himself and his story — against time, life, and death.

John Fischer's West is Texas cattle and oil, not Montana sheep. Fischer, who died in August at the age of 68, was of a different generation than Doig's — still personal, "informal" to be sure, but a more traditionally historical, his is a less poetic rendering of life on the "Llano Estacado," the staked plains around Amarillo and the Texas-Oklahoma Panhandles. Fischer mixes his family history and his youth with the more legendary settlement (and disruption) of the High Plains: Billy the Kid, Geronimo, Pretty Boy Floyd, the Texas Rangers, Col. Charles Goodnight and the building of the JA Ranch, the patenting and use of barbed wire by Joseph F. Glidden, the discovery of oil by geologist Charles N. Gould, rough-necking. This kind of thing.

We learn how to rope calves with the "hoolihan throw," how to butcher a steer (Fischer's wife is right, it is barbarous; but more in the description than the doing), how to shoot jack rabbits by car light at night (not much sport, really), how to string a barbed-wire fence (Fischer says that

his grandfather could build better fences than he can write books. By means of personal anecdote, shored up by more generalized support gleaned from listening to and reading amateur and professional historians of the area, he provides us with some gossip (e.g., about novelist Larry McMurtry's in-laws and Colonel Goodnight's virility) and some facts. Overall, Fischer deliberately sets out to demythologize the West, tone down the reader's movie and TV impressions of it.

The trouble is, imagination is thrown out with the myth and replaced not so much by "truth" as a kind of categorical sermonizing to an audience of greenhorns. The speaker-audience "transactions" in this book can easily go awry. In taking the time to define such things as a section of land, barbed wire, prairie dogs, and the like, Fischer may enchant some of his allegedly naive Connecticut neighbors who, he intimates, thought him quite the colorful cowboy; but many readers, Eastern and Western, including the shades of his historian idols J. Frank Dobie and Walter Prescott Webb, could easily be driven to distraction.

As with most autobiography — factual and fictive, historical and imaginative — Ivan Doig and John Fischer are wrestling in the writing of these books with defining themselves. Although Doig uses numerous ventriloquisms and voicings, it's a good guess that most readers will feel as if they know this man and he knows himself. In his no doubt earnest attempt to get at the reality of the Panhandle West, Fischer reveals much about himself that he didn't seem fully aware of, or that youthful readers will dismiss as addled, "old-fashioned." Perhaps this is to say that one feels Doig has outlived the past and traveled into today's West, while Fischer hadn't.

In any event, these authors establish through their autobiographies that what they are has largely been influenced — perhaps determined — by the West itself. The hero of their stories is not, ultimately, character. Instead, it is setting, and beyond that language itself. What we have here are two more accounts of not just growing up but of growing up to be writers — and further verification of the words of one of the best, Shakespeare: "Thou hast nor youth, nor age; But as if it were an afterdinner's sleep, Dreaming on both."

## MEMOIRS

# Looking to Montana

by Hank Shaw

Eight publishers held a sample of a western memoir, and then rejected it, though their surprisingly long letters were vaguely complimentary, respectful, and at times quite lyrical. There was a modesty to it: the sexual initiation of a brothel would offend no P.T.A. Conversely, it wouldn't boost sales in bus stations. It was a literary book and didn't fit into marketing plans. The letter from the ninth publisher was more to the point: the book was being considered.

The first mention of the book in Ivan Doig's journals comes in January, 1972, where there is a cryptic reference to "the book of where I come from." Doig was, in his own words, a "mid-echelon freelancer," a writer primarily of historical articles for *Kiwanis*, *Yankee*, *Lion's*, *Oceans*, and the *Botanarian*, which he had once worked for. He had written travel pieces for the *Sunday New York Times* and on interracial adoption for *Parent's* magazine. No fiction; a few poems. And though he had coauthored a journalism textbook and edited two anthologies, this was his first trade book: his first book.

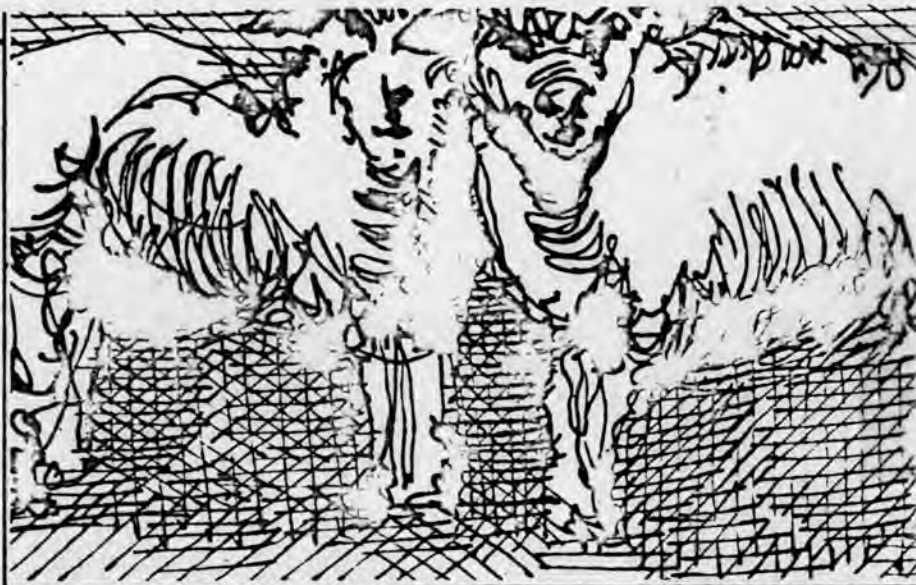
It was to be about his father. Charles Doig was the son of a Scotch homesteader in Montana and had died the year before from emphysema. In some measure the book was to deal with that death.

The book was built from fragments of memory, details run down on location, taped conversations: mountain scenery, local history, genealogy, the names of ranches and ranchhands, the bars in White Sulphur Springs, lambing and haying time—a thousand notecards' worth. As it took shape, two events altered its course: the death of Doig's grandmother, and the author's near-drowning in a riptide. The book became the 30 year story of a Montana family with fatalistic overtones.

By late 1976, 25,000 words were finished and a sample sent to random publishers. Some of the letters received were perversely praising, yet Harcourt Brace Jovanovich was the only one who indicated interest. Soon enough a contract was offered and a deadline set. The manuscript was to be completed by the end of 1977, and it was.

As quickly as the presses could roll—several months later in other words—bound proofs were suffering the

Hank Shaw is a freelance writer.



indignities of the postal system on the way to luminaries and reviewers. The good word came back from Edward Hoagland and William Hjortsberg—good enough to go on the book jacket. *Life*, *Time*, and *Horizon* lined up. *The New York Times Book Review* would be ready when the strike was settled. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich scheduled an initial run of 15,000, generous enough for a literary memoir.

From the window in his study Ivan Doig can see more trees than there were in all of White Sulphur Springs, Montana. White Sulphur Springs, the county seat, was a town of 1000 or so hardy people. The next largest town in the county had maybe 50 people. Meagher County, one of Montana's seven original counties, consisted of 2200 square miles and about the same number of people. There were four mountain chains and because of one of them, the Big Belts, the state capitol at Helena was 75 miles from White Sulphur Springs instead of a crow's 35.

*Here, as far back into the tumbled beginnings of the Big Belts as their wagons could go, a double handful of Scotch families homesteaded in the years before this century. Two deep Caledonian notions seem to have pulled them so far into the hills: to raise sheep, and to graze them on mountain grass which cost nothing.*

This was the homestead frontier and the economy like the beauty was misleading:

*Whatever the prospects might seem in a dreamy look around, the settlers were trying a slab of lofty country which often would be too cold and dry for their crops, too open to a killing winter for their cattle and sheep.*

*It might take a bad winter or a late*

*and rainles spring to bring out this f and the valley people did their best to live with calamity whenever it descen. But over time, the altitude and climate added up pitilessly and even after a generation or so of trying the valley, settling family might take account a find that the most plentiful things around still were sagebrush and wind.*

Charlie Doig, son of a Scotch homesteader, had a simpler way of put it: "Scotchmen and coyotes were the ones that could live in the Basin, and pretty damn soon the coyotes starved o. His father's homestead had not proved profitable, and the sons moved out on own. Doig soon proved to be a good

### This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind

By Ivan Doig.  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$9.95.

cowboy, a dependable foreman, admiring the valley among sheepmen for his skills—especially at a lambing procedure called jacking.

*Put simply, jacking was a ruse played on a ewe whose lamb had died substitute lamb quickly would be sin out, most likely from a set of twins. . . . then the stand-in lamb would have the skin flung onto it like a snug jacket on a poodle.*

*The next step of the disguise was to cut out the dead lamb's liver and smother it several times across the jacket of the pelt. In its borrowed and bedaubed skin, the new lamb then was presented to the ewe. She would sniff the baby impatiently, distrustful but pulled by the blood smell of her own. When in a few days she makes up her dim sheep's mind to accept the lamb, Dad slips away th*

*Jacket art recites his victory.*

*Mother him like hell now, don't ye? See what a helluva dandy lamb I got for ye, old sister? Who says I couldn't jacket day onto night if I wanted to, now-I-ask-ye?*

The earnings weren't much. Working on shares" was Montana's more polite way of saying sharecropping. But for a good hand there was always a job, and this book in part tells of this shifting, narrow existence.

Death and calamity were palpable facts of the valley, but they touched Charlie Doig's life more than most. His father had died when he was nine and several times he himself came close to death. In 1945 his life died; it is with that death the author begins:

*The start of memory's gather: June 27, 1945. I have become six years old, my mother's life was drained out at thirty-one years. And in the first gray daylight, dully heading our horses around from that cabin of the past, my father and I rein away toward all that would come next.*

Death was the moon over Charlie Doig's fathers, and when it drew close enough to touch in tribute three-quarters of his stomach, once again his life was rerouted. To ensure care for his son he was forced to seek reconciliation with his son's grandmother, estranged during a second failed marriage.

Bessie Ringer was a tough old bird, a rumpster, with a turn of phrase that proved the mundane: "Get that swatter dead that fly for me," she cried, and when a wind lifted up her dress, "mpf. Balloon ascension."

Marriage to an alcoholic made her gruff, and from the beginning she had not been high on cowboys, especially as marital aspects for her daughter. But necessity in a part of the country had decreed as many families as the church. Bessie, Charlie, Ivan—*This House of Sky* is the story of this makeshift family.

The youngest figure emerges with an inclination towards a different kind of life in the one he knew as a child. The rootings, the harnesses were plain to see and took their toll, none more so than the father that could turn a good year's profit to dollar-an-hour. One such incident, a winter storm in July, proved climactic.

*... as soon as the Mexican crew finished hearing the sheep in the first few days of July, worry and edginess set in on Dad. The weather had an unaccountable chill—Gee gods, is it gonna snow on us for the Fourth of July? Grandma demanded of the sky—and with our shorn ewes we had on our hands a*



cont.

*double thousand of the world's most undressed creatures, caught in only their paunch yellow-white carcasses like hospital invalids with their gowns suddenly ripped away. . .*

As the storm pressed on, the only way to avoid total disaster was to drive the sheep four miles into the protection of the river brush.

*In a dozen hours, we had managed to flog 3500 desperate sheep a little more than four miles. A hundred or more carcasses spotted the prairie behind us, dozens more strewed the base of the cliffs which the runaway clumo had avalanched towards. If this was victory, and we had to tell ourselves it was, for we could have lost nearly all the sheep in a pushing massacre off Two Medicine cliffs— I knew I wanted no part of any worse day. . . As much as at any one instant in my life, I can say: here I was turned.*

A remarkable woman named Tidyman first offered the encouragement that led in the direction of writing. She was a stern high school teacher who took grammar so seriously she made it a condition of absolute morality. "Once you get used to her split infinitives," she once commented on a townswoman, "you'll find she's a very nice person.

A scholarship at Northwestern followed, and a career vastly different from his father's:

*As I prop my feet on the desk to read manuscripts, Dad will be starting work in the calving shed, muttering his he's yours ye walleed old sister formula to make the cows and mother their purebred calves. When I break for lunch, walking to whatever greenery I can think of to eat my sandwiches amid, Dad kicks off his overshoes at the cookhouse door, takes the cup of coffee Grandma is handing him, delivers his latest curses of that god-damn geezer of a Jeff. As Carol works the phone to arrange the story assignment waiting for her in San Francisco or Atlanta, Grandma is setting the table for the ranch crew's lunch. . .*

As this book begins with death, it ends with it. It was ironic that Charlie Doig, whose life was dogged by death, should at its end winnow away from emphysema, his lung capacity slowly blanked. Bessie Ringer's death a few years later is a sudden cessation. The book deals with the uneasiness caused by the sudden inversion where son becomes parent having to weigh the values of independence and dependence: it was partly because of his uneasiness that the book came into being.

The author's near-drowning in the

riptide at Ellen Creek closes the book, adding another perspective on death—that of a man who expects to die.

*Even as my body is being beaten limp, my mind finds incredible clarity, as if the thinking portion of me had been lifted separately and set aside from the ocean's attack. While my arms and legs automatically try trick after trick to pull me atop the water and onto the precipice of shore, the feeling of death settles into me, bringing both surprise at the ease and calm of the process and a certain*

*embarrassed chiding of myself that this is a silly and early method to exit from life. John later told me that, as I came whirling out of the surf one more time, he saw on my face a look of deep resignation. . .*

*That afternoon, a few dozen months into the past, has stayed much in my mind, and not only for the marvel of finding myself undrowned and for the gratitude of having had three lives offered up instantly for mine. By the time of that incident his book already had begun to take over my fingers, and my scuff against death inevitably called up in me the endings put to other figures in my family, with less reason than my mistaken wade into the Ellen. . . Yet this much has been brought home to me fully: that added now into the lineage of all else I share with Charlie Doig and Bessie Ringer is a sensation of having been swirled out of deepest hazard. . .*

The one book that we all have in us is the book of our own lives, and this is what Ivan Doig has written. Ostensibly it is about growing up in the West—like Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow* and Marr Sandoz' *Old Jules*. It is a good book. The people in it are eminently likeable. If the exigencies of frontier life can be held accountable for the people in this book—tough, decent folk who endure without losing a sense of humor—then therein is their value. The writing is fresh—at times lyrical, at times direct. Considerable care has been taken with it.

But there are expressionistic colors to the book—the sense of fatalism, the haunting image of a man remembering, the specific setting of the book, which link this book to Robert Pirsig as much as to Stegner and Sandoz.

*The House of Sky* is not strictly memoir nor autobiography. It is about family and death and memory as much as growing up in the West. It is a book which eludes easy categorization and stops at this: a man's book. It is an unlikely book by an unlikely author: Kiwanis, Lion's and the Rotarian not being known as breeding grounds of lyricism. But the likelihood is this: that its first printing will not be the last. □

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SCANNING THE BOOKSHELF: FROM HISTORY TO FICTION

Copley News Service

Sept. 26, 1978

A DISTANT MIRROR -- The Calamitous 14th Century; By Barbara W. Tuchman; Knopf; 677 Pages; \$15.95. Twice winner of the Pulitzer Prize for historical epics like "The Guns of August," Tuchman spent seven years preparing this magnificent account of a century of torment that included the Black Death which devastated Europe, the Hundred Years' War that savaged the continent, the brigands who spread terror as they rode, the schism between pope and anti-pope that split the Christian world. It was a time when the world seemed to be declining into perpetual night -- not unlike our own time of balanced nuclear terror. Tuchman's book is not dry history; she spins her tale through the eyes of a French baron. It is history recorded as live as it can be.

THIS HOUSE OF SKY; By Ivan Doig; <sup>Do</sup>Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 314 Pages; \$9.95. A powerful, sensitive, biographical account of the young years of Ivan Doig as they were lived against a backdrop of the austere landscape of Montana.

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The impact of land and family fell heavily on this lad -- son of a ranch foreman -- who lost his mother when he was six. A bleak, cruel land in the winter, Doig's Montana wallows in the vast open spaces that now are on the list of endangered species.

CALIFORNIA COAST; A Sunset Pictorial; Lane Publishing; 224 Pages; \$6.95. From San Diego to the Oregon border there are 1,000 miles of endless variation in sea and sand -- from the cozy, sun-splashed bays of San Diego to craggy cliffs and fishing villages that range on up to Oregon. It's a changing land, as the sea eats away at the shoreline, threatening to topple luxury buildings into the Pacific. There are lush golf courses -- and mud flats where the horseneck clam digger roves. It's all captured here in superb color photos.

CHINESE WATERCOLORS; By Josef Hejzlar; Mayflower Books; About 100 Pages; \$10.95. This is one of those oversize books that you buy to cut out the prints and mount them on your wall. The paper is of excellent quality, and of dull finish so that light won't bounce off the prints. The watercolors themselves are exquisite -- delicate little poems in the Chinese tradition. The feeling is that of lightness, fragility. The prints vary in size -- and are in color.

# Memoirs From Beneath the Big Sky

**THIS HOUSE OF SKY** Landscapes of a Western Mind. By Ivan Doig. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$9.95

BY ARCHIE SATTERFIELD  
P-I Book Editor

ONCE IN awhile a book comes along that is so good, so well written, so well designed that reviewers all over the country jostle into position to lick the author's boots. After carping that books aren't written and produced like they used to be, along comes one to keep us quiet for awhile.

Such is this memoir written by a quiet, unassuming free-lance writer who lives in Seattle.

First of all, be assured that Doig subscribed to the belief that the people he knew — and the place he lived is more important than the teller of the story. While Doig eventually tells us a lot about himself, he does so in a style that is both oblique and circling. What we find out about Doig himself is earned the hard way. So don't expect any of the "me and Dad" or "And then I" school of writing. Instead, the memoir unfolds gently, subtly as an old-fashioned novel would, one that shows you rather than tells you its characters.

Doig is a product of Montana during the Depression, which perhaps meant less there than in cities, and his state and period (actually a relic of Charlie Russell's years) that has been producing a lot of fine reading lately.

Doig's father, Charlie, was a second-generation Scotsman, small and tough and afraid of no man and few horses. Charlie was a hired man, a sheep and cattle man who soon worked his way up to being foreman of large crews on ranches.

His mother was a tiny, narrow-shouldered victim of asthma who died on Doig's sixth birthday, and one of Doig's few laments in the book is an example of his eloquence: "But the

one thing which would pulse her alive for me does not come. I do not know the sound of her voice, am never to know it."

From her death onward, their lives were a kind of desperation. For Ivan, the quiet kid with flaming red hair, it was a matter of growing up with no permanent home and missing the childhood we consider normal, meaning having other children to play with. For his father, it meant trying to live a life of dignity, rearing a son he loved deeply while trying to make a life for himself.

Charlie married another woman, the ranch cook, and they moved into White Sulphur Springs to run a cafe. To Ivan's continuing surprise, his father was quite good at it. But the marriage, as Ivan now is certain, was made in the loins and not in the heart or the head. His father and step-mother fought constantly and bitterly, while both treated him with tenderness. He believes they remained together as long as they did out of sheer stubbornness.

After she left at last, Ivan was shuttled from friend to relative to friend so he could attend school. It was during these formative years that he learned of generosity from people who expected no payment in return. He also discovered something in school that altered his life: "If there was one knack in me, it was to hold in my mind any word I had ever seen, much the way Dad could identify any sheep from all others."

And finally, after fighting a severe thunderstorm to save a band of sheep, he had a decision thrust upon him by the country. He was going to do something with his life other than work on ranches.

Yet, as stated before, the book is only about Ivan himself incidentally. The rest is Montana and the people he knew in it. Most of all, it is about the people who loved him.

After his step-mother and father were divorced, his father feared for his own health — he had been bashed around by horses and had something

wrong in his chest that turned out to be emphysema — and he worried about what would happen to Ivan should he die before Ivan was grown.

His mother-in-law, Bessie Ringer, never did think much of Charlie Doig, and the feeling was mutual. Yet she was a good woman, Charlie knew, and Ivan needed blood relatives. So he and Ivan began a series of forays on her conscience and, as Ivan writes, it was almost a form of courtship on the mother of Charlie's dead wife.

Charlie wanted her to move in with them and mother Ivan. Eventually his brand of courtship took, and these two people who thought little of each other, were bonded by their mutual love for a solitary little kid who guarded his emotions.

Grandma Ringer was, well, a ringer. She had a strong personality, the kind movie casting directors would love to have had. She was addicted to playing solitaire, at which she cheated shamelessly. She briefed him on his early years and how she taught him to read and made her sing to him. She had a short-fused temper. She was, in his words, a thunderous snorer and would wake herself up doing so, then mutter in exasperation. She was laden with the kind of expressions that make Western novels sing. She talked normally to dogs and cats and collected them.

The book is about love as much as anything else. The odd family members loved him, and people throughout the White Sulphur Springs area expressed their love for the small, quiet child in various ways. Among his father's men friends, it was an exchange of insults with Ivan "chirping" insults right back at them.

And it is about the nature of memory. While he had his own memories, his file cards of expressions his father and grandmother used and incidents, the book was written in part as an examination of how the memory processes work. Memory he found, can be trusted only up to a point. Then it has to be reinforced or

monitored by research. In this case, it was trips back to Montana to chat with old friends and to read newspapers, scrapbooks and the like.

The book came into being in a roundabout way, as so many do. Doig said his first thought of writing a book about his family came some seven years ago. He had already been collecting information on his family by taping conversations with his father and grandmother, and some friends back home.

Then he did what the publishing industry says will never work. He had a friend in Seattle act as an agent for him. She had been selling his articles with success to national magazines, but getting the attention of a book publisher was something else.

It took about 10 rejections before the book landed at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. He signed a contract and completed the book in a short time. There were only a bare minimum of changes asked for by his editor, and since she acquired some clout in the meantime, she treated the book as a piece of art. She had the best design possible: heavy paperstock and the top dust jacket artist in the business (see separate story).

The result is a book that looks and feels like a book should, and also reads like too few books do. Sales have been good on it thus far, and the critical reception has been superb. Reviewers all over the country have been unable to find anything to carp about, and it passed the acid test in Montana when a well-known television performer has been ordering her viewers to buy the book.

Doig now is working on another personal book set in the Northwest. It is doubtful he will have difficulty finding a publisher. But he may have difficulty finding the time to work on it while from the den in his home he shares with his journalism professor wife, Carol. Everybody wants to interview him, part of the price of success.

