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Betty Mayfield [00:00:03] Recording in progress. Well, hello, everyone. I'll introduce myself first. My name is Betty Mayfield, and I am sitting in my home in sunny Tucson, Arizona. And I am ready to have conversation with my good friends, David Laskin and Kate O'Neill, to talk about our friend Ivan Doig. They are sitting in the Doig living room in Seattle, Washington, with Carol in the background. And I have help from Jan Zauha, who is in Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana, in the library there. And she's helping record and holding my hand pushing buttons that I don't have to worry about. I think if we can if everyone's comfortable, we can start. I just realized that today is Friday the 13th, so I think that's a perfectly good day to talk about Ivan, because every day is a good day to talk about Ivan. I just was going to start by saying I consider Kate and David, my siblings, my Doig siblings, Carol and Ivan collected lots of friends and we've become very close, even though we haven't known each other, particularly the Laskins and the Mayfield's and Kate did not for very long. But we, we just have this common bond. And that's why I think this conversation will be a wonderful thing. So to begin with, we'll just ask David, what is your full name?

David Laskin [00:01:49] My full name is David Laskin.

Betty Mayfield [00:01:52] And Kate, your full name is Kate O'Neill. Kate O'Neill. And do I have permission to record this interview? December 13th, 2024.

David Laskin [00:02:03] Yep, you do.

Betty Mayfield [00:02:06] - Great.

Betty Mayfield [00:02:05] And so to start with background, I'll just start with Kate first, some biographical information about you, where you're from. You can share a little bit of your family history, your education, and maybe describe a little bit about your career.

Kate O'Neill [00:02:23] Okay. So I grew up in Manhattan, in New York City, on the Upper West Side. Right below Columbia University. My father was an engineering professor there, at least in my early years. Later on, he went off into business. So Ivan and I grew up in the most radically different circumstances you can possibly imagine. My family were Irish American Catholics of a type that I think is very standard for their era. My education was in New York City through high school. I went to a private girls school where I got an excellent education, and then I went off to Stanford University, largely for the 3000 mile difference. And then I wandered back to New York after college and after a few years of terrible inconsequential employment or non employment, I caved in and went to law school at Columbia. So I got a law degree In 1980. While I was in law school, I met this guy, which made law school an awful lot better. And so I practiced law for a very brief amount of time in New York at a big Wall Street law firm, which I found was not to my liking at all. And I went and got a job teaching legal writing at NYU and took a 50% pay cut. But that was a much better fit. And eventually I got an offer from the University of Washington out here in Seattle to come out and be the director of their legal writing program. And then I slowly worked my way up into a tenured professorship, and now I'm retired.

Betty Mayfield [00:04:41] All right, David, the same with you, where you're from and so on. And then maybe briefly describe your work as a writer.

David Laskin [00:04:48] Sure. So like Kate, I'm from New York, not the city I grew up on, Long Island, the suburbs of New York. And I went to Harvard. And then I spent two years at Oxford in England in grad school. So I'm a very highly educated. And I when I came out of grad school, I returned to New York. I worked briefly in book publishing and sort of similar to Kate, discovering that corporate law was not for her. I discovered that book publishing was not for me at least, working as an editor. That part of it, I didn't really enjoy the amount of reading I had to do of, you know, slush pile garbage that occupies a lot of time for assistants, and I didn't really have that kind of nose for the bestsellers. That I think is essential for a good editor, at least these days. So I started freelancing and and I'm trying to remember the exact year, probably about 1980 or so, and did various things. But my first books were all practical. My very first book was the Esquire Wine and Liquor Handbook, which was about drinking as a debonair man about town or whatever. But and that was something that I was asked to write, and the first couple of books that I wrote were kind of commissioned and very practical, service oriented. But eventually I started writing what I wanted, what what I wanted to write. And the first book I would say that really came under that rubric was Eastern Islands, which is a book about all the islands that you can get to on the East coast of the U.S. by public ferry. So it's kind of combining history, geology, natural history, fishing, you know, stuff about local populations and some travel writing, some tourist stuff, too. And that sort of set me up for for my career my most. At some point, I switched to what we call narrative nonfiction, kind of suspense driven nonfiction books that read like novels. And of those I've written several. My most popular is The Children's Blizzard. I also wrote a book about the immigrant experience, the First World War called The Long Way Home. I wrote a book about my own family history, my mother's family history called The Family. And now I'm writing fiction. So I've evolved and followed something of a similar trajectory to Ivan's. But the timing was quite different. So that's that's the two of us in a nutshell.