## Praise From an Artist



Dust jacket painting by Paul Bacon for 'This House of Sky'

**F**ROM HIS studio in Carnegie Hall, Paul Bacon designs 150 or more book jackets a year. Although he is perhaps best known for his shark and swimmer in "Jaws," and the body suspended from wires in "Coma," Bacon does other books as well.

"This House of Sky" for example.

"I love that book," he said in a telephone interview, "and that isn't always the case when I design a jacket. Doig wrote to compliment me on the painting, and I wrote him right back to tell him how much I enjoyed his book."

Bacon has an almost uncanny ability to capture the essence of a book in his paintings or designs. Although his favorites over the years might not strike up a memory among most readers, he remembers three or four jackets with pleasure. One was "Franken-

stein Unbound," his all-time favorite, and others were "The Story of Coca Cola," a book by Kerouac he liked but has forgotten the title, "Ragtime," and Lillian Hellman's "Pintemento."

Although Bacon isn't a speed reader, he does read very fast and reads every book before he designs the cover. He also does some corporate design work — letterheads and such — and some theatrical design. The latter gives him headaches and Bacon says it is always irresistible at the time, but the next morning he always asks himself what he was thinking about to accept it.

Like the author who writes literary novels nobody reads, then writes a smutty best-seller, Bacon says he is always delighted when someone says a jacket doesn't look like a "typical Bacon," meaning a "Jaws" or a "Coma." — A.S.

# Nonfiction

## Doig: sheep country

*THIS HOUSE OF SKY. Landscapes of a Western Mind, by Ivan Doig. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$9.95.*

BY EMILY VINCENT

**G**ROWING up in Montana, moving around continuously, Ivan Doig had three durable anchors in his life. In this lyrical and occasionally pretentious memoir, he creates warm, unsentimental portraits of his father, his grandmother, and the harsh beautiful land itself.

Ivan Doig belongs chronologically to the generation that filled suburbia at the time of the Mouseteers. But his life seems of a piece with an earlier time when settlers began grazing sheep and cattle on western lands. Few of the places where he lived had indoor plumbing, "the cold visit to old Mother Jones on winter mornings." Nor electricity or telephone. He drove to town after a snowfall on a horse-drawn sleigh. Ivan's contact with contemporary life was through the magazines and books he read voraciously. His knowledge came from the rhythms of the land, lambing in the spring, haying or grazing sheep on the range in the summer, returning to a boarding family in the fall, and coping with the heavy snows of winter.

Ivan's mother died on his sixth birthday in 1945. Charlie Doig, a man of nomadic bent, who lived in the saddle, was left with a son to raise. Charlie knew how to get the best out of men and sheep: he worked as a foreman on ranches around Smith Valley, never staying long at one place. Ivan tagged along with his father from ranch to ranch, and on his Saturday night survey of saloon row, and through a brief unhappy second marriage. When Ivan started school he boarded with a family in the nearest town and joined his father on weekends.

A crusty Scot who got a good day's work from his men, Charlie Doig gave more than that of himself. He was especially admired at lambing time. "Jacketing was a sleight-of-hand I watched with wonder each time . . . a ruse played on a ewe whose lamb had died. Dad would skin the dead lamb, and into the tiny pelt carefully snip four small leg holes and a head hole. Then the stand-in lamb (most likely from a set of twins) would have the skin fitted onto it like a snug jacket on a poodle." The skin was smeared with the dead lamb's liver to persuade the suspicious ewe by the smell. "When in a few days she made up her dim sheep's mind to accept the lamb, Dad snipped away the jacket."

Ivan went to live with his maternal grandmother, Bessie Ringer, in the little house where she had brought up her family. "My grandmother did want me as a child to raise, the way a retired clipper captain might have yearned to make one last voyage down the trade winds under clouds of sail." For several years of turnabout, Charlie visited Ivan and Grandma on weekends, but he was not fond of static arrangements. He got Grandma a job as cook at the ranch.

The three-cornered family managed a stormy coexistence. The adults' short tempers flared and banked regularly and Ivan withdrew himself from the heat.

A high school English teacher spurred Ivan and he won a scholarship to Northwestern. After the army, he worked on a newspaper, a magazine and taught in college. He discovered that he wanted most of all to write and live in the west.

It seems ungrateful because of what is very good not to give way to superlatives. But the parts are better than the whole. Charlie Doig and Bessie Ringer are lovingly and honestly brought to life. The timeless challenge of the land, animals, and seasons are evoked with imagery that occasionally scores. But Doig weights the insignificant with portent. There is little humor to lighten the monotony of seriousness. Doig is less real than Charlie or Bessie. It is their story and not as the title suggests a philosophical statement about life in the west.

(Emily Vincent is a former publisher's editor living in Houston.)

## Growing up with love in land of the Big Sky

*THE HOUSE OF SKY, LAND,  
SCAPES OF A WESTERN MIND.*  
by Ivan Doig. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 314 pp. \$9.95

By Abe C. Ravitz

Montana is Big Sky country, and this spiritual autobiography by Ivan Doig captures the vast, haunting loneliness of endless frontier space, tauntly stretched freezing wilderness warmed chiefly by loving human relationships. It is a chronicle of nature's fierce, destructive elements as they help mold the sensibilities of a youngster growing up in isolated pockets of remote ranchland.

Ivan Doig lost his mother when he was six years old and was raised for a time by his father alone, briefly by his father and a step-mother, and at length by his father and maternal grandmother, a feisty woman of yesterday's prairie.

The boy had to be "boarded-out" for high school, since winter snows quickly closed all roads leading into and out of town. The entire area, in fact, became a frightening, but magical, "snow world" with ice and drifts duned like a frozen desert against solitary houses. The entire universe was alpine white.

With a perceptive clarity Doig sketches the tall "combine" and its gearwheel clusters, dry, greasy metal

driveshafts. He describes the "sheepwagon," that child of the prairie schooner and its spoked wheels, a "drifting brig on the grass ocean." The picture he paints of the town — population, 50 — its sad-looking railroad tracks, depot, post office and gas station with colorful passenger trains whipping through is a testimonial to the remote. The devastating stampede of hysterical sheep comes on like an avalanche of terror. All are pawns in the mysterious hands of fate — and weather.

A high school teacher turned Ivan Doig to reading and writing. Latin. The world of fiction. The big outside universe opens up, and the young man wrenches himself from ranching, goes off to college and at length becomes a journalist, forever carrying the Montana memory, which he equates, poetically, with a special kind of homesickness. Personality and generations fuse in space, and Big Sky is everywhere.

This memoir, filled with passion and realism, evokes a sense of one man's past, his emotional debt to times gone by, his psychological dependence on the ghosts whispering across the desolate wasteland.

*Abe C. Ravitz, formerly of Hiram College in Ohio, teaches at California State College, Dominguez Hills.*

Everett Herald

Oct. 14, 1978

By IVAN DOIG

# A seasonal time of saga

An excerpt from "This House of Sky"

All throughout the six-year sorting of memory that resulted in "This House of Sky," I found that my rememberings were tugged again and again toward autumn, and the coming of winter — the hinge of the year when trees and weather and temperament begin to turn.

Listening to the tape-captured tales from my father about his growing up on our family's homestead in the Tierney Basin of Montana's Big Belt Mountains, I found that same seasonal tinge in his own youth. Autumn and winter seemed to be his time of saga, as they seem to be mine

1919-20: It became the winter which the Basin people afterward would measure all other winters against. The dark timbered mountains around them went white as icebergs. The tops of sagebrush vanished under drifts. And up around the bodies of bawling livestock, the wind twirled a deadlier and deadlier web of snow. Day upon day, hay sleds slogged out all across the Basin to the cattle and horses as mitted men and boys fought this starvation weather with pitchforks.

By late January, the weather was gaining every day. The Basin's haystacks were nearly gone, and the ranch families shipped in trainloads of slough grass which had been mowed from frozen marshes in Minnesota. Fifty dollars a ton. Fifty-five. Then sixty. "We never heard of prices that high." And there was no choice in the world but to pay them.

"Godamighty, it was awful stuff, though. You had to chop the bales to pieces with axes." Sometimes out of a bale would tumble an entire muskrat house of sticks and mud. "And cat-tails and brush and Christ knows what all."

Down to this brittle ration, the Basin country began to feel winter fastening into the very pit of its stomach.

"I helped load what was left of a neighbor's sheep into boxcars there at Sixteen. Those sheep were so hungry they were eatin' the wool off each other."

And even the desperation had begun to run out. "If we could of got another ten ton, we could of saved a lot of cattle. But-we-could-not-get-it."

Cows struggled to stay alive now by eating willows thick as a man's thumb. And still the animals died a little every day, until the carcasses began to make dark humps on the white desert of snow.

It was early June of 1920 before spring greened out from under the snowdrifts in the Basin. "We had about 60 head of cattle left, and about half a dozen horses, and not a dime."

The losses killed whatever hopes had been that the Basin ranch would be able to bankroll Dad and the other brothers in ranching starts of their own. Like seeds flying on the Basin's chilly wind, they began to drift out one after another now.

Dad did not neglect to savor his earliest drifting. An autumn came when he and his younger brother Angus went off to the Chicago stockyards with a cousin's boxcars of cattle. "For every carload of stock, see, you were entitled to your fare both ways. We were a pair of punk kids, out for a big time. So we took off to see Chicago."

On the cattle train with them was a valley rancher who celebrated such trips by spending his cattle profits and then papering the city with overdrawn checks. "Oh, he'd go back there and have a high old time."

He took the young cowboys in tow, and the three of them sashayed through Chicago. One morning after several days of cloudbusting living, they were sprawled in barber chairs for the daily shave which would start them on a new round of carousing.

The policeman on the beat — "a helluva big old harness bull" — paused outside the window at the sight of three pairs of cowboy boots poking from under the barber cloths. He sauntered in, lifted the hot towel off the rancher's face, and said, "Well, damn sulphur Springs. When you get that shave, I want you."

Their financier on his way to the precinct station, the Doig brothers caught the next train back to Montana.

And some other autumn — it seemed to be his migration time — Dad and his friend Clifford Shearer talked each other into heading west for the Coast. What they were going to do out there, they had no idea whatsoever, but probably it would be more promising than the spot they were standing on at the moment.

Clifford and Dad made, as a valley man has said it to me, "a pair of a kind." They both were under medium height, wiry, trim, Clifford with his own good looks more sharply cut than Dad's square stead lines. Both were what the valley called "well thought of."

The night before they left, the Basin people threw a farewell dance at the Sixteen schoolhouse. "Women were bawling and carrying on, you'd thought the world was coming to an end."

Out in the unknown as job seekers, Dad and Clifford fizzed with more imagination than their first employment allowed for. They stopped in Washington's Yakima Valley long enough to try the apple harvest.

The idea, they were told the first morning, was to pluck each piece of fruit with care — "now, you young fellers, give it this little twist so the stem don't come off, see?" — so it would go into the box unblemished for the market. But quality was not what they were being paid for; quantity was.

Their orchard career hardly had got underway before they were caught efficiently shaking apples down into their boxes by the whole battered treeload, and were sent down the road. "We had five dollars apiece to show for it, anyway."

They headed west some more through the state of Washington. The Pacific Ocean stopped them at Aberdeen, where they hired on as pilers in a lumber yard.

"Charlie and I didn't know what a stick of lumber was, hardly" — this from Clifford, with his drawling chuckle — "We thought everything was made out of logs, y'know. But they asked us if we knew anything about lumber, and we said 'Well, sure.'"

When the first rain of the Aberdeen winter whipped in, the pair of them slopped through their shift wondering to one another





Photo by Rich Shulman

Author Doig, left; above, father Charlie is third from left, posing with his three brothers on Montana homestead in '20s.

how soon the yard boss would take pity, as any rancher back home would decently have done, and send them in out of the downpour.

By the end of that wettest day of their lives, they still were in the rain but had stopped wondering.

"Well, hell, we needed the job, y'know. It was November and the streets was lined with men, and we was a long ways from home. So I said to Charlie, by gollies, I'm goin' uptown and see if they won't trust a feller for some rain clothes."

Clifford slogged off and talked a dry-goods merchant out of two sets of raingear on credit. But a drier skin didn't ease Dad's mind entirely.

"He got homesick, y'know. You never saw a guy got so homesick as Charlie."

Dad toughed it out in Aberdeen for some months, told Clifford he couldn't stand it and headed back to Montana."

"And that Aberdeen winter was the longest one in my life, and godamighty, the rain."

... When my father came home shaking off the Aberdeen damp, he was less interested in the world beyond Montana. He stayed with the life of cowboying and sheep ranching for the next half century, until his death in 1971 — in earliest April, after having survived one last breadth of winter.

Copyright (C) 1978 by Ivan Doig. Adapted from *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind*, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

books

# Memories

**THIS HOUSE OF SKY: Landscapes of a Western Mind,** by Ivan Doig. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$9.95.

This first book by Seattle writer Ivan Doig is a gathering of memories — a beautifully spun, 30-year saga of a family.

The day of his sixth birthday, Doig's mother died of asthma. "There were only two breathings in the cabin now," he writes, those belonging to Ivan and his father Charlie, who was shepherding in the Montana high country with his young wife that summer.

"The remembering begins out of that new silence," Doig writes. "Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all."

That second paragraph in the book is a preview of what's to come — a moving tale that's far from your usual "story-of-my-life."

It's about a place — the isolated ranchlands of Montana where the weather was harsh and the living far from easy.

It's about Doig's family — his father Charlie, who with his grandmother, Bessie Ringer, raised him.

It's about a variety of people who touched his life — McGrath, the sheep rancher; his English teacher, Mrs Tidyman; the people he boarded with.

It's about the hard work of being a rancher. The lambing sequence and the struggle to save a herd of sheep from a summer storm are graphic examples.

It's about childhood in general and Doig's in particular. It's about growing up and deciding not to follow in your father's footsteps.

It's about love and family and about living and dying — timeless themes with universal appeal that weave poignantly through the gathered memories.

The book includes italicized portions which Doig calls "prism pieces" because, he says, they present a certain angle of memory.

It is here his writing reaches "somewhere beneath the blood," to use his expression.

To pick out a few examples:

"Childhood is a most queer flame-lit and shadow-chilled time. Think once more how the world wavers and intones above us then. Parents behave down toward us as if they are tribal gods, as old and unarguable and almighty as thunder."

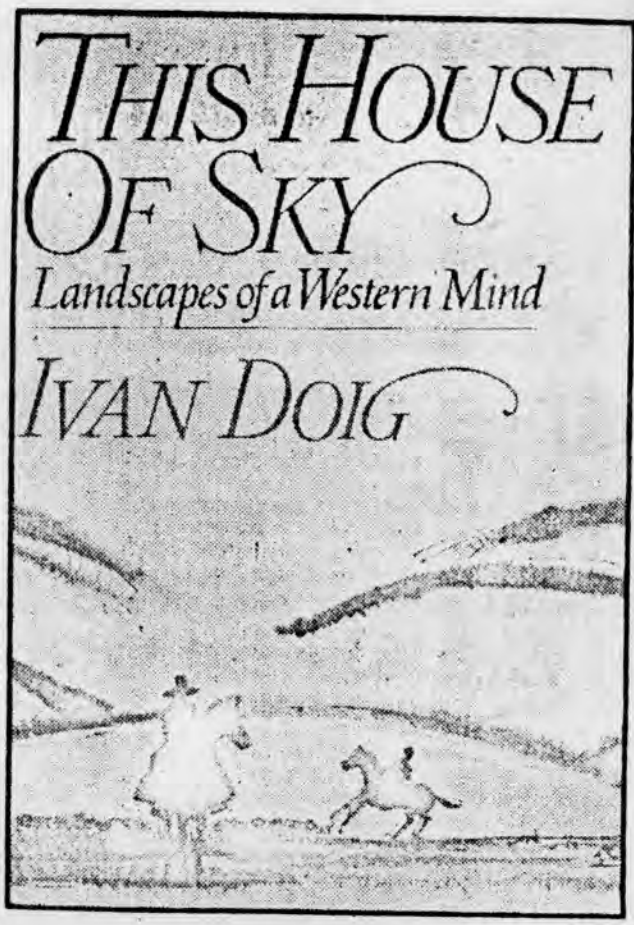
"Memory is a kind of homesickness, and like homesickness, it falls short of the actualities on almost every count."

This set of sagas, memory. Over and over self-told, as if the mind must have a way to pass its time, docket all the promptings for itself, within its narrow bone cave."

Doig claims he gave up writing poetry when he started writing this book. He may have in the strict sense, but his writing is nothing less than poetic.

"This House of Sky" was in the works for six years — the time it took Doig to interview people, do research and gather and sort memories which were compiled on over a thousand index cards.

At the same time he continued freelancing for national magazines like "Rotarian." His wife Carol teaches jour-



nalism at Shoreline Community College.

The death of his father and grandmother inspired him to wind up the book. "It was time I finally got rid of it," Doig says.

Ann Nelson, a friend who had been acting as his agent, began sending a 25,000 word sample to a number of publishers, most of whom wrote back saying it didn't have commercial possibilities.

In March, 1977, Carol Hill of Harcourt, who is now editor of the publishing firm's General Books department, contacted Doig and offered him a contract, saying: "I like this. Go ahead and finish it," which he did by the end of the year.

Ms. Hill, who made few changes in the book, believed in its quality and gave it first class treatment all the way — the best paper, type, cover design and promotion.

When the reviews started rolling in, his editor's opinion was backed up overwhelmingly.

"Doig lifts what might have been a marginally engaging reminiscence into an engrossing and moving recovery of an obscure human struggle ... A real writer is at hand." — Time Magazine.

"From this beautifully written, deeply felt book we recognize that other step toward the universal. The language begins in Western territory and experience but in the hands of an artist it touches all landscapes and all life." — Los Angeles Times

Harcourt is known as a literary house — they've published T.S. Eliot and Carl Sandburg — and while Doig is optimistic he says he'll be pleased to sell 25,000 copies.

Maybe the author will be proved wrong, because this book belongs on the bestsellers' list; it's that good. But maybe too good to make it. **JEANNE H. METZGER**

# This House of Sky

THIS HOUSE OF SKY: Landscapes of a Western Mind, by Ivan Doig. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1978.

Reviewed by Ripley Schemm  
For Friends of the Missoula City-County Library.

Ivan Doig was 16 when he decided at the end of a desperate, storm-ridden drive of 3500 sheep to their summer grazing on the Blackfeet Reservation that he "wanted no part of any worse day." His decision freed him from an inheritance of homesteading, sheep herding and boarding in small Montana towns. He went off to university life in Chicago and a career in journalism and writing, to make his living in the city. But these "Landscapes of a Western Mind" take their colors from Doig's memory of his boyhood along the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains in the twenty years that have followed that decision. "Memory is a kind of homesickness," he comments partway through the book.

"This House of Sky" is as much about living with memories as it is about Montana. Remembering dictates the shape of the book, arranged not in chapters but in blocks of time. Each of its seven parts is followed by a brief italicized passage about the presence of these memories in his immediate life:

"I step to the stove for tea, and come instead onto the battered blue-enamel coffee pot in a sheepherder's wagon, by father's voice saying 'Ye could float your grandma's flat-iron on the Swede's coffee.' I walk back toward my typewriter, past a window framing the backyard fir trees. They are replaced by the wind-leaning jackpines of one Montana ridgeline or another. I glance higher for some hint of the weather, and the square of air broadens and broadens to become the blue expanse over Montana rangeland, so vast and vaulting that it rears, from the foundation-line of the plains horizon, to form the walls and roof of all of life's experience that my younger self could imagine, a single great house of sky."

The opening section "Time Since" is a wistful attempt to hold to himself what he knows about his mother who died on his sixth birthday in "our single-room herding cabin" along the Bridger Range of southwestern Montana. "The remembering begins out of that new silence" of June, 1945, and the "single sound" that comes to him is the water of the creek that runs north through the valley. The rugged country — wind, storm, drought — enters in these first pages of Doig's book as the constant threat to the hopes of the Scots families who had come to homestead particularly in the Smith River valley of south central Montana around the 1890's. He characterizes the ranches in this country as places where "dreams were trapped in rocks."

The next three sections take place in the Smith River country where the largest town is White Sulphur Springs. "Valley" is Doig's rendering of his father, Charlie Doig, who raised him with a "wise instinct" of treating him as if he "already was grown and raised." To tell of his father, Doig gives

a small history of "the hills hemming the Big Belts," and of its people.

Montana becomes a place of extremes not only in its weather but in its people as well: hardships are alleviated by the sympathetic friendship of the good ones, and intensified by the knavery of the bad ones. Wellington D. Rankin looms as the pirate whose name "would be spoken in contempt...through my boyhood and beyond," for buying up the land that homesteaders could not make a go of and manning it, the rumor went, with prison parolees tending "wolfish cows." So hungry, Doig's father would say, "they reach through your fences...and if they break in they can eat you out in one night."

"Lady," a story all its own, tells of Doig's grandmother, Bessie Ringer, a woman equal beyond belief to the hard luck and the good luck alike of her life, even when, as she would say to young Ivan, there was "nothing to show from nowhere." She was his mother's mother whom Charlie Doig persuaded to live with them in 1950. Her death in 1974 ends "This House of Sky" and her daughter's death began it.

Doig's style is sometimes that of incantation, bringing forth these people who are in his dreams as well as his conscious memory. Occasionally, this mood elevates his language to a level distant from the action he describes. But his descriptions of the country itself, and what it meant to their lives, are the spare, exact lines in Doig's "Landscapes." In the section "North," when they first reach the summer grazing on the Two Medicine:

"Westward the Rockies jagged up as if they were the farthest rough edge of the world, but the other three directions flung themselves flat to grass, grass and grass. Eastering ridgelines ran from the base of the mountains tawny as lions' backs and crouched forward a bit toward the region's draining rivers, the Two Medicine...and the Marias."

"North" is their move to the country around Dupuyer and its even harsher trials for herding and ranching families. This section of the book yields another memorable group of Montana men and women, among them the Chadwicks of Dupuyer's Home Cafe where Ivan boarded to go to high school, and Mrs. Tidyman, his teacher, reading aloud in high oratorical style from Caesar's "Commentaries" and Scott's "Ivanhoe."

Throughout the book, consistent with his search for what these memories mean to his present life, Doig narrates from his own point of view, italicizing instead of using quotation marks to identify the words spoken by others until his own italicized commentaries merge with theirs. The search can end for him when his "single outline meets the time-swept air that knew theirs." "This House of Sky" is about a Montana that most of us can know only through Ivan Doig's memory.

About the reviewer: Ripley Schemm, a Missoula resident for five years, has published poetry in various literary reviews. She grew up east of the mountains and taught country school on Hound Creek in the Smith River country.

Author Ivan Doig will be at the Fine Print Book Store from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday to autograph copies of his work.

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OCTOBER 16, 1978

## GENERAL

**THIS HOUSE OF SKY: LANDSCAPES OF A WESTERN MIND**, by Ivan Doig (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; \$9.95). Mr. Doig was born in 1939 in the high valley country of southwestern Montana, and he was raised there—on a stark succession of hardscrabble sheep-and-cattle ranches and in little, lost, one-street towns, with a post office, a store, a filling station, and three saloons—by his father (his mother died when he was six) and, at times, his maternal grandmother. This book is a memoir that is also a tribute to the two unusual people who brought him up and gave his life its shape. It is a stirring experience—joyous, poignant, and loving. The central figure is Charles Campbell Doig, son of Scottish immigrant parents and an extraordinary father, whose instincts were exactly right: he made his little son a partner and took him everywhere—out on the range, into the lambing shed, into the docking cor-

ral, into town for an evening at the Stockman Bar. Mr. Doig brings him alive with anecdotes of courage and endurance and drive and adversity and gruff affection. Highly recommended.

# The Washington Star

Founded in 1852

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 1978

## 'This House of Sky'

In *This House of Sky*, Ivan Doig recalls Walter and Kate Badgett, an elderly pair of pronounced individuality who lived in Ringling, Mont., a weathered wide spot on a lonely road. "In all their ways . . . these two serene old outlaws put forth a steadiness, a day-upon-day carol out of the valley's past, and for all I knew, out of the past of all the world."

Which is exactly the sort of ennobling carol Mr. Doig himself has composed — about his father, his grandmother and a valley of southwestern Montana that held the shadows of his own future: Subtitled "Landscapes of a Western Mind," Mr. Doig's autobiographical book is a compelling exploration of a personal past and present that becomes far more than the sum of its small parts.

Ivan Doig's memories of his earliest years are entwined with mountain summers and single-room herding cabins in the Smith River Valley and "the sheep scattered down meadow slopes like a slow, slow avalanche of fleeces." And then on a June day in 1945, his mother dies: Ivan is 6, his father a 44-year-old ranch hand. "And in the first gray daylight, dully heading our horses around from that cabin of the past, my father and I rein away toward all that would come next."

The rough and intimate odyssey that begins with the boy and the widower is joined a few years later by Kate Ringer, the mother of Charlie Doig's dead wife; two sharply disparate personalities which, evolving around their re-

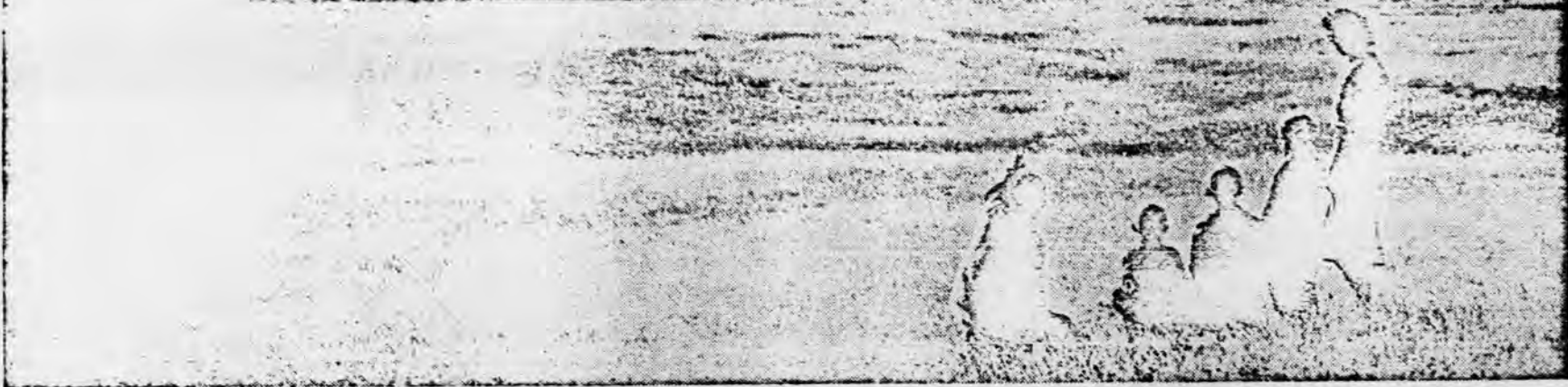
sponsibilities to the boy, bond finally in affection and dependence. Ivan Doig's father and grandmother had no resources but the callouses of their hard experiences and an indomitable tenacity. His father worked, as the seasons beckoned, as a foreman on ranches throughout the valley and his grandmother cooked for the hands, their larger world the tired town of White Sulphur Springs.

Later, Ivan in his early teens, the husband and mother-in-law move north from the Valley to raise sheep on "lease share" — sharecropping. During those years, Ivan's imagination swells beyond the rimming mountains and he begins an almost instinctual effort to sever himself from the indenture to a profoundly demanding land. Northwestern University on a scholarship, the Air Force, newspapering and then to an academic life, but always a centrality of the aging man and woman who had given him all they had to bestow — love and self reliance.

In the early 1970s, there are two funerals in White Sulphur Springs — Charlie's and, a few years later, Kate's. "Then my father and my grandmother go, together, back elsewhere in memory, and I am left to think through the fortune of all we experienced together. And of how, now, my single outline meets the time-swept air that knew theirs."

*This House of Sky* is a book of deep love and grace, of painful and gallant rhythms. Mr. Doig's sense of the land and his marvelous sensitivity to the lives that touched his own make *This House of Sky* a work of art.

OCT. 22, 1974



The great plains of Montana, "land that required people." Growing up in rugged Montana covered in Ivan Doig's work, "This House of Sky" (Harcourt).

## Coming of Age in Wide-Open Montana

**THIS HOUSE OF SKY.** By Ivan Doig. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$9.95.

"SOON BEFORE daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped."

This is the beginning of "THIS HOUSE OF SKY: Landscapes of a Western Mind," an extraordinary account of a life in Montana that is far more than biography.

Ivan Doig and his father, Charlie, are left adrift, stunned and bleeding by the early death of this asthmatic woman. For Ivan, the death was simply one of the events in his life, and though he remembered the later breathing that finally stopped, he forgot the sound of his mother's voice and her look.

But the mother's death, Ivan Doig recalls, was in some ways the beginning of his father's death some 25 years later. In the meantime there was a little boy to be raised.

Born on a Montana ranch, the son of Scottish immigrants who left him with a Scottish burr to his speech, an ability for hard work and a sense of humor, Charlie Doig begins to put together a life for the two in the rugged Montana sheepland. It isn't easy.

Ivan boards with various families during school—he is in college before he has a room of his own—and spends the weekends and summers working with his father at the jobs of an itinerant ranch hand. Charlie Doig tries a disastrous second marriage then, fearful of an illness that could kill him, finally makes peace with his mother-in-law, Bessie Ringer, and the three of them form a flawed but fiercely supportive family unit.

Ivan Doig, now 39, grew up when Montana was still

always called, were silent tribute to land that conquered people. Men died from the harsh, long winters. After a night when the sheep they are caring for on the Blackfeet reservation spook and run off, killing themselves in a stampede of tiny hooves, Ivan decides against the land that has shaped his family. He will not be a rancher like his father but a

writer.

"This House of Sky" is an extraordinary book of the West, of growing. The language is rich, unique. Ivan Doig uses words the way his father used a Scottish burr—to soften but not to change the hard memories.

—SANDRA DALLAS

## Historic Pictures Make 'Montana Images' a Gem

**MONTANA IMAGES OF THE PAST.** By William E. Farr and K. Ross Toole. Pruett. \$30.

THE MOST enjoyable way to learn history is through photographs. A collection of historic pictures interests readers who wouldn't give a second glance to a history book of solid text. That is why "Montana Images of the Past" will be of interest to a broad group of readers. There are pictures of mining, lumbering and stock raising, of settlers, Indians and prospectors. The authors have selected a good cross-section of the state, though they have left out two staples of Western picturebooks — prostitutes and mansions.

The text is needless. The authors suggest, erroneously, that previous historians have overlooked pictures in their research. Even the captions might have been left out because most are simply descriptions of the picture and add little information or interpretation.

—SANDRA DALLAS



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**ADS**

# Four that mark a time

**This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind**, by Ivan Doig. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$9.95.

This extraordinary, eloquent memoir heralds a powerful, new American writer. Doig poignantly traces his Montana boyhood with his father and grandmother on sprawling ranches and in small town schools. In a country which looks bleak and brooding to an outsider, he found familial love and encouragement which made leaving for college and career all the more wrenching.

Never dipping into indulgences, Doig tells of sledding on a shale gully, joining in the frenzy of lambing, bucking hay in meadows, driving sheep to grassland, peering into a herder's wagon — all surrounded by a mountain skyline and the pungency of sage.

The mere space others see on the prairie Doig has filled with cowboys and cafes, rhythm and companionship. As the land has haunted and shaped him, so his movingly beautiful prose haunts us.

**Petals of Blood**, by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. New York: E. P. Dutton. \$9.95 hardcover, \$4.95 paperback.

The most ambitious work yet by this gifted and controversial Kenyan author, this novel cuts a swath through the present to portray today's Kenya still struggling, this time to free itself from neo-colonialism. Ngugi, with

sensitive, almost poetic ruthlessness, describes what he sees as the still unfulfilled hopes, the treachery of the powerful (both black and white) in betraying the powerless, and the rape of national aspirations by multinational capitalism parading as African unity.

**Messengers of Day: The Memoirs of Anthony Powell, Vol. II**. New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston. \$10.95.

The story of Powell's apprenticeship as a writer, this is required reading for anyone who wants to be a novelist or else to become a better novelist. Powell looks at what he calls the "archetypal" hero of so many 19th century novels — the young man, just out of university, embarking upon a metropolitan career. There are hilarious stories and anecdotes about friends, contemporaries, and relations.

**War and Remembrance**, by Herman Wouk. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. \$15.

Wouk's sequel to "The Winds of War" is one of the great narratives of our time. With the world as a backdrop and World War II as a dominating event, this is really seven novels in one. By conceding that the inhumanity of the 1940s is beyond human comprehension, Wouk's novel provides us with some understanding of Western man's dilemma then and now.

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*This House of Sky*

## Local author critically acclaimed

by John Nordahl

"Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted, and then it stopped."

These are the opening words of Ivan Doig's new book, *This House of Sky: Landscape of a Western Mind*. Doig is the husband of Carol Doig, SCC instructor of communications and English. The couple co-authored a textbook entitled *News, A Consumer's Guide*.

A Montana-born freelance writer, Doig started writing *This House of Sky* seven years ago. It is a memoir, beginning in 1945, and covering a 30-year time span, most of which is spent in Montana.

The book is currently Seattle's top best seller. One of the reasons for the book's success is the nature of the book itself, according to Doig. "The broadest appeal of the book is that it tells about family. Everyone has had parents," Doig continued, "Anyone interested in the ties of love or emotions with a parent will find something in the book for themselves."

Promotion has also played an important part in the book's success. Doig has written close to a hundred local magazine articles, so area readers know his name and his work. He has also gone to many autographing parties in

Montana, and plans to attend more in Seattle. The book has been promoted on television in Great Falls, Montana. Word of mouth has played a valuable role, as well.

The book jacket was designed by Paul Bacon, designer of the jackets for *Jaws* and *Coma*. Doig said "Every bookseller I've talked to really likes the distinctive cover. There are a lot of (my) books on display because of this."

Doig's book has been receiving complimentary reviews from all over the country. The book has been reviewed by such noted establishments as the Los Angeles *Times*, the Chicago *Tribune*, the Seattle *PI*, and *Time* magazine; as well as just about every newspaper in Montana. The *PI*'s review remarked, stated that "The book looks and feels like a book should, and also reads like few books do. The reception has been superb." Frank Trippett of *Time* magazine added, "In his tellings, Doig lifts what might have been a marginally engaging reminiscence into an engaging and moving recovery of an obscure human struggle. There is defeat and triumph here, grief and joy, nobility and meanness, all arising from commonplace events, episodes, and locales."

Fifteen thousand copies of *This House of Sky* were made at the first printing, and Doig is starting

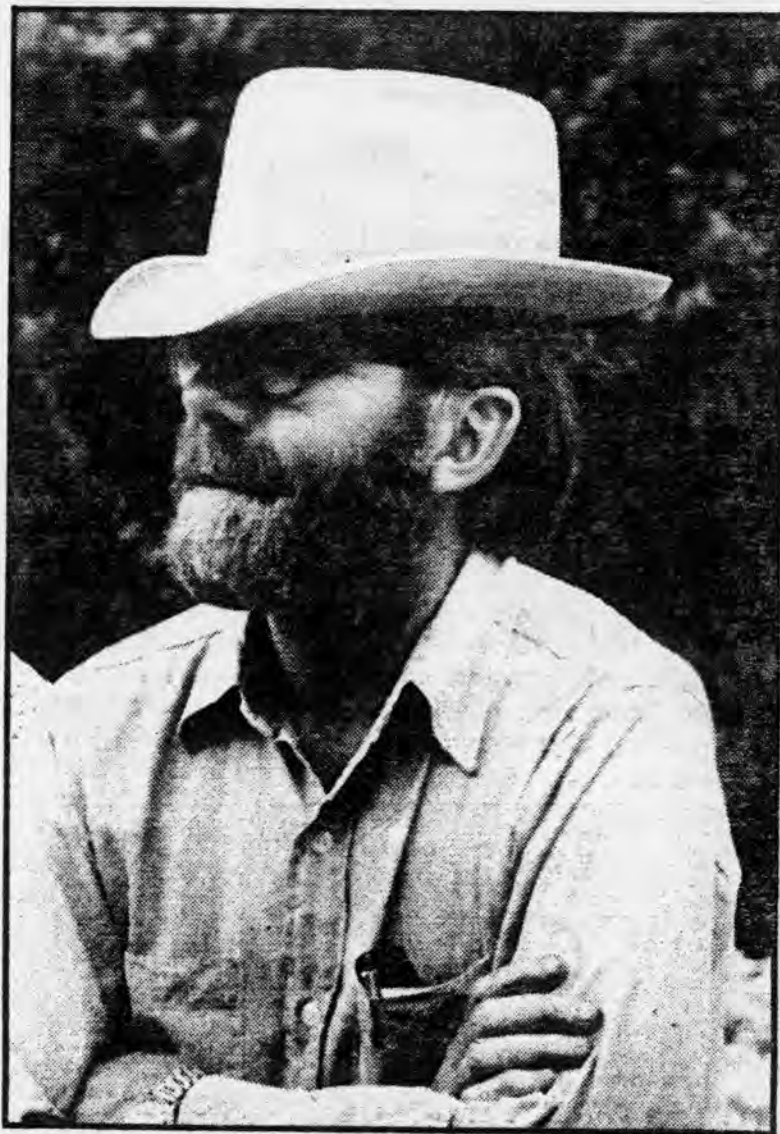
to feel that perhaps a second printing will be needed. Fifteen thousand is approximately three times the size of most first printings for a book of this sort.

Doig did a lot of research for his book. He has 1,500 file cards and many taped interviews, as well as four family photo albums, 10 files of correspondence, and research files.

Doig attended Northwestern University, graduating in 1957 with Master's and Bachelor's degrees in journalism. In 1966, Doig and his wife moved to Seattle. Three years later he earned his Ph.D in history from the UW.

In the last seven years Doig has written about 150 articles for the *New York Times*, *McCalls*, *Parents magazine*, and many other. He has also written several articles for *Pacific-Search* magazine and *The Seattle Times Sunday Pictorial*. In the future, Doig plans to write another book about his personal exploration of the Pacific Northwest. He will start researching his new book on the first day of winter; and intends to finish on the last day of winter. The book should be finished by the end of next year, and in print by fall of 1980. He also plans to write a novel in the not too distant future.

Doig is starting to write books



•—Ivan Doig, author

instead of magazine articles for economic reasons. He said "I will write fewer magazine articles because the rate of pay is so low I can't keep up with inflation. Magazines are making more profit now than in any time in history, but the freelance writer sees none of it." The freelance writer has no leverage to raise his pay because there

magazines can easily find someone else to write an article more cheaply. Doig explained "There is an overabundance of people who think they are freelance writers. Too many tinker with writing part-time. I feel this hurts the trade and it keeps pay down."

He added, "I have a whole lot of books to write, and a whole lot of



## Memories of rich boyhood in Montana

**"THIS HOUSE OF SKY" by Ivan Doig. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. \$9.95.**

Recollections of the author's family and what existence was like on lonely sheep ranches in Northern Montana when he was a boy form the substance of this poignant narrative.

His mother died when he was 6 and his father and later his maternal grandmother endeavored to take her place.

They were an oddly matched family, Ivan a bright student, the two others rudely educated and often of abrasive temperament. The boy not only received his education in country schools, but in ranch-town saloons, among cowboys, sheepherders



Ivan Doig

and cookhouse characters. They are all part of his book.

It is best described with a few quotations. Doig has a way with words, for instance:

"Then when the snowfall and wind at last stopped, the world's one noise would be the scrushing sound of boots on silk-dry snow. In the fresh calm, wood smoke climbed straight up from chimneys, until it appeared as if the fat gray ribbons were dangling all the town's houses down into a bowl of snow. The comfortable cushioned silence would last until the first pickup truck began the fast ratatatat of its chained tires."

Or this picture of driving the sheep to safety before a storm:

"So we fought, running, raging, hurling the dogs and ourselves at the waves of sheep, flogging with the gunny sacks we had grabbed off a corral post, shaking the wire rings of cans to a din, and steadily as the rain shot down on us, we lost ground. We were like skirmishers against a running army."

There is vigor and atmosphere in all Doig has to say. When his father's life nears its end the author pays tribute to his parent:

"So swiftly did you have me grown beyond my years that nei-

ther of us entirely understood the happening of it, but knew it to be rare, a triumph and terribly needed . . . that it was you in your burring troubadour's way of passing to me all you knew of the valley and the basin, who enchanted into me such a love of language and story that it has become my lifework."

Doig studied journalism at

Northwestern University, worked on newspapers and helped edit a magazine. Then he married and moved to Seattle, where he has continued his studies and his writing. This book is an invitation to read more by this compelling delineator of western life. He is at work on another volume.

—Lucile McDonald

WASHINGTON POST BOOK WORLD OCTOBER 29, 1978



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# Montana's the place, memory is the magic

Reviewed by  
Douglas J. Keating

*Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.*

*The remembering begins out of that new silence. . .*

And how Ivan Doig remembers. He has taken the story of his life and family, imbued it with the significance of a novel, told it with the sensitivity of a poet and produced a beautiful, not-soon-forgotten memoir.

Doig's mother died in a cabin in the high country of Montana, where she and Doig's father were spending a summer herding sheep. Charlie Doig takes on the task of raising young Ivan. And after a near-fatal illness and a second marriage that fails, he makes peace with his estranged mother-in-law and brings her to live with them.

Doig's central theme is the evolution of this alliance-by-necessity into a family. It is an imperceptible process. Gradually Doig's grandmother, a tough, no-nonsense woman, distrustful of all men, and Charlie Doig, a restless, independent ranch hand, overcome their mutual antipathy and become as close and devoted as any married couple.

The reason they remain together during the first stormy years is Ivan, "the agreed-on, barter between them." And Ivan, it is clear, was worth the trouble. A mature, intelligent boy, an intellectual misplaced in the practical world of the American West, he gave no trouble, loving grandmother and father equally. This model son-grandson not only cemented and nourished the father-grandmother alliance, but also became the most important person in their lives.

The book opens with the death of Doig's mother, and her presence haunts the memoir. She is a faultless angel hovering over the Doig family, as it struggles along without her, evermindful of her goodness and determined not to disappoint her.

As real and important as the people in this vivid remembering is the Montana landscape. It is land of rugged mountains, arid valleys and changeable climate; a land that can provide lush pastures for sheep to

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**THIS HOUSE OF SKY**  
**Landscapes of a Western Mind**  
By Ivan Doig  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$9.95

---

fatten peacefully in, and then, on a whim, send a sudden thunderstorm to stampede them toward a cliff. It is not an easy land, and those who wrestle with it, like Doig's ranch hand father and his grandmother, who came to the country as a homesteader, become as tough and stubborn as their adversary.

One expects a writer who attempts a memoir to have a large store of memories to draw on. Even so, Doig's powers of recall are nothing short of uncanny. The detail of people and events that his remarkable memory supplies, going back to his early childhood, make his story vivid and interesting, yet he never allows the book to become a mere chronological recitation. The reader constantly is aware of the larger theme of three lives moving against a background of past generations and the vast western landscape.

"This House of Sky" is worth reading just to savor the writing alone. There is an entrancing rhythm, balance and tone to Doig's simple, clear prose that imparts poetical beauty. As a young man he drove a tractor, an experience he describes in this sentence:

*Shuddered throb of the Cat, curved lines of harrow digging by the battalion behind me, marching chocolate lines of worked field, cold flame-peaks spacing the western horizon — everything of each day was rhythm, pulse, pattern, and within such propulsion, like a space traveler sledging through orbit, I could cast myself free into every luster of my life to come.*

This is Doig's first book. A 39-year-old freelance writer living in Seattle, he is, according to the book jacket, working on a second. "This House of Sky," obviously was something Doig had to write. Now that he has, in effect, freed himself from the past, we can look forward to see what this talented, perceptive writer attempts next.

Douglas J. Keating is an Inquirer staff writer.

PHH  
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10/29/78



Ivan Doig

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**THIS HOUSE OF SKY: LANDSCAPES OF A WESTERN MIND** by Ivan Doig, PhD Hist. '69 (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$9.95)

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Montana refused to yield its stubbornness to that of the Doig clan who settled there from Scotland. It turned instead and shaped the Doigs as it saw fit and as Ivan Doig now recalls and retells in *This House of Sky*.