Betty Mayfield [00:07:36] That's actually that's really interesting. I've learned more about you guys just in the last five minutes. That's amazing. So let's begin with meeting the Doigs. So, Kate, can you talk a little bit about being a neighbor of Ivan's and Carol's and maybe when was the first time you met them? Do you remember?

Kate O'Neill [00:08:02] Yeah, I've thought about this a little bit. I'm not absolutely sure this is true. And Ivan would have really objected if the historical record was distorted by my bad memory. But here we go. I think David had met Ivan before I did. And I think the first time I met Ivan and Carol was at a restaurant in Edmonds, Washington, just north of where we live called Chopsticks, which Ivan and Carol were very fond of. And I think that that was my first introduction to the to the Doig couple. And we used to meet there. I think we did that a few times before we ventured into having dinner parties at each of our homes, which we would trade off periodically. Yeah. Yeah.

Betty Mayfield [00:08:56] The dinner parties. That's. That's what I remember too. And one of the things I remember when it was my husband Roy and I, when we would go over for dinner, you know, we would talk a little bit at the beginning. But Ivan was always very keen to know what me a little bit bit more about what Roy was doing. Roy was working in dam safety and he was this geotechnical engineer, and they and he was very fascinated. And we had some conversations about that. And I kept thinking about, you know, the four of you at the dinner table and whether that kind of professional kind of conversation happened with you. Kate, Did you talk about your.

Kate O'Neill [00:09:38] Technical.

Betty Mayfield [00:09:39] Engineering but law?

Kate O'Neill [00:09:41] Well, yes, it did. Of course, you know, Ivan and David would at some point go into heavy duty, write book talk. But I had a lot in common with Carol because Carol had taught journalists, journalism and writing at Shoreline Community College. And I had spent most of my career in a largely futile effort to teach law students to write comprehensible prose. So we had, you know, that to talk about. And Ivan was interested in my work. He was always interested in hearing about well, he was interested in hearing about the law school and the university. There's always lots to gossip about out of any academic environment. And I think he was quite delighted by some of the how shall I put it, gracefully frivolity of academic.

Betty Mayfield [00:10:45] Tittle tattle.

Kate O'Neill [00:10:47] Academic politics. So we talked about that, but I had also eventually developed some knowledge and taught copyright law. So Ivan and I would often get into some kind of technical discussions. I remember in particular when e-books started to be a big thing, Ivan was really outraged because at the time the royalties for e-books were markedly lower than they were for books in print. And I remember we went around and around about that. So we had discussions of those those kinds of practical, you know, writer writers concerned kinds of.

Betty Mayfield [00:11:39] Yeah. Yeah. That's that's interesting. I would have liked to have been a part of that conversation.

Kate O'Neill [00:11:43] Yeah, but it's worse now. If Ivan were alive now and he were thinking about AI, he would. Yeah, he would be standing on his head.

David Laskin [00:11:56] I just might jump in with one thing that I think Kate omitted, which has to do with Kate, Kate's conversations with Ivan, and some of them that I remember had to do with the UW [University of Washington] libraries. And let me let you take over and talk about that, because that was something you've been involved in as well.