After the death of his mother on his sixth birthday, Ivan trailed his father across the state, battling its winters, its terrain, and its sheep. From every bar in White Sulphur Springs where his company was accepted along with his father's, to the isolated ranches they worked, Doig observed the adult world with fascination and etched his impressions on the landscape of his mind.

You know the Stockman's bartender after Doig describes him for you. "Pete simply had made it a hobby to size up people, and to work out a routine of friendship with those deserving. He had a tribute for the few best men he knew. Glancing off into the glass hodgepodge behind the bar, Pete would say slowly: 'He's a nice fellow.' Slow nod, and slower again: 'A real nice fellow.' When that was said, you knew the fellow must be a prince of the world. And plainly enough, Pete deemed this wry-smiling father at my side a real nice fellow."

He describes his father's skill at breaking horses, "jacketing" lambs, and his determination to eek more than a living out of Montana. Doig himself combined vocational agriculture with his high school Latin, but he says "Here I was turned" when a July storm claimed a season's profit. "With our shorn ewes we had on our hands a double thousand of the world's most undressed creatures, caught in only their paunchy yellow-white carcasses like hospital invalids with their gowns suddenly ripped away."

"I had no steady idea what I would do in life, but I intended now that it would not include more seasons of sheep on that vast gambling table of Blackfoot rangeland."

When he decided to live a life without Montana and its sheep, Doig "learned rapidly that I either had luck or had to make it." Make it he does with this book nearly ten years in the writing and over 30 in the living that combines Montana's history with Doig's memories and musings. Hard times, bad times and good times are carefully and tenderly woven into a story and a style that are his own. You will chuckle some, cry a little, but you will be delighted that Doig chose a career less tangible but more to his talents than sheep ranching. The English language yields where Montana would not and Doig uses it superbly to describe the landscape and the people who shaped him.

He now lives in Seattle where ten years of freelancing have produced over 200 magazine articles and two previous books. He and wife Carol returned to Montana this summer for a reunion included in *Life* magazine's October feature on family reunions.

UW ALUMNUS, AUTUMN 1978

# Seattleite Ivan Doig's 'puttied road' to Big Sky

By Leslie Starr

*THIS HOUSE OF SKY*

By Ivan Doig

Harcourt, Brace, Javonovich

MOST PEOPLE WOULD NOT consider their lives fit material for a publishable autobiography. That is perhaps a surprising state of affairs in a country reputed to encourage individuality and personal growth. But, nevertheless, most published memoirs are by people who have in some way gained public recognition. One exception is *This House of Sky* by Seattleite Ivan Doig.

Since Doig is not Scarlett O'Hara's older brother, what reason exists for reading such a book? Doig seems to have had a dual purpose in writing it, or at least a purpose which is both personal and public: to memorialize his father and his grandmother, both representatives of a life style that is uniquely American and largely extinct.

Although the lives Doig chronicles begin around 1920 and end shortly after 1970, they are largely the lives of the American pioneer of the last century. He tells of the struggles of settlers in rural Montana against the weather

and the landscape, shared by the last of the cowboys (actually sheep, not cattle, ranchers).

The book centers mainly on Charlie Doig, the author's father, a rugged Scot who herded sheep and managed men with steady skill, despite personal tragedy and poverty; and on Lady, Doig's maternal grandmother, whose devotion to hard work and endurance carried her at full tilt past the age of 80. In addition to these portraits, the book contains vignettes of rural townspeople, and descriptions of small town life: of ranching and of heroic battles with the land.

The content is richly varied, but also highly fragmented. Doig has indulged what seems to be an incredibly detailed memory without adequate selectivity. For most of Doig's readers, the descriptions of lambing, of herding sheep through blizzards, of struggles with primitive housing should prove absorbing. On the other hand, do we really need a ten page summary of the different saloons in White Sulphur Springs? Or detailed descriptions of the deserted houses there as opposed to those in Ringling? We meet hundreds of people in the course of the book, but see most for no more than a paragraph. Some of these

are enticing views — of the only blacks in White Sulphur Springs, of derelict Indians — which lead nowhere.

In fact, Doig never really gets beyond his gift of telling observation to attempt any rendering of the emotions of those he describes — with the notable exceptions of Charlie and Lady. Even his stepmother, Ruth — with whom he lives for several years — remains emotionally enigmatic. Major decisions in his own life (to leave ranching, to attend college in Chicago, to marry) are glossed over rather than analyzed. The lack of insight here is only emphasized by the few portions of the book where Doig does allow deep feelings to come through in extended descriptions, as he does when detailing his father's fight against illness at the end of the book.

As it is, the book remains largely a work of reporting with occasional flashes of emotion and implied pathos. Little humor or introspection intrudes on this basically objective, although obviously sincere, tone. The action must, and often does, provide its own excitement.

Doig does work at making his language expressive. His early love of words, de-

scribed in the section in which he attends high school, and his ability to remember most words he encounters, is certainly evident in the rich and often unpredictable use of vocabulary in the book. The alternation of poetic diction and slang and the use of unusual words as verbs seems to suit Doig's subject; occasionally the sentences can be confusing or even strained ("rain puttied its roads into slick gumbo").

Nevertheless, Doig's intentions are clear. His desire to record a spirit of rugged independence, perseverance and courage and to describe an untamed and often brutal land is largely achieved. His vision of the rancher or of the cook who can toil endlessly for 80 years only to reach a stalemate with nature is one that is easily forgotten in an automated, conglomerate society. And, since the kind of life he describes is no longer being lived even in remote Montana (the Doig Ranch is now owned by "a goddamn-Kansas-City-Paper-box-company"), such reminders are increasingly difficult to find.

Yet the suspicion remains that the memories contained in this book are far more meaningful to Doig than they can ever be for his reader.

SEATTLE SUN NOVEMBER 8, 1978 PAGE 13

## Doig Fondly Reminisces About 'Great House'

SCOTSMEN AND Swedes were Montana's first white settlers. Their idea was to elbow the Blackfeet north and raise sheep on what was virtually free grassland. But their drive to run west ran much deeper than business.

"Place." Floating about minds, ill-equipped to articulate the word was that rough-edged, saw-toothed idea of "place." Crowded in sleepy Midwest farming villages, settlers yearned to "stretch out" or "go where ye can breathe."

So, clutching families and trooping west, they chose to settle in a cruel and beautiful land. And, somehow, this quenched an atavistic need: a need for punishment, reward and a clear view of God in the land.

IVAN DOIG found himself growing up in just such a settler community. And "This Great House Of Sky" (Harcourt

Brace Jovanovich, 314 pages, \$9.95) is his autobiographical sketch of a boy who, at 6, loses his mother and is left to the care of his father and grandmother. Blanketed by their love, he picks his way through a life of ranches, bars, cafes and shepherders.

Though hardly encouraged, Doig finds a need to read. Friendly neighbors and an understanding schoolteacher provide him with books, and the incessant reading eventually propels him to a journalism degree at Northwestern and a writing career.

Yet the haunting memories of Montana and the deaths of his father and grandmother pull him back.

HE WRITES OF a flinty father and grandmother reveling in the harsh conditions. They survive blizzards that cloak the sun and bury herds of sheep. They endure piercing winds which nub boul-

ders down to pebbles and shriek through the pores of their frail shanty.

Once moving camp 58 times in 60 days, they scratch a thin living from a sun-baked land; a desolate land where only Scotsmen and coyotes can survive. And soon, Doig says, even the coyotes starve out.

It's this tenacity which consumes the author. He fingers and probes at it with scientific bent — measuring, cataloging, evaluating.

His style is to recount his boyhood in colorful swatches, leaving the reader to knit them together. Family anecdotes tint the novel with the full musky flavor of a Montana household. ("She looks like she's been drawn through a knothole backwards.")

FLICKERS OF memory deftly guide Doig's pen as he carves and colors the prose, breathing life into a rarely-seen people. And his telling descriptions of Montana scenery bolster a finely written novel.

He curls a talented finger around the

link between family and the outlook of its sons. We're continually reminded that environment and the guidance of a father and grandmother has an impact so profound as to tug at every subsequent turn in one's life. So Doig carefully sifts through his boyhood like a miner panning for gold.

And occasionally he finds a nugget.

Like the mannequin-like passengers at the train station who gaze imperiously from their regal cabins as they're raised across the frontier.

OR THE MAD rush of terrified sheep as a hailstorm bullies them toward the lip of a canyon.

Or the steel-spiked farming monsters who break the soil as cleanly as they do the tradition.

"This Great House Of Sky" introduces an exciting new novelist; a novelist who can dig into his past with the pick and shovel of a master. And despite the limitations of his venture, the artistry is worth the effort.

— JIM HANNAH

# 'This House Of Sky' ✓

By IVAN DOIG

Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich, \$9.95

Reviewed by C.L. Sonnichsen

Ivan Doig may well be to small-town Montana what Marcel Proust was to Paris. His book is a Western "remembrance of things past" — an exciting and memorable performance, a work not so much to be read as to be experienced.

On the surface it is a family chronicle, the life stories of Ivan himself and of his father, mother and maternal grandmother, but it is full of dreams as well as facts and is charged with love and memory. Not as many Western books are as rich and compelling as this one.

Montana in Doig's growing up time was still not far from the frontier, and his father Charley was a country product of many talents and skills. He worked cattle and sheep, sometimes on a small scale for himself, mostly for other

## Landscapes Of A Western Mind

people. Ivan's delicate gentle mother died early and left her husband to raise the boy. After an unsuccessful second marriage, Charley patched up a truce with his sturdy, independent mother-in-law Bessie Ringer and they joined forces to get their precocious son and grandson through grade and high school and on to college. Eventually Ivan took a degree in journalism from Northwestern University and earned a doctorate at the University of Washington. Charley died first, slowly and painfully, and Bessie followed in a few years, bringing Ivan's story to an end.

They are only two of many notable personalities in the book. He is obsessed with heredity and the passing on of temperament and attitude from one generation to another. He "feels into the oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all." He is just as aware of the impact of people outside the blood line —

people like Frances Carson Tidyman, Ivan's English teacher, huge in body and in wisdom. "The foliage of her learning faced everywhere through the school." She helped make him a freelance writer.

Almost as important as the people is the country — the "unsparing landscape" of Montana where "attitude and climate add up pitilessly." Doig's sense of place is remarkable and his descriptions are unforgettable.

If any pages could be spared they are probably the ones of which Doig is proudest, his speculations on "kin and clan . . . the mysterious strengths of linkage." He knows he is wrestling with the "inexplicable," but he keeps on wrestling. His publishers think these passages make him "quietly universal." To this reviewer they add motion without much movement. Doig's hindsight is better than his insight. He finds poetry in his remembrance of things past and that, in the long run, may make his book a Western classic.

## CHRISTMAS GIFTS

(Continued from page 128)

Pierre Le-Tan, and prefaced by George Plimpton (Clarkson N. Potter). With the help of Pierre Le-Tan's imaginative illustrations and George Plimpton's fond preface, John Train presents, in a small, really inexpensive book, a group of odd, funny stories, all true. Subject? Everything from "Romantic Entanglements" to "Imbroglions"—each story with its own special twist. Example: the last words of Joseph Henry Green, the great English surgeon were (pointing to his heart), "Congestion"; and then (taking his own pulse), "stopped."

**Masterpieces of Primitive Art**, with photographs by Lee Boltin and text by Douglas Newton (Alfred A. Knopf). These 250 sumptuous works of art from the Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection make up a unique visual experience. Photos range from the Asmat art of Guinea to Aztec artifacts, as well as magnificent African pieces—all in full color. Special beauties—masks from the Ivory Coast and one from the Ibibio in Nigeria. They are extravagantly winning.

**This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind** by Ivan Doig (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). A powerful first book about the author's life in the wilderness of Montana—its valley ranches, its small-town saloons—and about Doig's life with his father and grandmother. Incomparable. And true. And not only universal—but unique.

**The Bettmann Archive Picture History of the World: The Story of Western Civilization Retold in 4460 Pictures** by Otto Bettmann (Random House). With Creation as

its prologue, this picture history begins in ancient Egypt, and ends with "hopes and fears" for the future of atomic energy and space technology. Incredible.

**Six by Lewis: The Screwtape Letters, The Problem of Pain, Miracles, Mere Christianity, The Great Divorce, and The Abolition of Man** by C.S. Lewis (Macmillan). A box packed with classics by the popular Christian scholar—including one never-in-the-U.S. published book, *Miracles*, a miracle in itself. Together, these volumes are a key to Lewis' genial, witty, hard Christianity. As a start, this tiny box has an imprint of one hundred thousand, sonorous, sophisticated.

**Born To Lose: The Gangster Film in America** by Eugene Rosow (Oxford University Press). The aim of this book is to take a comprehensive look at the development of the gangster film in America, its connections with the rise of crime in American society and with the growth of Hollywood. From 1932—the heyday of the gangster film—to the day of *The Godfather*. A lovely danger to read.

**The Arts of David Levine** by David Levine (Alfred A. Knopf). For the first time in a major book, David Levine shows us his luminous oil paintings and watercolors—portraits, landscapes, city-scapes—plus his famous caricatures: his enormous-nosed General de Gaulle; a dreamy Marcel Proust with a scraggle of moustache and prodigiously darkened eyes. Marvelous.

**Great Chefs of France** by Anthony Blake and Quentin Crewe (Abrams). The high drama of dining out is the subject of this visually — and gastronomically — thrilling

book. Author Quentin Crewe and photographer Anthony Blake explored the kitchens, dining rooms, hearts, and minds of such great chefs as Paul Bocuse, the Troisgros brothers, revealing some of the secrets that make each chef's cuisine unique. Bonus: a back-of-the-book collection of special recipes. A gourmet's dream.

**The Nouvelle Cuisine of Jean and Pierre Troisgros** by Jean and Pierre Troisgros (Crown Publishers). The special respect for simple parts has given a fragile delight to the recipes of these two consummate chefs. Their specialty (and the trademark of the *nouvelle cuisine*): light, simple fare, prepared quickly and without fuss.

**Man's Lot** by Walter Kaufmann (Reader's Digest Press). The author, professor of philosophy at Princeton University, gives the patina of young life and old age vigorously and marvelously. With more than three hundred and thirty color photographs in a highly irregular "textbook," Kaufmann presents the broad background of human existence. In all, \$60 worth, an honest price.



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# BOOKS

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U.W. DAILY    DECEMBER 1, 1978

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## A Seattle writer's picturesque childhood memories

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### This House of Sky Ivan Doig

By Melanie Reed

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*This skewed rhythm of year that the mountain weather sent down on the valley, I can call to mind as if watching coastal waves comb in before me this minute. And recall, too—such is the edifying but detailed power of memory—precisely the crinkled dance of air as July's sun snaked moisture up from green windows of hay. And the dour slipping wash of a gray afternoon's wind, which I tread to this day. And the scenes out of the indelible ninth winter of my life, with its shadowless smothering snow across all the hills of the Sixteen country.*

Montana—land of broad, wind-whipped open spaces, rustic, brawling mining towns and a people as diverse as their changing surroundings. In *This House of Sky*, Seattleite and former UW student Ivan Doig lyrically and vividly describes his childhood experiences in traveling across this land with his restless father. What makes his style effective is that it is simply a description—honest and straightforward, with little analysis or explorations of might-have-beens.

This approach seems to be tied to a subtle but central theme—that the people and surroundings we grow up with so truly shape our lives and values that the past is better left untouched for true appreciation.

The book's italicized passages allow the characters to speak for themselves, which in turn gives the reader a more personal glimpse of their identity, and here is where the best examples of unspo-

ken poignancy come through. In a letter from Doig's grandmother, he learns of the death of a favorite teacher, but the passage ends with the letter, and the reader is left to imagine how this must have affected him.

Doig's mother died when he was six, and in the time that followed, he and his father traveled around the country, not so much trying to find a place to settle, since they already had each other, as sampling the offerings of a land they had come to call their own. The book covers everything in the years after Doig's mother's death, from saloon-tripping with his father (portrayed only as a young boy could see it) to the eventual death of his grandmother at the age of 81.

*This House of Sky* is a good book to read for relaxation, but you may end up becoming more involved than you realized. The book leaves one wanting more, yet at the same time satisfied—with the feeling of a life fulfilled or a completed cycle.

PHILADELPHIA

INQUIRER  
12/3/78

THIS HOUSE OF SKY by Ivan Doig (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$9.95). These "Landscapes of the Western Mind" would make the list even if the year's best books were reduced to a handful. Reminiscences of childhood and growing up in Montana: a glorious debut.

WASHINGTON POST

BOOK WORLD/DECEMBER 17, 1978

## Current and Choice

**LIFE IN THE ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE: A Social and Architectural History**, by Mark Girouard (Yale, \$19.95). Upstairs, downstairs, and all around the house—from the Middle Ages to the Edwardian epoch.

**THE SEA, THE SEA**, by Iris Murdoch (Viking, \$10.95). A retired man of the theater pursues a lost love, now a shapeless, ordinary, old woman, but in his eyes still the long-limbed beauty of his youth.

**STRIPER: A Story of Fish and Man**, by John N. Cole (Atlantic-Little, Brown, \$10). A requiem for the striped bass, told with grace and deep feeling.

→ **THIS HOUSE OF SKY: Landscapes of a Western Mind**, by Ivan Doig (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$9.95). A son evokes the world of his father and his own early life in Montana.

**OF WOLVES AND MEN**, by Barry Holstun Lopez (Scribner's, \$14.95). The lore and lure of the wolf, with many illustrations.

**THE BOOK OF THE DUN COW**, by Walter Wangerin, Jr. (Harper & Row, \$6.95). When the day of Ragnarok, or world's end, is upon us, only Chauntecleer the rooster, Mundo Cani dog, and their animal band can face the dread wrath of Wyrn.

Reviewed by  
Curt Suplee

## The Hardpan World

The reviewer is an assistant editor of the Style section of The Washington Post.

"There is no life of a man, faithfully recorded," the Scots sage Thomas Carlyle once wrote, "but is a heroic poem of its sort."

Ivan Doig, Carlyle's countryman by long extraction, has delivered richly on that promise in his vivid, muscular autobiography about becoming a man in the West.

Doig's hardpan world is quite unimaginable to most Americans: the sheep ranches and mining towns of western Montana, a state whose scant half-million souls are scattered across an area four times the size of Virginia. This is no country for tennis-shoe ecologists or Snail Darter evangelists—in the uneasy lee of the great mountains, amid the heartless rocky sprawl, nature is not a friend, but an omnipotent and endlessly in-

ventive adversary, and a daily measure of courage is needful as water.

Into that unrelenting solitude the Doigs migrated at the end of the last century, driven by "two deep Caledonian notions . . . to raise sheep, and to graze them on mountain grass which cost nothing."

Ivan Doig was born to that thrall of generations, and it is not surprising that his life's landmarks are work and whiskey, accident and death. His book begins on his sixth birthday in 1945, as his mother dies of asthma in their one-room herding cabin. From there, the story rides the rhythm of the seasons, following his father's questing discontent from place to place, as Ivan grows like a bucket-fed calf, bigger and bolder, finally growing into books and out of the ranching life altogether. After 300 pages and 20 years, the reader is left

exhilarated: about to feel the brutal beauty and sudden danger of the land; and unable to forget two brave people who lived on it, unconquerable as sagebrush.

The first is Ivan's father, Charlie Doig, a small, wiry man, sorrowing widower, and stubbornly adept ranch foreman whose characteristic nod to each opportunity is, "Well, it's something to try." Between caring for sheep and ranchhands, between badgering a living out of scrub pasture and stringing his makeshift family along, Charlie teaches and Ivan learns.

He learns the clockless shape of country work, where noon is not a time but "instead the controlled curve of the day . . . where the beginning of labor crossed into the lessening of labor." He becomes an intimate of winter, where "the world's

## of Stoic Westerners

### Book World

*THIS HOUSE OF SKY: Landscapes of a Western Mind.* By Ivan Doig

(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 314 pp. \$9.95)

one noise would be the scrushing sound of boots on silk-dry snow," and of the musty stockmen's bars where "glass and liquor and liquor and glass reflected each other until my eyes couldn't take in the bounce of patterns," where in the afternoon the tavern was "open and uncrowded as a sleepy depot" and he could sneak a look at the calendar girl: "the naked lady with the breasts coming out like footballs." He passes, in this masculine picaresque, by good-humored Hutterites working in bee-like consort, by working men drunken,

broken, resilient and resigned, by occasional impressive rarities like the black man singing spirituals: "His tenor voice could ripple like muscle, hold like a hawser across the notes."

On the other side, equally unforgettable, is Ivan's grandmother, thrust into his life when his father's disastrous second marriage falls: his mother's mother, an enduringly cranky woman, abrupt with people, affectionate with dogs, a practical cook "long since locked into an everlasting lost battle against her own pastries," whose style of "not-quite-cussing" punctuates Ivan's day: "Gee gosh, god darn, gosh blast it."

Despite the blood magnetism of Charlie and Grandma, the taciturn Ivan, already an anomaly the day he was named ("Dad was amazed with himself when he at last discovered that he had spliced Russian onto the Scottish family name; he and my

mother simply had known someone named Ivan and liked the sudden soft curl of the word") is drawn apart by love of language to a different life: journalism, scholarship and finally the rain-soft ease of the far west coast.

These are not heroic people; they are stoic, hard-working Westerners, to be sure, but scarcely mythic. And yet, as Doig believes, "memory is a set of sagas we live by, much the way of the Norse wildmen in their bear shirts," and he muscles these characters up from plain humanity to a convincing epic dignity by the sheer force of a prose style which may owe much to Gerard Manley Hopkins and Dylan Thomas: "under the fir-dark flanks of Hatfield Mountain, a bow of meadow makes the ruffled water curl wide to the west. At this interruption, a low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up watchfully."

And so when Doig concedes that "memory is a kind of homesickness, and like homesickness, it falls short of the actualities," we agree—but we do not believe.

## Growing Up in Montana

*This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind.* Ivan Doig. (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) \$9.95. 314 pp.