Kate O'Neill [00:12:14] Yeah, The University of Washington in Seattle has just Suzzallo [Library] and well, the whole library system is absolutely fantastic. And it's I my opinion, you know, the single most wonderful feature of the university and I got involved early on in my career in doing, you know, faculty committee work designed to support the libraries. And so I got to know your colleague Betty Bengston and Betsey Wilson, all the directors of the libraries, and I guess so I was always involved in the libraries and I would talk to Ivan about that. And of course, there was always, you know, enormous funding issues. So that was a shared passion that he and I had together.

Betty Mayfield [00:13:11] Yeah, that's great. Yeah.

Betty Mayfield [00:13:13] All right. So, David, I know we've talked to you in some other interviews about your relationship with Ivan and everything, but I just love the the comment that when you met Ivan and he said you lived in the same zip code. And I can absolutely hear him saying that, you know, so if you can describe maybe that early meeting and how that grew into a friendship.

David Laskin [00:13:39] Yeah. So I think I'm going to have to correct you, Betty, because I believe that the comment about the zip code was not oral but written here. So here's the

context. I reviewed *Bucking the Sun*, one of Ivan's novels, for I believe it was *The Washington Post*, is to do a lot more book reviewing than I do now. And I had never met Ivan, had heard of him, obviously, but I had never met him. And of course, that was also one of the requirements. As a book reviewer, you're not supposed to be friends with or even acquainted with the author of the book you're reviewing. So I had never met Ivan and just loved the book, of course, and it just sort of took me over. And I think it was maybe I'd read *This House Of Sky*, but I think that was the first novel of Ivan's that I read and gave it a rave review. And and that's when the card arrived, the typewritten. And I never understood how Ivan typed postcards, but they never came out curly. I didn't. Some way to do some magic. So there was a little postcard and Ivan said, you know, well, it's funny, we live in the same zip code, and one day maybe we'll meet or something. It was all very tentative, which was looking back very typical of Ivan. Ivan would not be the kind to call you up and go, Hey, great review. Let's, you know, go have a drink. Everything was as Ivan was reserved and somewhat decorous. So I think that was sort of our first contact. I think the first time I met Ivan in the flesh, we were at a conference together somewhere in Oregon. I think it was Eugene. I'm blanking on exactly what public or Oregon University was at, but I'm pretty sure it was Eugene. And Ivan was the keynote. And I think maybe I might have given a workshop because I can't remember what I did. But I got a very mild, minor role and there was a whole crowd around Ivan and I, you know, sort of joined the line and basically said, hello, Mr. Doig, I'm the person who lives in your zip code. So we, you know, became acquainted then. But I you know, it was the friendship was slow to build. And I my memory again, you know, I was thinking about this interview beforehand, Betty, and I was thinking, you'll probably go back to some of the earlier interviews and going, wait a minute, you didn't say that five years ago when we did *Ivan Doig Among Friends*. So which is true. And I would say the earlier ones are probably truer. They were closer to the events. But my memory, in any case, is that the four of us, Carol and Ivan and Kate and I became friends before Ivan, and I really became friends separately. And, you know, obviously we had the book business in common. And at some point, the friendship deepened and developed and at some point. Ivan never really liked this, but never really rejected it either. I started to think of Ivan as my mentor and he really was my mentor. I think maybe it was the term that he didn't like, but I think he did enjoy mentoring me and just. But he was like everything with Ivan. It was very low key. It was not demonstrative. Some of it was actually, you know, things that I only discovered later that Ivan had put in a good word for me or what have you. But I think it wasn't so much the professional assistance as the kind of moral and professional support and endorsement. And, you know, I think Ivan took me seriously as a writer and took me seriously as a professional, probably even before I did myself, took myself seriously. And that was a huge kind of vote of confidence and a huge boost. So I think Ivan's moral standing in my world was huge. And yeah, so I think that was that was, I think books, writing, publishing, dealing with the publishing world and being true to yourself as a writer, I think that was always the foundation of our real friendship. And then there are other parts that we'll get to later.

Kate O'Neill [00:18:16] Yeah.

Betty Mayfield [00:18:17] Well, that's interesting that I saw Kate kind of go hmm one of this. I mean, I. I can see how that relationship developed, and it made me wonder whether Ivan, I know that he played a strong role in Linda Bierd's work, and he, you know, I think connected a publisher with her and things like that. But I don't know very many writers. Do you know any other writers that he might have had that kind of influence on?

David Laskin [00:18:49] So I think a little bit with David Williams or his work and Ivans had, I think, slightly less overlap than mine did with Ivan. But, you know, I think Ivan admired David's writing and his his work ethic. But I don't know, Carol. Is there anybody that you can think of who Ivan mentored or who Ivan, you know, a younger writer who I haven't kind of took under his wing.

Carol Doig [00:19:16] He mentored you too whatever he said about.

David Laskin [00:19:18] Okay.

Kate O'Neill [00:19:21] Yeah.

David Laskin [00:19:22] Yeah. Nobody really comes to mind. Yeah. But I. You know, I even knew everybody He knew every writer. Yeah. Every living American writer, I think. Well, maybe not. Yeah, I'm exaggerating. He had a very wide circle. Yeah. And, you know, I think. I think Garth Stein to some ...

Kate O'Neill [00:19:44] Yeah.

David Laskin [00:19:45] Extent, was influenced by I mean, I think Ivan was very generous to Garth. And Garth thought the world of Ivan, so that's another one.

Kate O'Neill [00:19:54] Yeah.

Betty Mayfield [00:19:55] Yeah. Well, it's that's that's just really great. So we can delve a little bit more. But getting into Ivan's books and I have to say, I had cataloged This House of Sky. It's the first time I'd ever met or ever heard of Ivan Doig coming growing up in Canada. His works were not very prevalent up there. But, you know, eventually, of course, I read them all. So I was wondering, Kate, had had you read any of his books before you met him? Can you remember the first one you read and maybe some impressions on his books?

Kate O'Neill [00:20:31] Definitely. This House of Sky. I know. I read that long before I ever met Ivan and loved it. And I may have read Heart Earth also, because I so loved This House of Sky. I think I did read both memoirs before I ever met him. After I met him, I began to read more of his fiction. I don't think before I met him that I'd actually read much if anything. But, you know, then once we got to know him, you know, kept an eye on the books that reg, came out so frighteningly regularly and.

Betty Mayfield [00:21:14] Going to all the book readings.

Kate O'Neill [00:21:17] yeah, with the Stetson hat and the whole the the whole shtick, which we knew. You know, I remember going over to Third Place Books, which is a big bookstore not far from us that you know about Betty, but the audience for this might not. And I'll never forget an evening we were invited to go over and Ivan was putting on a show about it might have been. It might have been the Whistling Season, but I think maybe it was a little later than that. Maybe it was. It wasn't. Last Bus. I'm I'm forgetting which novel it was. But I had never seen one of these shows that he put on. And, you know, as David said, he was very dignified and quite reserved most of the time. And I remember being just amazed when he stood up on this stage with the big hat and the whole cowboy western outfit and and did a fantastic job. I mean, he so prepped those presentations that he had the passages he was going to read. And he had we now know he had practiced and

underscored the words he was going to emphasize. You know this was not a slapdash performance. But but I was sitting in the audience thinking I had no idea that this guy had the showman.

Betty Mayfield [00:22:46] Yeah. What I remember is the voice.

Kate O'Neill [00:22:48] Oh, the voice.

Betty Mayfield [00:22:51] Big booming voice. And that was not the voice at the dining room table. Every once in a while it might boom out. But that was a it was helpful to hear that.

Kate O'Neill [00:23:01] So, yeah, that was quite delightful to discover that side of his personality.