*This House of Sky* is a chronicle of lives so shaped by an unyielding land that their story is at the same time a chronicle of that land. Ivan Doig was born in 1939 in south-central Montana, in the valley of a Missouri tributary on the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. His father, Charlie Doig, "had spent all but a few years of his life riding out after cattle and sheep across the gray sage distances of the Smith River Valley and the foothill country hunkered all around it." His mother died when Ivan was six years old. It is at this point that the recollection begins; yet the shadow figure of a mother dead at the age of 31 remains as a might-have-been—in the mid-40s, asthma was not necessarily a terminal affliction—had the family lived elsewhere or had their circumstances been different. After his mother's death, Ivan lived with the unlikely team of Charlie Doig and Bessie Ringer, Ivan's maternal grandmother.

Charlie Doig's story began nearly as long ago as the valley received its first white settlers. "Here, as far back into the tumbled beginnings of the Big Belts as their wagons could go, a double handful of Scots families homesteaded in the years just before this century. Two deep Caledonian notions seem to have pulled them so far into the hills: to raise sheep, and to graze them on mountain grass which cost nothing."

Bessie Ringer, stiff-backed, flinchless, of unbending notions and unattackable beliefs, accepted what life handed her with a "hmpf!" "Family, work—and the clinch across both of them, steadfastness. Life was to be lived out as it came. If it came hard, you bowed your neck a bit more and endured. So without thinking it through—not entirely knowing how to—she had set her mind not to be afraid of that spare weather-whipped land, that wan ranch life."

Perhaps it was Doig's early life, so removed from the consideration that writing is a way to earn a living, that made him the kind of writer he is. His talent is immense, but the exactitude—the careful crafting of each phrase

28/Pacific Search



Charlie Doig (in striped shirt and bowtie), father of Ivan Doig, author of *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind*, posed with three of his brothers at the family homestead in Montana's Big Belt Mountains in the early 1920s.

that makes close reading imperative—comes only through an infusion of labor. His work deserves to be read aloud. The description of a sheep rancher named McGrath, for example, is brilliant: "With his cask of chest, the even grander gut beneath, and a great boxy head jowled like a bulldog's, he always looked roundly out of place on foot. Saddle years had bowed his legs wide, and he toed along in cowboy boots as if hating each touch of the ground. But on horseback, the legs pegged down into the stirrups as if into a socket, his swell of chest looked right, the ugly head somehow went against the sky like the profile of a Comanche chief."

Doig's writing received its first watchful guidance under a formidable, persistent teacher of high-school English in Valier, Montana. Perhaps it was she who leaned over Ivan's desk and intoned, "describe with verbs!" Her advice, if that is the source, produced some of the most inventive, enhancing verbs I have ever encountered.

I read *This House of Sky* as a Montanan, my mind searching for associations that come not from literature but from familiarity. I found these

associations coming in tangential ways: not in the sight of the land, as described, but in the smells of dryness; not in the vastness of Montana but in the emptiness felt upon leaving it. I felt a kind of morbidity reading about the old Sherman Hotel in Shelby—not because I'd been there but because the wood and brass and marble of Montana's old hotels are being wrenched out of them and sold to people who use them to decorate bars and restaurants in places like Seattle.

After everything else, Doig's book is about death and moving on. Whatever justification he needed for writing this chronicle took substance at the time of his father's death. "All of his way of life that I had sought escape from—the grindstone routine of ranching, the existence at the mercy of mauling weather, the endless starting-over from one calamity or another—was passing with him, and while I still wanted my distance from such a gauntlet, I found that I did not want my knowing of it to go from me. The perseverance to have lasted nearly seventy years amid such cold prospects was what heritage Dad had for me; I had begun to see that it counted for much."

**Katherine Raff**

*Ms. Raff is former editor of Puget Soundings, and has contributed articles to Pacific Search.*

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"Environmental impact studies generally tend to be dull and full of fabricated numbers and misleading assumptions. That is not the case with the first volume of this new series. Dixon documents Parksville's failure to prepare for the deluge of construction-related equipment and personnel and its consequences— from an increase in prostitution to port crowding. Never simply satisfied to point out the problems, the author presents community alternatives that were ignored. In her own model, Dixon attempts to evaluate the impact of rapid growth and suggests that industry pay the social cost of disruption to the community. A very readable and valuable volume, essential for libraries interested in this subject." R. J. Phillips  
Library J 103:1159 Jc 1 '78 120w

**DOCKSTADER, FREDERICK J.** Great North American Indians: profiles in life and leadership. (Norbeck 100) 386p il \$16.95 '77 Van Nostrand Reinhold

320 Indians of North America—Biography  
ISBN 0-412-02148-8 LC 77-23733

This volume "is a collection of biographies of 300 native American leaders (who are now dead). . . . The span of coverage extends from the sixteenth century (when Hiawatha and Beganawida flourished) to 1977, the death date of Herbert Burwell Fowler, Sioux psychiatrist. Each biography includes birth and death dates, native names and translations, family background, and . . . historical information (provided in an attempt to place the individual in the context of his or her time). Black-and-white illustrations, mostly photographs of biographers or objects illuminating life-styles, accompany most of the profiles." (Booklist) Bibliography, Index of names.

"Contrary to tradition, native American men do not monopolize this work. . . . The meaning of Indian ancestry is given a liberal interpretation so that one-eighth blooded native Americans are given biographical. . . . The writing throughout is lively and lucid. . . . Appended to the book are several useful listings. . . . a breakdown of more than 60 tribal divisions, each indicating tribal members treated in the profiles, and a handy roster of biographers arranged in birth date order. . . . The book is very readable, filled with facts, attractive, and printed in clear, dark type on heavy paper. It would be a worthwhile acquisition for most public, high school, and college libraries."

Booklist 75:325 O 1 '78 550w

"[This book] fills the need for a popularly written, inexpensive adult reference book. . . . While historical figures who resisted white injustice, such as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse are lauded, contemporary supporters of Indian rights such as Frank Clearwater, Buddy Lamont, and Pedro Bissonette, who died in the 1973 American Indian Movement occupation of Wounded Knee, are conspicuously absent. Nevertheless, this is a useful reference volume. Recommended for public and academic libraries." Jean Winans

Library J 103:557 Mr 1 '78 140w

**DOIG, IVAN.** This house of sky: landscapes of a western mind. 314p \$9.95 '78 Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

R or 92 Doig, Ivan  
ISBN 0-15-190054-X LC 78-53897

"These are memories of 30 years in the early life of the author. They are the story of the hardscrabble lives of the last of a generation of aging cowboys, sheepherders, and other ranch hands in rural Montana, particularly the author's father and grandmother, thrown together in reluctant armistice by the calamity of his mother's death when he was six." (Library J)

"This extraordinary, eloquent memoir heralds a powerful, new American writer. . . . Never dipping into indulgence, Doig tells of sledding on a shale gully, joining in the frenzy of lambing, bucking hay in meadows, driving sheep to grassland, peering into a herder's wagon—all surrounded by a mountain skyline and the pungency of sage. The mere space others see on the prairie Doig has filled with cowboys and cafes, rhythm and companionship. As the land has haunted and shaped him, so his movingly beautiful prose haunts us."

Chr Sci Mon pR15 O 23 '78 110w

"[This] is a depressing tale of worn-out people working worn-out land, yet somehow finding solace among themselves and stubbornly persevering to the end. This is not an exciting book. It is too long, and reading it is a chore. Yet the book preserves for us a convincing bit of fast-dying rural Americana." Roger Woelfel

Library J 103:1734 S 15 '78 130w

"[The book] is a stirring experience—joyous, poignant, and loving. The central figure is Charles Campbell Doig, son of Scottish immigrant parents and an extraordinary father, whose instincts were

exactly right: he made his little son a partner and took him everywhere—out on the range, into the lambing shed, into the docking corral, into town for an evening at the Stockman Bar. Mr. Doig brings him alive with anecdotes of courage and endurance and drive and adversity and gruff affection. Highly recommended."  
New Yorker 54:197 O 16 '78 260w

**DOLENSEK, NANCY.** Mutt (hov) Nancy Dolensek and Barbara Burns; drawings by Roy McKie. 275p \$14.95; pa \$6.95 '78 Potter, G.N.; for sale by Crown

636.7 Dogs  
ISBN 0-517-53185-2; 0-517-53186-0 (pa)  
LC 77-17491

"This book contains material on locating, selecting, and adopting a mixed-breed dog. In addition to . . . information about canine disease, training, and nutrition, there are human-interest stories, many quotations about dogs, and several humorous features." (Library J) Annotated bibliography, Index.

"For any dog lover, the humor will prove irresistible: examples are the dog horoscope, the Mixed-Breed Aptitude Test, and the scenario of a dog psychotherapy group led by Dr. Joyce Mothers. Enlivened with McKie's cartoon-like drawings, Mutt would be a good choice for any library in the market for a new dog book." Susan Matusak

Library J 103:1070 My 15 '78 90w

"Vividly complementing this very informative guide are countless photos, cartoons, drawings, and brief biographies written by mutt owners. A delightful salute to the world's underdog."  
Carol Schene

SLJ 25:164 O '78 110w [YA]

**DOUDNA, MARTIN K.** Concerned about the planet: the Reporter magazine and American Liberalism. 1949-1968. (Contributions in American Studies, no.32) 197p \$14.95 '77 Greenwood Press

951 The Reporter, New York (periodical). Liberalism. U.S.—Politics and government—20th century  
ISBN 0-8371-9638-1 LC 77-16048

This is an account of the magazine and its founder-editor, Max Ascoli. Founded in 1949 The Reporter competed with other "liberal political journals during the 1950s and 1960s. . . . [The biweekly] reflected Ascoli's views. Prominent among these was a militant anti-communism that led The Reporter to support U.S. policy in Vietnam long after many of its readers had begun to criticize. Ascoli did not succumb to such criticism. Estranged from numerous friends over the war, facing rebellion from some subordinates, nearing 70 and unwilling to bequeath his magazine to others, he ceased publication." (Choice) Bibliography, Index.

"Doudna, a professor of English, is more successful in recounting The Reporter's brief history than he is in explaining recent American liberalism. His book, therefore, is a more valuable contribution in the field of journalism than in political philosophy. Recommended for all college libraries."

Choice 15:1641 O '78 170w

"[This is a] delightful history of a man and a magazine. . . . Doudna uses The Reporter, and the philosophy of European liberalism with which Ascoli invested it, as a lens through which to examine the assumptions and inconsistencies of postwar American liberalism. . . . Doudna examines (a number of) . . . divergences between The Reporter and American liberalism, with some interesting conclusions about the latter. But, absent the political theses, the book is a fine biography of an influential postwar figure, and a history of a journal which, at its zenith, was arguably the most important liberal publication in America." F. J. Flaherty

Commonweal 105:503 Ar 4 '78 500w

**DOUGLAS, ROY.** In the year of Munich. 155p pl \$17.95 '78 St Martin's Press

940.53 Great Britain—Foreign relations. Europe—Politics and government—1915-1945. World War, 1939-1945—Causes  
ISBN 0-312-411790 LC 77-82823

Douglas examines the "year between March 1938 and March 1939, a period in which both Austria and Czechoslovakia were absorbed into Hitler's Third Reich. The book is an examination of Britain's appeasement policy. . . . [and] focuses on the dilemmas that Chamberlain's government faced. . . . Douglas's study is confined to information available in Britain during that year, that is, to facts that the British acted on. He claims that Chamberlain acted wisely." (Choice) Bibliography, Index.

"The volume complements such standard accounts as J. W. Wheeler-Bennet's Munich: prologue to tragedy (BRD 1948), A. J. P. Taylor's

Origins of the First World War. . . . The book is a valuable addition to any library necessary reading."

Choice  
Econ

**DROPSHOT:** the David I Brown 330p Wadsworth

355p 120p ISBN 0-670

"Using new information available in the future war will be the objective. . . . conditions, an industry plan." (Library J)

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A Reverent "Wow"

**THIS HOUSE OF SKY:  
LANDSCAPES OF A WESTERN  
MIND,** by Ivan Doig, Harcourt Brace  
Jovanovich, 1978, 314 pages, \$9.95.

Reviewed by Mary Abrams,  
AAUW Staff.

How easy it is to write critical reviews. Witty phrases of dismissal leap to mind when one reads a book that offends, resorts to cliché, disappoints one's expectations. Words venture forth more timidly in the face of searching honesty and flawless insight, crystallized in language that is all but poetry.

"We came up over the crest and were walled to a stop. The western skyline before us was filed with a steel-blue army of mountains, drawn in battalions of peaks and reefs and gorges and crags as far along the entire rim of the earth as could be seen. Summit after summit bladed up thousands of feet as if charging into the air to strike first at storm and lightning, valleys and cliffs chasmed wide as if split and hollowed by thunderblast upon thunderblast." The only appropriate response to this kind of writing may be a reverent "Wow!"

The reader can learn a number of useful things from Ivan Doig's account of growing up in the Montana countryside, including how to write an autobiography. The lank, wind-scrubbed taste of a small Montana town precariously holding off the 20th century is here preserved for the historians. Practical matters of scrabbling a year-to-year living on skill, cruel labor, and difficult hope are amply covered. Then, the book could serve as a perfect child-raising manual—demonstrating the effectiveness of responsibilities assigned, promises kept, and cherishing love bountifully given.

Following the tragic early death of Ivan's mother, his father (Charlie) determined to keep the six-year-old boy at his side. After five wandering years, Ivan's maternal grandmother, Bessie, joined the pair, in time forming a tightly knit family, gentling the pain of the mother's absence and raising the boy with all the love and care he needed.

Charlie's deep unity with the land and life of the prairie is reflected in Doig's singing descriptions of the Montana countryside; Bessie's rage for work, her instinctive need to make beautiful her corner of the universe, echoes in Doig's meticulous polishing of every phrase. The careful attention and gentle wisdom these two adults lavished on the growing boy is reinvested in this tribute to their lives.

These three people, a competent, unschooled, rough-handed man; a tough, energetic, cheerfully selfless older woman; and a thoughtful child/adult follow the Montana landscape, formed, battered, instructed, and nurtured by the difficult country they live in. *This House of Sky* is a living chronicle of their achievement. Every portrait is accurate, every phrase rings true, every need to know is satisfied. It is a book haunted by the ghost of the woman who died too young, the echo of a doomed way of life, and the sweeping wind and endless sky. ■

Now Hear This!

**FOR HER OWN GOOD: 150 YEARS  
OF THE EXPERT'S ADVICE TO  
WOMEN,** by Barbara Ehrenreich and  
Dierdre English, Anchor Press/Doubleday,  
1978, 292 pages, \$10.

Reviewed by Mary Abrams,  
AAUW Staff

There isn't much you can do about experts. They tend to pop up like mushrooms just when you think you have them mowed nearly down; they invade new and pristine areas of thought before the rest of us have time to investigate and form opinions of our own.

People of power and self-confidence refuse to be browbeaten, but during the 150 years chronicled by Ehrenreich and English, women's power was stolen and their self-confidence atrophied from underuse, leaving them fair game for anyone with an opinion to air on any topic. Obviously, since women were seen to be fearful, incompetent, confused, and grateful for guidance, a general ordering-about was not only fun and profitable for the experts, but a valuable service to the hapless orderer.

Ehrenreich and English trace, for instance, the history of expert advice on bringing up baby. The 20th century saw the end of the harsh, exploitative view of children as little economic assets to be trained for the workplace. In the early 1900s it was discovered that they arose in hope of the world, to be strictly brought up with charts and schedules, as future solid citizens. Then they became schooling monsters, whose nasty impulses must be firmly tamed, preferably before three months of age; metamorphosed rapidly into sweet lambs whose mothers must regress to infant level, surrounding them "twenty-four hours a day" with nurturant love, then into small pre-astronauts whose minds must be honed and sharpened while their bodies are being served (again by confused but willing Mom). Today's experts seem to view children as expensive luxuries, probably not worth the trouble, and very possibly fathered by demons. Only heroic women could be expected to weather these imperatives from on high, raise their children with love and firmness, and succeed in the project.

Conflicting messages have been aimed at women on every subject imaginable. Women's health (precarious), childbirth (a risky, pathological activity), sexuality (alternately rapacious and nonexistent), beauty (essential to happiness), housework (according to the authors an invention to "give the girls something to do"), marriage (prime responsibility of the female partner), to careers (now we have *Woman's Dress for Success*, written by a man) have all been lit by the wavering spotlight of expert opinion.

This is not just another "now look what they've done to us" book. It is the result of careful research and tremendous scholarship, and is written with elegance and humor. The greatest service the book will perform lies not just in the chronicling of facts but in the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from them. Any work that helps build women's confidence in their own good sense and a healthy skepticism about the advice they continually inspire can only be a boon to womankind. ■

Down with the Cookie Jar

**WOMEN AND MONEY,** by Mary  
Rogers, 1978, San Francisco Book Co. \$7.95

Reviewed by Julia Montgomery Walsh. Julia Walsh is president of her own investment firm, Julia M. Walsh & Sons, Inc., and is a trustee of the AAUW Educational Foundation.

In her preface to *Women and Money*, Mary Rogers writes, "It is my hope that this book will prevent any woman from find-

San Francisco  
Chronicle  
1/28/79

## PAPERBACK BEST SELLERS

- 1 **THE WOMEN'S ROOM**, by Marilyn French. A woman's rough road to liberation: fiction.
- 2 **MY MOTHER-MY SELF**, by Nancy Friday. A discussion of the mother-daughter relationship.
- 3 **THE INSIDERS**, by Rosemary Rogers. TV anchorwoman in the jungles of Los Angeles and New York: fiction.
- 4 **COMING INTO THE COUNTRY**, by John McPhee. Alaska, the last frontier.
- 5 **THE BLACK MARBLE**, by Joseph Wambaugh. Cops and dognappers in Southern California: fiction.
- 6 **OLIVER'S STORY**, by Erich Segal. Tearless, well-meaning sequel to "Love Story": movie tie-in.
- 7 **FIREFOX**, by Craig Thomas. A Yankee sets out to steal a Russian superplane: fiction.
- 8 **CENTENNIAL**, by James A. Michener. Colorado from pre-history to the present day: basis of the current TV series.

*New York Times*

# One Man's West

By *W.H. Hutchinson*

**W**HAT Ivan Doig has done in "This House of Sky" (Harcourt Brace; \$9.95) is tantamount to restoring quicksilver spilled on the floor to its original mass of shimmering beauty. It is a beauty not of formal lines, planes and edges, but one of life and death and warmth and sorrow and the inevitable abrasions and contusions with which all lives, at

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# The Montana School of Mystery W

BY ARCHIE SATTERFIELD  
P-I Book Editor

**B**ACK IN the 1950s when nothing else was happening, there came out of Montana a literary storm named Leslie Fiedler, a teacher at the University of Montana in Missoula who found sexual connotations in all American literature. Fiedler found homosexual overtones in "Huckleberry Finn" and racial overtones elsewhere we might have missed on the first reading.

Fiedler eventually left the university and headed east to stir the stagnant waters back there, and was replaced by Richard Hugo, who in turn started attracting more writers to the university. If they didn't come to teach, they came to hang out with sympathetic writers.

The newcomers found a place accustomed to writers and critics. Dorothy Johnson, author of such Western classics as "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," "The Hanging Tree," "A Man Called Horse," and several other great stories, was teaching in the school of journalism. Madeline DeFreis was there writing poetry and teaching it with Hugo, and A.B. Guthrie Jr. was always there, writing novels steadily on the heels of his Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Big Sky"

Into this easy-going but productive atmosphere came William Kittredge, a former rancher from Southern Oregon who wrote several superb stories about his ranch background that were published as a collection by the University of Missouri Press. Kittredge and Hugo, the sage of White Center, form the nucleus of what has become the Missoula gang as compared with the Livingston gang where Thomas McGuane, Richard Brautigan, William Hjortsberg and a few others hang out with Peter Fonda. Jim Harrison,

whose trilogy of short novels, "Legends of the Fall," is being published to great praise in Esquire, is also a part-time member of the Livingston crowd.

"There's no antagonism or jealousy between the two groups," Kittredge said recently in a telephone interview. "They live there and we live here. That's about all there is to it."

Kittredge and Steven M. Krauzer have co-edited three anthologies in paperback for New American Library, "The Great American Detective," "Great Action Stories," and "Stories into Film," due this year.

The detective story appears to be the most popular genre for the Missoula writers. Jon A. Jackson has a new one out called "The Blind Pig," a police detective story set in Detroit, and James Crumley's private-eye novel, "The Last Good Kiss," has been called the best such novel since Raymond Chandler.

Crumley was teaching at the University of Montana when Kittredge appeared on the scene. Crumley, a restless sort as shown in his new novel, left the university and Kittredge took his place. Kittredge and the others delight in comparing the wild poet, Abraham Trehearne, with either Richard Hugo or the late Theodore Roethke, or both.

Trehearne is big and shambling, and has a limp, which links him to Hugo, and his sense of humor is wild and unpredictable, as was Roethke's. The novel, which is being made into a film, is dedicated to Hugo.

Writers have a way of showing up in Montana and being welcomed by other writers. Now there are around 30 in the area, Kittredge said, and most are seriously at work on something. Nearly all have been published.

Kittredge is working on a novel now, and says he's determined to complete this one and get it published. "I'm tired of being a closet



The dust jacket for Doig's Montana men House of Sky, was to be included in the S Illustrators' annual jubilation. The painting Bacon will be included society's annual book best illustrations.

novelist," he said, laughing. His previous stories dealing with ranch life have told of elderly cowboys, the growing pains of young ranch hands, all told in clear, direct prose with a lyrical touch. They are available from the University of Missouri Press in a collection called "The Van Gogh Field and Other Stories." When asked why there were so many writers in the Missoula area write mysteries and detective stories, Kittredge had a ready answer:

"I think most writers went through the experimental stage of the 1960s, and have backed off it looking for a 'box' to put their stories into. The mystery format is excellent for this. You can go almost any direction you want with it."

Kittredge became an anthologist almost by accident. A former student went to work for New American Library as an editor, and told Kittredge of a series he was editing on great American genre stories. He asked if Kittredge was interested.

Kittredge joined forces with Steve Krauzer, and they've produced the

three anthologies thus far. Krauzer has taught and done a variety of jobs around Missoula to keep himself going while writing.

"Steve survives on endless odd-jobs," Kittredge said with a touch of wonder. "He's kept afloat four years doing them. He pops up all over campus doing totally unrelated jobs. I don't have the courage to survive that way, but Steve thrives on it."

The university has become well known for its writing program and encouraging atmosphere, Kittredge said. Students from all over the country apply to the school, and writers wander in and out of town, speak to writing classes and hang around the taverns where writers hang out after classes.

Montana is one of the few states that can offer college courses on the literature of the state. Kittredge believes there are about a half dozen key books on Montana, beginning with Guthrie's "Across the Wide Missouri" and going through James Welch's "Winter of the Blood" and up to Ivan Doig's "This House of Sky."



# National Book Awards Announce Nominations

By HERBERT MITGANG

John Irving's "The World According to Garp" and John Cheever's "The Stories of John Cheever" are competing for a major book prize for the second time this year. In January, the National Book Critics Circle declared Mr. Cheever the winner, with Mr. Irving the runner-up in fiction. And on April 23 the winners of the National Book Awards will be named.

Nominations in seven fields for the National Book Awards have been announced. They include best sellers as well as a surprising number of university press titles (nine out of 35 nominees) that have received little notice up to now. The university presses are Cornell, Texas, Tennessee, Johns Hopkins, Yale, California (two books) and Oxford (two books).

Several books nominated by the National Book Critics Circle that were acclaimed by reviewers and in the marketplace were omitted by the National Book Award judges. In fiction, those excluded were Mary Gordon's "Final Payments," John Updike's "The Coup" and Charles Simmons's "Wrinkles," and in nonfiction, Theodore H. White's "In Search of History" and Barbara W. Tuchman's "A Distant Mirror."

### Winners Get \$1,000

This will be the 30th annual National Book Awards honoring literary distinction. They are sponsored by the Association of American Publishers. Prize-winners receive \$1,000 and, often more important, a first or second life for their books.

These are the nominees and judges,

who will also pick the winners. All the books came out in 1978.

**FICTION:** John Cheever, "The Stories of John Cheever"; John Irving, "The World According to Garp"; Diane Johnson, "Loving Low"; Tim O'Brien, "Going After Cacciato"; David Plante, "The Family."

Judges: Alison Lurie, Mary Lee Settle, Wallace Stegner.

**BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY:** Donald Hall, "Remembering Poets"; William Manchester, "American Caesar"; William M. Murphy, "Prodigal Father"; Phyllis Rose, "Woman of Letters"; Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "Robert Kennedy and His Times."

Judges: Fawn Brodie, John Clive, Justin Kaplan.

**CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:** Lloyd Alexander, "The First Two Lives of Lukas-Kasha"; Vera and Bill Cleaver, "Queen of Hearts"; Sid Fleischman, "Humbug Mountain"; Paula Fox, "The Little Swineherd and Other Tales"; Katherine Paterson, "The Great Gilly Hopkins."

Judges: Eleanor Cameron, Robert Coles, Priscilla Moxom.

**CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT:** Kenneth E. Boulding, "Stable Peace"; Ivan Doig, "This House of Sky"; Alfred Kazin, "New York Jew"; Peter Matthiessen, "The Snow Leopard"; Meyer Schapiro, "Modern Art."

Judges: Michael Arlen, Kenneth B. Clark, Joyce Carol Oates.

**HISTORY:** Reinhard Bendix, "Kings or People"; Gordon A. Craig, "Germany 1866-1945"; Richard Beale Davis, "Intellectual Life in the Colonial South"; John H. White Jr., "The American Railroad Passenger Car"; Garry Wills, "Inventing America."

Judges: James H. Billington, Shelby Foote, Robin Winks.

**POETRY:** Robert Hayden, "American Journal"; Sandra McPherson, "The Year of Our Birth"; James Merrill, "Mirabell"; Philip Schultz, "Like Wings"; May Swenson, "New and Selected Things Taking Place."

Judges: Elizabeth Bishop, Michael S. Harper, Anthony Hecht.

**TRANSLATION:** Jonathan Chaves, "Pilgrim



Shyla Irving

John Irving

of the Clouds" by Yuan Hung-tao; Clayton Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia, "The Complete Posthumous Poetry" by César Vallejo; June Guicharnaud, "The Horse of Pride" by Pierre-Jakez Hélias; Richard Howard, "A Lover's Discourse" by Roland Barthes; Reynolds Price, "A Palpable God: 30 Stories From the Bible."

Judges: Richard Miller, Alastair Reid, Eliot Weinberger.



## Pollini Pairs Usual and Unusual.

No. 22 is a less important work, to be sure, but an interesting one, nonetheless. Mr. Pollini played it tensely and intensely. But his work in the "Appassionata" — either because he was warmed up by then or because he knew it better — was of an entirely different and higher order.

This "Appassionata" was really passionate, even in the troubled, urgent shaping of the slow movement. But it wasn't the warm, expansive passion of a Rubinstein; this was playing almost frightening in its fury. And technically, it was the work of a genuine virtuoso.

The word "virtuoso" suggests 19th-century hamminess. After the intermission Mr. Pollini turned to the 19th century, all right, but to the 19th century of the late Liszt. In other words, to

This is music that is increasingly popular these days among the more intellectual artists — remember Pierre Boulez's extensive Liszt with the New York Philharmonic a few years back? — and one can hear why. Mr. Pollini delivered about the most convincing account this listener has heard yet.

And to cap it all, there was music by Mr. Boulez himself, in the form of his Sonata No. 2 of 1948. Partly because of Mr. Boulez's own fearsome intellectuality, this music has usually been approached by analysts on technical terms, as part of the composer's evolution of "total Serialism." But Mr. Pollini's account of the piece was so exact and so passionate — that word again — that one could appreciate it on a whole other level. In this performance, Mr. Boulez's music became an extreme and

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# Nominations for Book Awards Told

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE 3/19/79

New York

Nominees for the 1979 National Book Awards were announced yesterday.

Three judge panels in each of seven categories will meet April 23 to select the winners. The categories, authors and nominated books are:

## Biography and Autobiography

Donald Hall, "Remembering Poets: Reminiscences and Opinions"

William Manchester, "American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964"

William M. Murphy, "Prodigal Father: The Life of John Butler Yeats (1839-1922)."

Phyllis Rose, "Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf."

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "Robert Kennedy and His Times."

## Children's Literature

Lloyd Alexander, "The First Two Lives of Lukas-Kasha."

Vera and Bill Cleaver, "Queen of Hearts."

Sid Fleischman, "Humbug Mountain."

Paula Fox, "The Little Swineherd and other Tales."

Katherine Paterson, "The Great Gilly Hopkins."

## Contemporary Thought

Kenneth E. Boulding, "Stable Peace."

Ivan Doig, "This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind."

Alfred Kazin, "New York Jew."

Peter Matthiessen, "The Snow Leopard."

Meyer Schapiro, "Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries."

## Fiction

John Cheever, "The Stories of John Cheever."

John Irving, "The World According to Garp."

Diane Johnson, "Lying Low."

Tim O'Brien, "Going After Cacciato."

David Plante, "The Family."

## History

Reinhard Bendix, "Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule."

Gordon A. Craig, "Germany 1866-1945."

Richard Beale Davis, "Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763."

John H. White Jr., "The American Railroad Passenger Car."

Garry Wills, "Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence."

## Poetry

Robert Hayden, "American Journal."

Sandra McPherson, "The Year of our Birth."

James Merrill, "Mirabell: Books of Number."

Philip Schultz, "Like Wings."

May Swenson, "New & Selected Things Taking Place."

## Translation

Jonathan Chaves, "Yuan Hung-tao's Pilgrim of the Clouds: Poems and Essays From Ming China."

Clayton Eshleman and Jose Rubia Barcia, "Cesar Vallejo's The Complete Posthumous Poetry."

June Guicharnaud, "Pierre-Jakez Helias' The Horse of Pride: Life in a Breton Village."

Richard Howard, "Roland Barthes' A Lover's Discourse: Fragments."

Reynolds Price, "A Palpable God: Thirty Stories from the Bible With an Essay on the Origins and Life of Narrative."

Associated Press



Jones New York  
is  
Spring '79

A delightful buff beige silk and linen blend to herald Spring. Belted, shawl collar jacket, \$89. Slim, slit skirt, \$47. Cotton mandarin neck blouse in lavender or olive,

Grodin

San Francisco: Stockton/Market,  
Embarcadero & Stonestown,  
also at Kaiser Center and Northgate

# of Books

extinguisher when his house is burning, "it doesn't matter whether the label uses the word fire, flame, or combustion." Such a frantic reader just wants to know what to do.

In the other kind of reading, esthetic reading, "the reader focuses attention on what is being lived through during the reading, what is being stirred up in him, the rhythm of the words and the past experiences those words call up." Using the "cues" provided by the author's words, the reader "constructs the experience, and more and more gets built into it as he reads on.

"There is no such thing as a vicarious experience" in esthetic reading, Rosenblatt said. "Reading can be a real experience, an experience different than the author's."

Generally, she said, students are "immediately pushed into efferent reading, without having the opportunity to live through the experience."

If teachers want to determine whether students have indeed read an assigned work, they shouldn't test on "a

few facts," they should ask questions that "encourage students to develop the courage and self-respect to have esthetic experiences."

Examples of such questions would be: "What puzzled you? What stirred you?"

Students, who "look at TV all the time," should be encouraged to "take a text and make your own movie, because that's what you're doing when you read esthetically."

Rosenblatt discusses her theories more fully in a new book entitled "The Reader, the Text, the Poem," and in an older book (now in paperback) entitled "Literature as Exploration."

Literature, she said here, should "be part of the general culture, not something savored by an elite.

"For a youngster to wait for a teacher or professor to tell him what literature's about is like having someone else eat his dinner for him and then tell him how fine the meal was," she said.

## ation Battle Goes On

winner. The small company will slowly take the conglomerate's authors and their momentum to build its own house by its own rules."

Godine's prediction is worth listening to because he has established himself as one of the best publishers in the country with a small list each year, but an excellent one with great attention to design and production. Unfortunately, many authors write for money because it takes money to buy the necessities of life, and while we watch the major publishers swing more and more toward the books that sell the most copies (which are seldom the books that last beyond one reading), we can expect writers to try and write what the publishers will buy and promote heavily.

Fortunately, there will always be a few authors and publishers who produce books of lasting value, knowing nobody is going to get rich in the process. The problem is finding those books among the stacks of disposable books that litter the stores and take up all the exhibit space with posters, banners and the like.

On the same subject, smaller presses that is, the Committee of

Small Magazine Editors and Publishers (COSEMP), an international association with more than 1,000 members in this country, will hold its conference this year at Port Townsend July 23-27.

According to Bill Wilkins, publisher of Nitty Gritty out of Pasco, there are more than 3,000 small publishers in the country, most with circulations under 5,000, who are producing some of the most important writing today.

The conference will have numerous workshops in all phases of writing and publishing, and will feature writers such as Jack Cady, John Pyros, Susan Landgraf, Richard Morris, and printer-publishers Tree Swensen and Sam Hamill of Copper Canyon Press.

Cost of the conference is \$85 which includes the workshops, dormitory room and board, disco dancing, readings, softball, volleyball, a wine tasting party and all the conversation you want. For information: Bill Wilkins, Nitty Gritty Magazine, 331 West Bonneville, Pasco, WA 99301, phone 509-547-5525.

It has been a great season for Ivan Doig. His first trade book (he wrote

some anthologies earlier), "This House of Sky," his memoirs of growing up in Montana, has been reviewed favorably in virtually every publication in the land and has sold very well. It has won some additional notice by being selected for specialized reading lists.

Now it has been nominated for a National Book Award in the contemporary thought category. Other books in the same category are "Stable Peace," by Kenneth E. Boulding, "New York Jew," by Alfred Kazin, "The Snow Leopard" by Peter Matthiessen and "Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries" by Meyer Schapiro.

The winners will be announced at a banquet in Carnegie Hall April 23.

So far no Pacific Northwest author has won the NBA, although David Wagoner and Ruth Kirk have been nominated in recent years. Perhaps the joke back there that the West will win one this year (the west side of Manhattan Island), won't apply.

"Hanta Yo," the Indian "Roots" novel written by Ruth Beebe Hill of San Juan Island, is hanging in there on the best-seller lists. New York Times list has it in fourth place this week.

## Young Readers

Quickly

"Tattoo," a collection of writing by Jack Cady of Port Townsend (Circinatum Press, P. O. Box 99309, Tacoma 98499, \$5.75) is a representative selection of essays and stories, the first Cady collection since his award-winning volume, "The Burning" of 1972.

From an appreciative essay on James Jones, to a sensitive tribute to a much-loved aunt and an introspective piece on the pleasure of driving a tractor-trailer rig, in which the author also reflects on transcendental philosophy and philosophers (Emerson, Thoreau), Cady portrays the contemporary American scene, filtered through his own experiences.

His descriptions of driving are sensual as he responds to the smells, sounds and sights of the equipment:

"There is a great hand of wind pushing the mirrors. There is thunder in the stacks. Bounce, thrust, kick of the van which is laying 2,000 square feet of aluminum sail against any quartering wind. Thump and hum of 10/

22 tires, the song of nylon and weight; power wailing like the hammers of hell as overdrive comes singing in and you smash 30 tons down a narrowing road that is silver in vivid moonlight."

Ivan Doig, author of "This House of Sky," speaking at the midwinter banquet of the Pacific Northwest Writers Conference, stressed the importance of making writing a full-time career ("There are no part-time brain surgeons," he said); urged writers to demand professional standards of pay, and advised them to assume full responsibility for their work.

"Believe in it," he said, "even when it is rejected. The first publishers I sent my manuscript to wanted the format changed from memoir to novel. They said the memoir of an unknown, ordinary person, wouldn't sell. Fortunately I didn't know that and insisted on keeping it a memoir. Eventually it was accepted and the first printing of 15,000 copies already has sold out."

Dorothy Smith's "A Handbook for the Citizen Lobbyist in State Legislatures" (Madrona Publishers, \$4.95 paperback), may be the tool you need to help you light a fire under a state legislator. Knowing how to win the attention of a legislator is an important step toward getting political action. The book is available or can be ordered at all bookstores. The author is a practicing lobbyist for a number of organizations.

"Iron Country" edited by Floyce Alexander (Copper Canyon Press, price unlisted) is a collection of poetry and prose by 25 Washington writers. The work was selected from more than 720 entries in a writing competition and the book was funded by the Pierce County Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (C. E. T. A.) Artist Program. For further information contact the Civic Arts Commission, Room 1315 Medical Arts Building, 740 St. Helens Ave., Tacoma 98402.

Seattle Times 4-22-79

## Booksellers honor four local authors

The Pacific Northwest Bookseller's Association last night selected four Northwest authors for 1979 literary awards.

They are Ivan Doig, "This House of Sky"; Blaine Johnson, "What's Happenin'?"; Vonda McIntyre, "Dreamsnake," and Barry Lopez, "Of Wolves and Men."

The Ken Boyle Award for outstanding contributions to the understanding and appreciation of the Pacific Northwest was presented to Richard Hugo, poet and author, director of creative writing at the University of Montana.

The association, which represents members in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska and Montana, held its annual spring banquet last night at the Doubletree Inn.

# The year's most honored American writers are coming to Carnegie Hall.

The 35 nominees, in seven categories, for  
the 1979 National Book Awards

## FICTION

■ **John Cheever**/*The Stories of John Cheever*/Alfred A. Knopf ■ **John Irving**/*The World According to Garp*/E. P. Dutton/A Henry Robbins Book ■ **Diane Johnson**/*Lying Low*/Alfred A. Knopf ■ **Tim O'Brien**/*Going After Cacciato*/Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence ■ **David Plante**/*The Family*/Farrar, Straus & Giroux

## BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

■ **Donald Hall**/*Remembering Poets. Reminiscences and Opinions*/Harper & Row  
■ **William Manchester**/*American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964*/Little, Brown  
■ **William M. Murphy**/*Prodigal Father. The Life of John Butler Yeats (1839-1922)*/Cornell University Press ■ **Phyllis Rose**/*Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf*/Oxford University Press ■ **Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.**/*Robert Kennedy and His Times*/Houghton Mifflin Company

## POETRY

■ **Robert Hayden**/*American Journal*/Effendi Press ■ **Sandra McPherson**/*The Year of Our Birth*/The Ecco Press ■ **James Merrill**/*Mirabell. Books of Number*/Atheneum  
■ **Philip Schultz**/*Like Wings*/The Viking Press ■ **May Swanson**/*New & Selected Things Taking Place*/Atlantic/Little, Brown

## CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

■ **Kenneth E. Boulding**/*Stable Peace*/University of Texas Press ■ **Ivan Doig**/*This House of Sky. Landscapes of a Western Mind*/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich  
■ **Alfred Kazin**/*New York Jew*/Alfred A. Knopf ■ **Peter Matthiessen**/*The Snow Leopard*/The Viking Press ■ **Meyer Schapiro**/*Modern Art. 19th & 20th Centuries*/George Braziller, Inc

## HISTORY

■ **Reinhard Bendix**/*Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule*/University of California Press ■ **Gordon A. Craig**/*Germany 1866-1945*/Oxford University Press  
■ **Richard Beale Davis**/*Intellectual Life in the Colonial South 1585-1763*/University of Tennessee Press ■ **John H. White, Jr.**/*The American Railroad Passenger Car*/Johns Hopkins University Press ■ **Garry Wills**/*Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*/Doubleday & Co.

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

■ **Lloyd Alexander**/*The First Two Lives of Lukas-Kasha*/E. P. Dutton ■ **Vera and Bill Cleaver**/*Queen of Hearts*/J. B. Lippincott Company ■ **Sid Fleischman**/*Humbug Mountain*/illustrations by Eric von Schmidt/Atlantic/Little, Brown ■ **Paula Fox**/*The Little Swineherd and Other Tales*/illustrations by Leonard Lubin/E. P. Dutton/A Henry Robbins Book ■ **Katherine Paterson**/*The Great Gilly Hopkins*/Thomas Y. Crowell Company

## TRANSLATION

■ **Jonathan Chaves**/*Yuan Hung-tao/Pilgrim of the Clouds: Poems and Essays from Ming China*/John Weatherhill, Inc. ■ **Clayton Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia**/*César Vallejo/The Complete Posthumous Poetry*/University of California Press  
■ **June Guicharnaud**/*Pierre-Jakez Hélias/The Horse of Pride: Life in a Breton Village*/Yale University Press ■ **Richard Howard**/*Roland Barthes/A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*/Hill and Wang ■ **Reynolds Price**/*A Palpable God: Thirty Stories Translated from the Bible with an Essay on the Origins and Life of Narrative*/Atheneum

## THE 1979 NATIONAL BOOK AWARDS

### □ 30th ANNIVERSARY

Awards to be presented at Carnegie Hall on April 25, 1979, Dick Cavett,  
Master of Ceremonies, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Speaker



Sponsored by the Association of American Publishers and Its General Publishing Division

## State Authors Honored

### P-I Olympia Bureau

**OLYMPIA** — Authors of the top books published by Washington residents were honored yesterday at the 14th annual governor's Writer's Day.

Recognized for outstanding books were Tony Angel, Seattle, for his book "Ravens, Magpies and Jays;" Ivan Doig, Seattle, for "This House of Sky;" Martha Kingsbury, Seattle, for "Northwest Traditions: Seattle Art Museum," and Roger Sale, Seattle, for his book "Fairy Tales and After: From Snow White to E.B. White."

Gov. Dixy Lee Ray presented the awards and spoke to the assembled authors in the State Library.

George Tsutakawa, Seattle, received a special award for his sumi drawings in Judy Geise's cookbook, "The Northwest Kitchen."

Among other authors honored were:

Tess Gallagher, Port Townsend, for "Under Stars," a collection of her poems; Ernest K. Gann, Friday Harbor, for "A Hostage to Fortune;" Ruth Kirk, Tacoma, and Richard D. Daugherty, Pullman, for "Exploring Washington Archeology;" Alan E. Nourse, North Bend, for "The Practise;" Moritz Thomsen, Ecuador, for "The Farm on the River of Emeralds," and Todd Walton, Santa Cruz, Calif., for "Inside Moves."

# 'House of Sky' Nominated for National Book Award

WITH HIS FIRST BOOK hitting bestseller and Book-of-the-Month Club lists, reviewed with extensive quotes in *Time* magazine and scheduled for paperback next year, Ivan Doig '69 has received the ultimate honor for a new author: his book, *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind*, was nominated this spring for a National Book Award.

Doig hasn't been getting much rest on his laurels, however; already he's well into his next book. Like *House of Sky*, it is first-person nonfiction, but this time the setting is the Pacific Northwest, largely Puget Sound country and the Olympic Peninsula. And it goes back in time further than *Sky*—back to the life and times of James Swan, "a scholarly Doc Maynard" who came to Willapa Bay in 1852 and, until he died in Port Townsend in 1900 at the age of 82, kept virtually a day-to-day diary. "With an occasional gap for a 'drunk,'" adds Doig. "He liked to drink, too, but not as much as Maynard."

How does one go about writing a first-person account of another man's life? Doig laughed. "Well, it's not a straight biography." That figures. His first book, which was autobiographical, received its National Book Award nomination not in the Biography but in the "Contemporary Thought" category.

Doig's books just don't fit into categories. Neither, for that matter, does their author. He spent his academic life preparing to be a journalism professor, got experience in the field, a Ph.D., a job offer from one of the Big 10—then turned it down and opted for the precarious life of a free-lancer.

Doig laughed in recalling that his publishers, too, had trouble trying to fit his new book into a neat category. At the time they accepted his *House of Sky* manuscript ("with almost no revisions"), he was asked, "What are you working on now?" and told them what he had in mind. "When the time came to sign the contract for it," Doig said, "their advertising and publicity directors were at the table with us as I explained what I was writing. They looked more and more baffled as they tried to characterize it. After a



Author Ivan Doig  
Now at work on his next

between genres; don't worry about it' — and we signed the contract, still not knowing what to call it."

THE NEW BOOK IS Doig's "journey into the life of another man," and it begins last December 20. (His working title is *Winter Brothers: A Season at the Edge of America*.) Having immersed himself in Swan's massive array of diaries, he spent this past winter going back to the Olympic Peninsula and retracing Swan's life. The journey took him back and forth up and down Puget Sound and across the Strait

Why James Swan — teacher, writer and comparatively obscure government official who never came down in history as one of the big-name pioneers?

"I first became aware of him some years ago," Doig said, "when my interest was caught by a piece by George Quimby (Burke Museum director) in *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* on Swan's influence on Indian art. Swan was the first teacher for the Makahs after they went on the reservation. He was somewhat of an artist himself, and while he was at Neah Bay the Indians asked him for figures. He was the one who introduced them to the exotic non-Indian things (dragons and griffins) that showed up in their art.

"When I finally got *House of Sky* out of my system, I began thinking about him again. He never attained any elective office above probate judge in Port Townsend . . . or made much money. Money burned a hole in his pocket. If he had settled in Seattle, he might have been one of our cherished eccentrics like Doc Maynard."

BUT HE DID LEAVE forty years' worth of diaries, written virtually day by day. "A million and a half words!" said Doig. "That's *War and Peace* and a half! He wrote one book also, and a number of magazine articles. As a writer I look on that as quite a life's output — particularly for a guy with not much means of support other than minor bureaucrat jobs."

Doig is still in the process of reading "all that," but "it will be read." He has also researched Swan's life before he came to the Northwest. As a young ship's outfitter in Massachusetts Swan had been sent by his employers to Britain. He was in London at about the time Dickens was beginning to write. Doig not only traced Swan back to Massachusetts but has just spent the month of April in Britain.

With his explorations done, and his first draft written, he is now rewriting. The first 100 pages are due at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich the first of June, the completed manuscript by the end of this year. The book will be in print by the fall of 1980 — just two



THIS HOUSE OF SKY: LANDSCAPES OF A WESTERN MIND, by Ivan Doig. (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1978. 314 pp. \$9.95).

Ivan Doig, who is still in his thirties, has written his autobiography. His sparkingly-written book details his growing up in a series of sheepcamps and three-saloon hamlets in western Montana. Painstakingly recalling his life following the death of his mother when he was six, Doig reveals his gradual discovery of how attached he was to his father and the mutuality of these feelings. Then Doig zips through the unhappy years of his father's brief and mismatched second marriage and the growing realization of father and son that the boy's maternal grandmother would have to serve as adopted wife and mother.

Most of the book recounts Doig's years before he left Montana to pursue a major in journalism at Northwestern University. A few pages are devoted to his marriage and his first positions as writer and editor. But other subjects intrigue Doig more than his education and his jobs. For, if the book opens with death, it also closes with death—those of his father (after a prolonged battle with emphysema) and his grandmother, whose powerful heart finally plays out. Just as Doig as a boy had been mystified with his mother's premature departure, so as an adult he is puzzled about how to cope with the leavetakings of his father and grandmother. Yet he fronts these new dilemmas and adjusts—as he has throughout his life. Few writers deal as movingly as Doig with impending death, its occurrence, and its impact on survivors.

Doig builds setting and scene as carefully as a kid at work on a giant ten-tier house of dominoes. As father, grandmother, and son traipse along the eastern reaches of the Rockies through such metropolises as White Sulphur Springs, Ringling, and Dupuyer, Doig sketches sharply-etched vignettes of these towns and their residents that are as memorable as the best portraits of Sherwood Anderson and E. A. Robinson.

Like a premier historian and poet, Doig comprehends the links between past and present. As chronicler, he cherishes the past, nourishing its memories as if they were eternal guides. As follower of Calliope, he poetically evokes the memories that shape his present. Indeed, he is not in time, nor outside it, but *with* time. As son of his father, as adopted son of his grandmother, as man of past and present, he lives as part and parcel of what he has inherited, and yet becomes his own man. The past continues to shape him even as he forges his individual identity.

Doig is also a word wizard who dexterously suits diction and feeling to character and place. He understands better than most interpreters of the western American experience how important form is to content. And he is interested in remembering—in adroitly rendering moments of memory and feeling. Doig knows his limits and those of his readers; he revs up our emotions, but he never jumps the governor to crash into crippling nostalgia and sentimentality.

Especially notable among Doig's numerous artistic gifts are his sinewy syntax and diction. His sentences march across his pages as smoothly and surely as a band of sheep following a dependable bell ewe. And from familiar nouns he creates new verbs so that his characters lesson, site, chore, and ruler. Indeed, attempting to summarize and analyze Doig's fresh and smoothly-written book is like trying to describe a Bierstadt landscape; too much escapes in the endeavor to summarize. Doig's book must not be experienced second hand; it must be read and savored.

For this half-breed, son-of-a-Basque-shepherd, *This House of Sky* smells of the sheep camp and recalls boyhood memories of being smeared with lanolin and thrown into a wool sack. For many Montanans the volume should provide a renewed sense of place and memory, for Doig provocatively "cultivates" his region. For all readers he proves that the open marriage of history and literature is the best union for producing superior regional writing. And make no mistake, this is a top-notch book, deserving of large attention. Should Doig continue to turn out volumes of value equal to this one, he will merit comparison with the best western writers.

RICHARD W. ETULAIN  
University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

October 1979

How long the two papers were able to continue the practice we do not know. Only one later *Sentinel* extra, issued on November 17, 1864, has been located. It carries a number, No. 79; if this was the 79th *Sentinel* extra published in 1864, the daily extra schedule did not last long. The only located *Intelligencer* extra is dated November 8, 1864, shortly before the paper expired.<sup>4</sup>

Other Oregon weekly newspapers also experimented with the daily extra innovation after the telegraph line arrived. Eugene *Review*, July 9, 1864: "We are under great obligation to the *Oregon Statesman* for latest dispatches on Extra slips during the week, giving news a day in advance of the *Oregonian*." The

*Statesman* experiment did not last long; it established a daily edition on July 20. The *Review* itself announced on April 28, 1865: "... hereafter . . . we shall issue an Extra every day, at \$1.00 per month, payable in advance." The paper moved to Salem in September. The *Statesman* suspended its daily edition in November 1864; seven surviving "Extra slips" published in April 1865 may be part of a second daily extra series. □

George N. Belknap is university editor emeritus, University of Oregon. He is author of *Oregon Imprints 1845-1870* and editor of an annotated edition of William L. Adams's 1852 *Treason, Stratagems, and Spoils*. Both books were pub-

lished in 1968. He has also published numerous articles on early Oregon printing in historical and bibliographical journals.

4. This conclusion is supported by extra plans announced in the January 23 *Intelligencer* in a report of the arrival of the telegraph line. The *Sentinel's* reconsideration late in April of the question of purchasing telegraphic news and issuing extras was perhaps forced by the fact that the *Intelligencer* had continued to buy the dispatches and had probably continued to issue extras. On March 12 the *Intelligencer* had been outraged by an item in the *San Francisco Journal*, which quoted the *Sentinel's* February 24 announcement (see note 3) but attributed it to the *Intelligencer*. The March 12 response is a bit vague in regard to extras; but the paper was still buying dispatches for publication in regular issues.

## Recent Books in Review

*This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind.* By IVAN DOIG. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978. 314 pp. \$9.95)

This is a truly exceptional book, in more than one respect. On the one hand, it is a beautifully composed memoir, a reminiscence and a tribute by the author to his family and his homeland. On the other, it is an evocative, insightful portrait of rural America in its last flowering, the 1940s and 1950s. Viewed in either context, *This House of Sky* is a major achievement—a notable contribution to western regional literature and a clear indication that Ivan Doig will join the ranks of other native Montana writers of distinction, such as A. B. Guthrie, Jr., and Norman Maclean.

Like Maclean, the author is Scottish in ancestry; and a strong, clannish sense of Scottish veneration of the family flows through these pages, as it does through Maclean's *A River Runs Through It*. Doig's book is essentially the story of the author's growing up, first in the Smith River Valley of central Montana, and then in the vicinities of the villages of Dupuyer and Valier to the north. Following the death of his mother at an early age, Doig was raised by his father, who was a ranch foreman, and his maternal grandmother. These two fascinating individuals, Charlie Doig and Bessie Ringer, are the central characters of the book, and the author describes them with an intimacy that is loving but not maudlin. Like the characters of Guthrie's screenplay for the movie *Shane*, they emerge in graphically sharp focus when viewed through the eyes of a youngster.

The most notable feature of this book, especially to the regional historian, is its depiction of rural life and rural people. Anyone who has grown up in small towns and on farms and ranches will immediately recognize the authenticity of Doig's descriptions: the overwhelming sweep of a large, harsh, and forbidding environment, the imaginative musings and games of a child living in isolation from his peers, the unique world of ranch hands and sheep herders, convivial cafes, stores, and saloons. He recalls, for example, a dedicated rural schoolteacher and a classroom exercise:

*Day after day we would troop to the blackboard to take apart sentences for her, phrases chalked to one another like scaffolding, being shown how a clause dovetailed here, an infinitive did the splicing there, the whole of it planed and beamed together as her pointer whapped through a reading of the revealed sentence. For her the language held holy force, and she shuddered at any squander of it. (p. 194)*

One completes this book with a rare sense of satisfaction—sure of its honesty, of the realness of the people and the genuineness of this slice of western history. The author has succeeded in rendering his own life experience and that of his family not only in a profoundly moving way, but in such an astute manner as to capture a regional spirit and life-style. Ivan Doig is currently at work on a "personal exploration of the past and present of the Pacific Northwest." If he can master that larger task with the sensitivity displayed in *This House of Sky*, it should be a book to anticipate. □

MICHAEL P. MALONE  
Montana State University

## Book Reviews

by Jill Vanneman

*This House of Sky:*  
*Landscapes of a Western Mind*

Ivan Doig

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$9.95

*Everything fights the child's ambitions — fences reach too high, streets reach too wide . . . Just so does life blaze and haunt around us before we learn we are sober creatures of civilization. Just so, when childhood itself has passed into the distance behind me, does my remembering of the thirty-year story that begins with my mother's last breath go on the way it was recklessly shaped in me then.*

SO begins Ivan Doig's autobiographical novel, *This House of Sky*, which traces his life in southwestern Montana from the time he was six in 1945 to the day of his grandmother's death 30 years later.

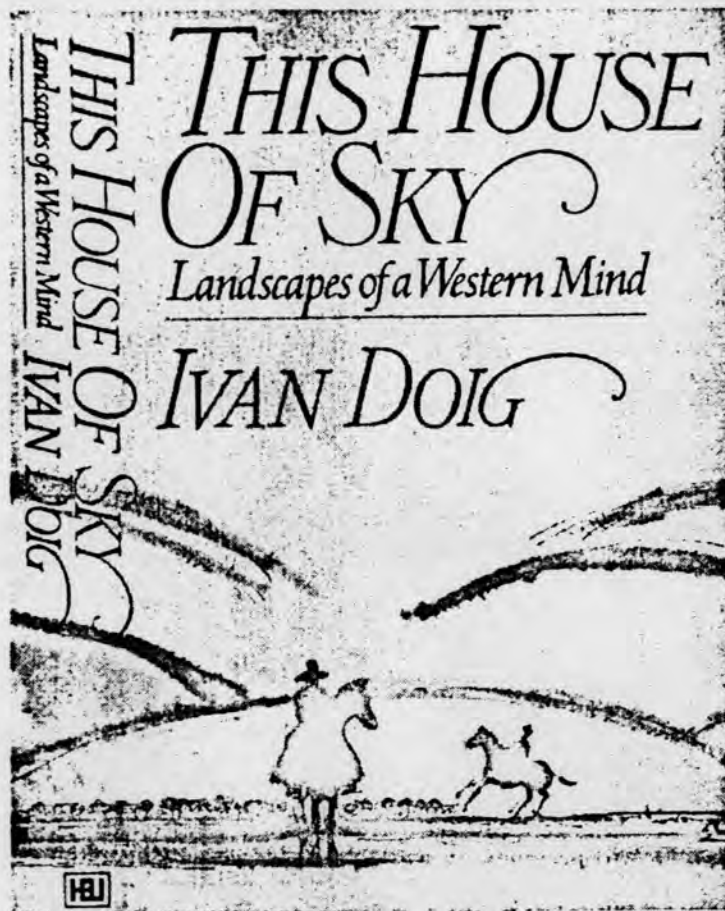
It is largely a narrative of Ivan's life with his father, a work-scarred ranch hand who spent most of his days riding out after cattle and sheep across the gray sage distances of the Smith River Valley.

Upon his mother's death, young Ivan becomes more like a partner than a son. "From whatever quarter it came, Dad took his decision about me. My boyhood would be the miniature of how he himself lived. That policy corded us together at once, twined us in the hours of riding to do all the prodding tasks of the ranch."

It is the timeless quality of Doig's first novel that sets it apart, reminding one of the timelessness of Thomas Wolfe's novels about his home town, such as *Look Homeward Angel*. As with Wolfe, memories play an important part in Doig's memoir. Combined with the straightforward tale, they give the sentences a lyrical flow.

Doig has captured the ranchman's qualities and language beautifully. "People who remember me at this age say I was something of a small sentinel: 'You always were such a little sobersides.'" Or he recalls how his father urged the horses through the Montana winter snow: "Hup there, Luck, get your heft into it . . . Pull a bit, damn ye, Bess . . . Up this rise, now, get yourself crackin' there."

The descriptions of his native Montana are perhaps the most lyrical — "I glance higher for some hint of the weather, and the square of air broadens and broadens to become the blue expanse over Montana



rangeland, so vast and vaulting that it rears, from the foundation-line of the plains horizon, to form the walls and roof of all of life's experience that my younger self could imagine, a single great house of sky."

The timeless quality best appears in the values handed down from Charlie Doig to son Ivan and in the ties Doig describes between himself, his father, and his grandmother, who comes to take care of the two of them and stays until her death. Doig makes the intangible qualities of love, family, independence and survival clear by etching their meanings poignantly in his own life. By doing so he has created a memorable novel. I look forward to his next book, which is to be about the Pacific Northwest.

View of Puget Sound

12 December 1979

→ Far removed from the hip, decadent worlds presented in the fictions of Mr. Maupin and Miss McFadden is the square, harsh but often beautiful world presented by Ivan Doig in his autobiography, *This House of Sky*—a book that is remarkable in a number of ways. It is remarkably well written. Mr. Doig's lyrical talents are considerable and, like most first rate autobiographers, he seems to have the faculty of total recall. He remembers his mother, who died when he was six, as having a "frail and porcelain look" and a "dainty way of arching her head forward as if listening to a whisper." He remembers, with like clarity, the eyes of his stepmother, who never got on with his father. "Her eyes," he writes, "were large and softly brown with what seemed to be some hurt beginning to happen behind them—the deep trapped look of a doe the instant before she breaks for cover." He remembers the lusty speech and stories of the Montana sheep ranchers he was raised with. Of June mosquitoes: "Bastards're so big this year they can stand flatfoot and drink out of a rain barrel." Of a politician who has just won a debating point: "Had a grin on him like a jackass eatin' thistles." Of a dumb ranch hand: "Send him to fetch a bucket of water and he'll bring it back upside down." He remembers the palpable loneliness of the tiny Montana towns he and his itinerant ranch hand father lived in during the 1930s and '40s—towns where there were

<sup>1</sup> THIS HOUSE OF SKY, *Landscapes of a Western Mind*, by Ivan Doig. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$9.95.

Hudson

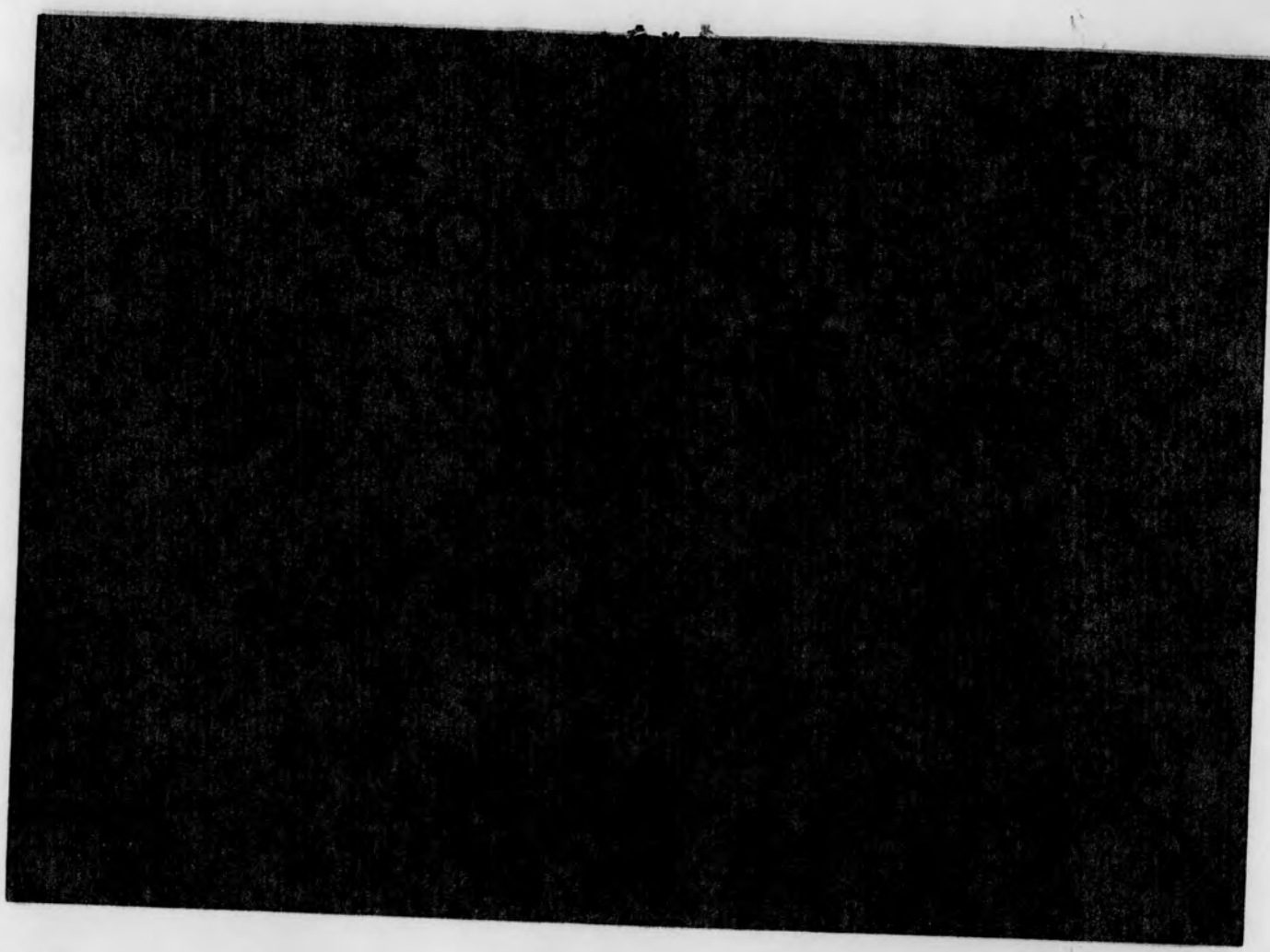
Review

Hudson  
Reviews

Dec. 1979

no other children, towns of "50 persons, almost all of them undreamably old to me," towns like Ringling which consisted of "a gas station, a post office, Mike Ryan's store, the depot, and exactly through the middle of town, the railroad tracks which glinted and *fled* [my italics] instantly in both directions." And he remembers the fierce cold of the Montana winters—winters when he lived in a small drafty bungalow with his seventy-year-old grandmother—winters when "mews of wind came sneaking under the sash" of his bedroom window and when, on some mornings after blizzards, the inside sill of that window would be covered with "tiny sifts white as spilled sugar."

More remarkable, though, than the quality of Mr. Doig's writing, is his ability to celebrate—without being sentimental or provincial or preachy—those traditional, middle class values which, as I said above, have taken such a drubbing for so long from the literary establishment: fidelity, self-sacrifice, hard work, deferred gratification, common sense, dependability, concern for the rights of others, desire for the good opinion of others, to mention a few. Though the characters Mr. Doig renders—especially those of his father and grandmother—are typically lower middle class in being suspicious of all pretentiousness, of all heroic posturing, they nevertheless emerge as heroic by embodying the above-mentioned values. They are heroic in the same way that some of the western characters in the early fictions of Wallace Stegner (that finest of novelists living in and writing about the American West) are heroic: to paraphrase one of Stegner's people, "Until an eastern writer explained to them that what they were doing was heroic, they had thought they were merely doing their duty."



The existence of THIS HOUSE OF SKY, and whatever merit the book may have, owes immensely to the libraries and librarians of this state. Without them, my story of western life, which is the near-story of countless of our people, in Washington as well as Montana, would not have come to print; nor would Washington have become the only state west of the continental divide to have one of its citizens nominated this year for the National Book Award in the prestigious category of Contemporary Thought. THIS HOUSE OF SKY, for which I gratefully accept your award, is full evidence that if our libraries are not funded to keep pace with today's flow of information, if our librarians are crippled by financial strictures, the lives of us all and the vigor of our of our state will be lessened. Thank you.

NEWSPAY

MARCH 23, 1980

"This House of Sky" by Ivan Doig (Harvest/HBJ, \$4.95). The "Landscapes of a Western Mind" referred to in the subtitle of this memoir are the mountains, plains and forests of rural Montana, where Ivan Doig was raised. In painterly prose, the author recreates wild hill country and shows the elemental power of this beautiful and mysterious land. Even though the literature of our continent abounds with memorable descriptions of particular environments, Doig's Montana has a vividness and believability that sets it apart.

If his remembrances of the land are good, his recalling of the people is even better. His father, an extraordinary little man with an enormous gift of gab, and his lovely ageless grandmother will seem more real to you than some of the people you see every day. The shepherders, farmers, drift-

ers and soldiers he encounters are defined against the outline of his own hard-won sense of self. This is deeply felt and finely crafted work, as good as you will find in any book of contemporary writing.

# Western author recalls growing up in Montana

By CHRISTENE MEYERS  
Of The Gazette Staff

Westerners are more at ease with space and the landscape than are their southern and eastern countrymen, observes author Ivan Doig.

"A Westerner will ask you where you're from," Doig says, "meaning where else in the West are you from."

"An Easterner will ask you what you do. "And a Southerner will ask you who your kin is."

Doig, in Montana for a library conference and at Eastern Montana College to discuss women in Western literature, is a native son come back for a visit.

His best selling book, "This House of Sky — Landscapes of a Western Mind," is rich with memories and images of his growing up in Montana. He shared some of his prose and additional anecdotes with a group of students, faculty and townspeople Tuesday afternoon on campus.

He talked about the single black family in White Sulphur Springs, of Rose Gordon,

the head of that family, a strong woman whom he admired.

"She wanted to be a doctor," Doig recalled, "and if you can think of greater odds than being black, a woman, and from a small early-day Montana town, then I don't know what they'd be."

Doig spent about an hour reading and discussing his own works, painting the same vivid pictures he put to print in his book.

He reminisced about his family and friends around White Sulphur Springs, about the sheepherders and characters of the small-town saloons, of the hired help in the valley ranches and of his grandmother, Bessie Ringler, whom he introduces a third of the way into his book:

"Sitting up in a railroad coach seat for a day, a night and another day, Bessie Ringler is jostled westward in the springtime of 1914."

Bessie went on to spend a winter in the Crazyes — and many more winters — and to become one of Doig's strongest influences.

She, and his father, Charlie, raised him after the death of his frail mother, overwhelmed

by the harshness of frontier life.

One of his letters from his grandmother, which he used in the book, was written while he was away at college at Northwestern:

"Is the grub there good? I sure hope so. We're glad you're getting to know your journalism advisor Professor Baldwin he sounds like a lot of help to you... Dad says to tell you we can get you a pair of bat wing shaps and a larial rope if it will help your studies. Your loving grandma."

Doig, who lives with his wife in Seattle, is working on another book, this one involves images, or "landscapes," as he calls them, of the area that is now his home — Seattle, Vancouver, the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

His wife, he says, has helped underwrite his efforts in order to enable him to devote full time to his writing.

"I tried magazine writing for a while," he says, "but I wasn't able to make it work financially."

His daily routine involves rising early, beginning work at about 7 a.m.

"By 9:30, I'd dearly love a cup of coffee

and some counter chat," he says, recalling Gertie Chadwick, another character in his book.

Gertie ran the local cafe, which he describes as "a truly humanizing institution, the fulcrum of life in the community, a truly stabilizing element all could count on."

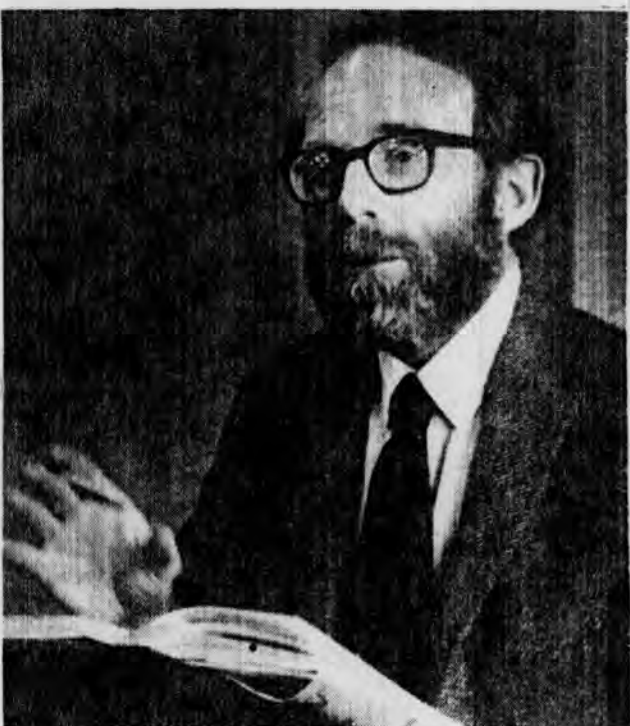
Gertie ran the cafe 364½ days a year, taking only Christmas afternoon off.

She, he believes, is typical of the hard-working spirit of the Western women who so strongly influenced his life.

And the spirit of the Western family, he hopes, will live on in new families in these same small Western towns.

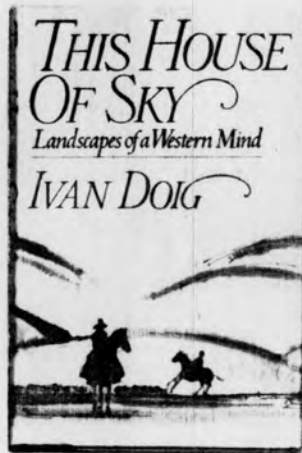
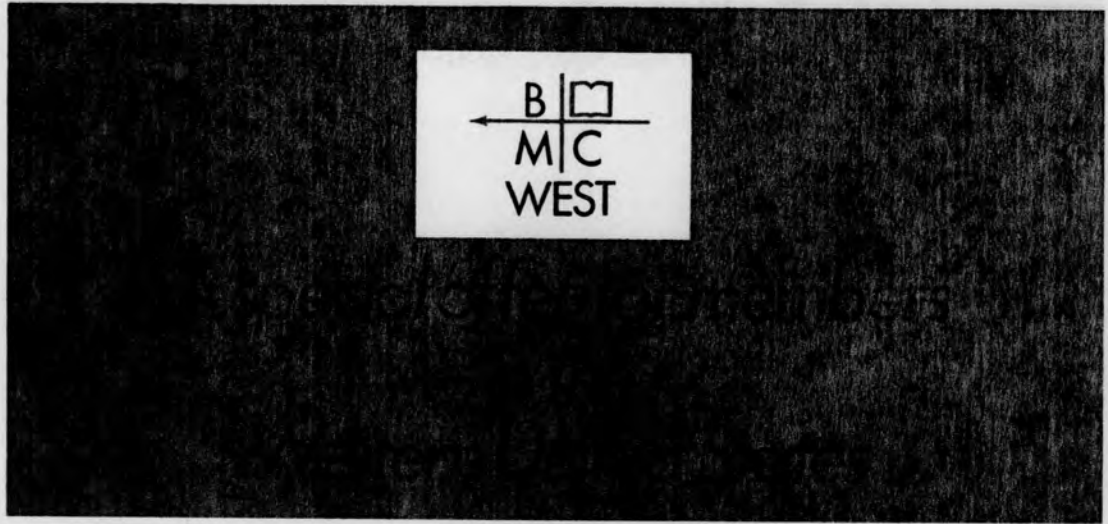
Spirit, hard work and humor grace the pages of his book and are reflected in a brief story he told Tuesday:

"I understand that my family would have quite a time at the dances in Ringling. They'd work hard all day, dress up for the party, dance until 3 or 4 a.m., then they'd stagger on home. But instead of going to bed for an hour or two of fitful sleep, they'd do the chores and then go to bed."



Gazette photo by William Tutokey

Author Ivan Doig reminisces at EMC



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*A highly praised memoir of growing up in the harsh and beautiful land of Montana...*

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**HONORS NIGHT PROGRAM**

**Academic Year 1983-1984  
Montana State University**

**June 8, 1984**



## PROGRAM

### Master of Ceremonies

Dr. Michael Malone, Dean of the College of Graduate Studies

### Recognition of the Montana State University Septemviri

Stuart L. Anderson, Bozeman	Shelly K. Onstad, Kalispell
Steven D. Daines, Bozeman	Dennis C. Wagner, Baker
Tamra L. DeRudder, Bridger	Robert Weinschrott, Billings

### Presentation of the Endowment and Alumni Foundation Graduate Achievement Awards

Mr. Alan Harmata, Bozeman      Mr. Randall Violett, Lothair

### Recognition of the 1984 Montana Committee for the Humanities Award Winners

Dr. Lynda Sexson      Dr. Michael Sexson      Dr. Richard Roeder

### Recognition of the Anna Kruger Fridley Distinguished Teaching Awards

Dr. Dean Drenk      Dr. Sara Jane Steen      Dr. William D. Hall

### Presentation of the Endowment and Alumni Foundation Charles and Nora Wiley Research Awards

Dr. Robert Brown	Dr. Gordon McFeters
Dr. Martin Hamilton	Dr. Gordon Pagenkopf

### Introduction of Montana State University President William J. Tietz

### Presentation of the Blue and Gold Awards

### Introduction of the Honorary Doctoral Degree Candidates

Mr. George Noe, Doctor of Engineering  
Mr. Richard Gray, Doctor of Science  
Dr. Ivan Doig, Doctor of Letters

## 1984 Montana State University Honors Lecture\*

Dr. Ivan Doig

### George Noe

A 1936 graduate of Montana State University and a native of Forsyth, Mr. Noe has lived in Australia for more than 40 years. According to a contemporary, his career is "almost a history of building and construction in Australia and the Southwest Pacific." His major accomplishment is the construction of the Sidney Opera House in 1972, now a worldwide landmark.

### Richard Gray

Founder of the Freshwater Biology Foundation in Minnesota, Mr. Gray has been a strong supporter of research at Montana State University. In 1980 he established the R.G. Gray endowed chair in biology, the first such designation on this campus. As a business leader and an advocate of the values of research, Mr. Gray has long demonstrated a deep concern for environmental matters.

### Ivan Doig

A Montana native, Dr. Doig has written several books, but his most critically acclaimed work is *This House of Sky*. The book is the story of his coming of age on a sheep ranch near White Sulphur Springs. Dr. Doig's most recent work, a novel set in the Choteau-Dupuyer area titled *English Creek*, is scheduled for publication next fall.

\*In 1983 MSU began the tradition of publishing the Annual Honors Lecture. We are pleased to make Dr. Doig's lecture the second in our series. It will be available by year's end.

AUTHOR OF BEST SELLING BOOK

# **THIS HOUSE OF SKY**

LANDSCAPE OF WESTERN MIND

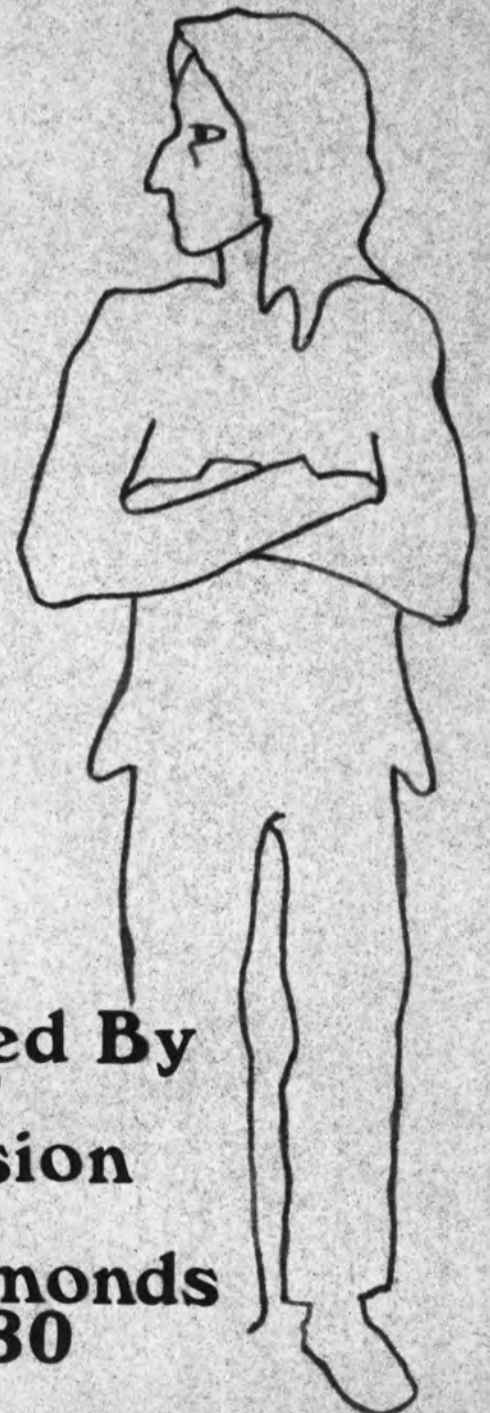
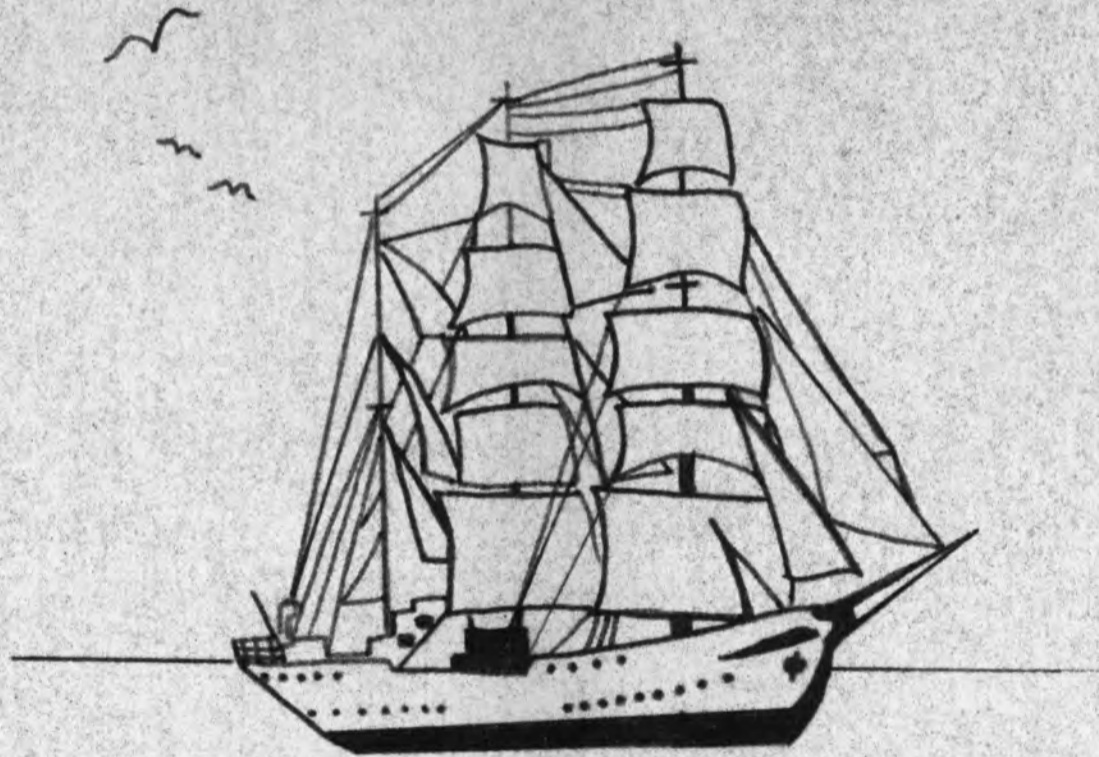
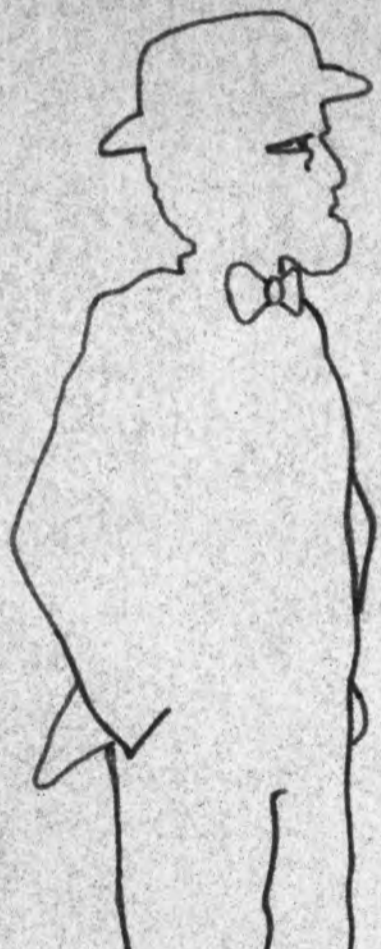
# IVAN DOIG

WILL DO READINGS FROM AND LECTURE ON

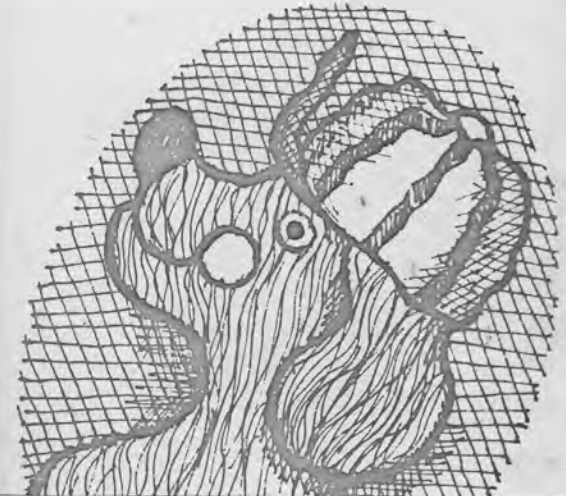
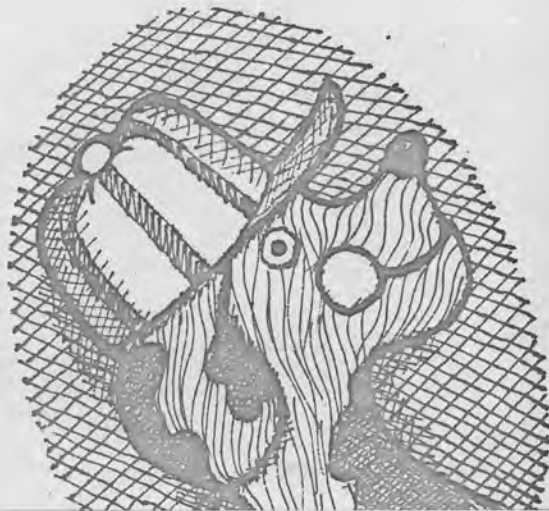
HIS SOON TO BE RELEASED

# **WINTER BROTHER**

A SEASON AT THE EDGE OF AMERICA



This Free Program Is Sponsored By  
Edmonds Arts Commission &  
Washington State Arts Commission  
At The  
Wade James Theater 950 Main, Edmonds  
8:00pm Wednesday, April, 16, 1980



## Where a southpaw is really a south paw

By Ivan Doig

THE stands of Wrigley Field threateningly silent all around me, I swing desperately at the baseball. It bloop into center field, my fifth lazy little fly ball in a row.

I stomp toward second base, my 32-ounce bat trenching a grim trail across the infield grass and the pitcher's mound. At the bag, I set my stance. Toss a ball in the air, swing — and I swear by the sacred hem of the home uniform of Ernie Banks, the ball rockets up into the center field seats. Giddy now, I fungo a dozen more over the ivy into the bleachers.

At the beginning of each baseball season, I commemorate my long-standing record for home runs fungoed from second base. Along with the warm nostalgia of this April memory, however, come a pair of regrets which haunt my record like the asterisk after Roger Maris's 61 homers.

First, Wrigley Field was empty the day I smashed all those Spaldings into the stands. The Cubs were on the road, and a college friend who worked for the club was shooting a short baseball instruction movie in the park for his film course at Northwestern. Another friend and I were the stars — in fact, the entire cast. It was my first and last chance to pound out home runs in the big leagues, even if only from second base and even if the place was empty.

Second, I've always regretted that my boyhood teammates were not on hand to share the glory of that day. I can see my grandmother now, short and gray-haired, perched on the very mound where Ewell Blackwell and Warren Spahn hurled their thunderbolts. I can see the black dog making a leaping catch in center field, the white-and-brown dog hustling over to back him up.

For the sake of the sportswriter who will write my autobiography someday, we may as well record here that I learned everything I know about fungoing home runs from my grandmother and those two dogs in the sagebrush of Montana, about 1,500 miles from the nearest major league stadium. In those pre-

expansion days when the big leagues had ventured only as far west as St. Louis, I was an aspiring country boy slugger with no one to slug with. Even at school, we played only softball, I think because girls and teachers often filled out our skimpy teams in that little country town. During summers, which I spent on a succession of remote ranches, I lacked even that timid substitute to feed my baseball craving.

Along about the year the Phillies beat the Dodgers 4-1 in 10 innings the last day of the season to win the pennant — let's see, 1950? — my grandmother showed up to solve the teammate shortage.

My mother had died several years earlier, and my father had little time from his work on a sheep ranch to toss a ball with me. But when my grandmother came to live with us, all at once I had an indulgent partner with the staying power of a Lou Gehrig. When we acquired a pair of dogs — brothers who were uncertain concoctions of collie, shepherd, and whatnot — and imaginatively named them Spot and Tip, I gained a pair of outfielders who could have tutored Snoopy on going deep for a hot liner.

Tip, the temperamental star of this pickup team, was lean and tense. He looked like a black coyote with a white tip on his tail, and he was the fastest living thing I've ever seen. Naturally, Tip was superb in the field, playing fly balls on the first bounce by leaping high to catch the ball in his mouth.

Brilliant as he was, Tip had one unsettling habit. He nurtured a secret desire to be a third baseman, and every once in awhile would charge in for a bunt. Since I never deliberately bunted, this meant that midway through an all-out swing I might find both the ball and a black streak of dog hurtling at me. I became one of the all-time greats at checking a swing.

Spot was chunky, brown and white and about half as fast as Tip. His technique was to hustle after Tip and try to swipe the ball.

This dog Spot was born 30 years too late. He had a spitball that made the immortal

Burleigh Grimes look like a Vermont prohibitionist. Prying the ball from Spot's mouth was like trying to grapple a sliver of soap from the bottom of a reservoir. Tip, always fastidious, held the ball daintily between his teeth as he returned it. Not old dog Spot. He learned to shift the ball around in his mouth so that every bit of it got moisturized, and for good measure would slurp you several times with his tongue after he finally gave up the ball.

But Spot was steady. His two great loves were herding sheep and playing ball. He would field as long as I had energy to swing the bat. Tip, after what he considered his quota of spectacular catches, would depart to terrorize jackrabbits.

So that was the lineup. The four of us would head for the nearest level patch of sagebrush to play ball. I would wriggle into my Lou Boudreau stance, bat cocked high and right elbow carefully out from the body. My grandmother would lob a rubber ball at me and I would do my utmost to murder the pitch. If I hit it, the team of outfielding dogs did their retrieving act, and we would wrestle the ball away from them to set up for another pitch.

It went that way, pitch-hit-fetch-and-wrestle, for countless afternoons through my boyhood. Neither Grandma nor the dogs ever were blasted by a line drive, an escape I now see as a genuine miracle.

Since those dreamlike innings in the sagebrush, I've watched baseball in many major league stadiums. Once I even was interviewed on a pre-game show at Wrigley Field, and incorrectly predicted the pennant winners in both leagues for all of you home viewers. I've even followed baseball here from my adopted city, which holds the record for the shortest-lived major league team (Seattle Pilots, 1969, RIP). But none of it has ever seemed as real as those second-base fungo home runs or those dog-bound line drives off my grandmother, the pitcher.

Ivan Doig, formerly of Evanston, is a freelance writer from Seattle.