Betty Mayfield [00:23:10] Right. Okay. This is a long question, so I have to look at it, you guys. David, in other interviews you participated in about Ivan, you talked a lot about his work, so I thought I'd ask you about process. And recently I was reading a book written by Ursula Le Guin called *Steering the Craft*, and it's a book she put together for workshops for writers and many of them professional writers. And she talked about how peer writing groups were incredibly helpful. And it made me think about Ivan. And after reading his diaries, it occurred to me that he didn't really participate in these kinds of groups. But as Jan pointed out, there are quite a few file folders of clippings that he would clip out of magazines and newsprint New York Times New Yorker about writers writing, about writing. And so perhaps that was where he was getting his peer. I don't know, help. But I'm just wondering what you thought about his maybe not participating in in the writing groups or if you guys ever talked about that?

David Laskin [00:24:23] Yeah, I haven't, Ivan said to me no workshops. A waste of time. Don't do them, don't participate, don't get sucked in. And if you take a speaking engagement and there's a workshop attached to it, say no to the workshop part. So Ivan was very emphatic. Workshops were not for him and I took that advice to heart and kind of steered away from workshops. But as you said, Betty, there is another side to this. And I was really startled one day when I came here and Ivan was reading and may have been *Steering the Craft* or some book. And I thought I said to him, Ivan, why are you reading that? You know, you you don't need any help in craft. You could teach a master class and craft and, you know, it just it and I wasn't just saying it to to flatter him. I mean, I just thought, you know, that's it. It seemed at how advanced he was in his mastery. It it seemed unnecessary to me. But Ivan said, you know, you learn all the time. You learn, you know, you can learn from others. It's always interesting to me to follow others thought processes and how they attack the subject. So, yeah, I think Ivan was extraordinarily open to knowledge of all sorts, especially when it came to writing and was always picking things up and synthesizing things and doing, you know, finding what was useful to his own process. But, you know, I think maybe the distinction or maybe the real the hostility to workshops came more out of. Jealousy of his time. I think he was very, very careful even before he got sick. He was very careful about his time. And he knew I mean, Ivan was very wise in the ways of the profession. And he knew early on that if he opened himself up to endless interviews and workshops and, you know, speaking engagements and whatever, he would never get his writing done or he wouldn't get as much of his writing that as he wanted to. For him, that that thing that really made him get up in the morning and shine was writing, was writing, you know, new stuff, the written word, pushing the manuscripts forward. And I think anything that hindered that was something that Ivan fought against. So

I think workshops and the whole kind of literary circuit of conferences and, you know, panels and all that stuff was just I mean, Ivan did it to the extent that he, you know, promoted his books. And but I think he was very careful about the venue. So so I didn't do any workshops during Ivan's time. And I felt like if I had, he would have really kind of scoffed at me. But I have to say, not all that long after Ivan died, I became very involved with Fishtrap and Fishtrap is a writers organization in Joseph, Oregon, where we have our summer place. And Ivan actually once spoke there and participated in it. So he was well familiar with it, and I became more involved. And part of the reason I became involved was I really wanted to bring some of Ivan's wisdom and light to Wallowa County and share it. And I actually did a workshop. I led a workshop, and I think the subject was something to do with, you know, kitchen table and how. And I and I think I started with with English Creek and how the book opens at the kitchen table. And there's a lot of kitchen table scenes in Ivan's view. If you think about the kitchen table as a trope or whatever, whatever you want to call it and go back, you'll see that there's a lot, but he uses it in a really interesting way. And so I led a workshop and I had my participants write a scene set at the kitchen table or what have you. And I think Ivan would have been okay with it.

Betty Mayfield [00:28:54] I can just imagine him on your shoulder.

David Laskin [00:28:56] Yeah, I think he would have forgiven me. But, you know, I have to say, and I think Kate will back me up on this because she's also become involved with Fishtrap. I went in with a little bit of an attitude like ooh a like A, workshop, so Ivan warned me about that time suck. But B, I thought, oh, it's going to be a bunch of, you know, amateurs who are, you know, just writing at a middling level. I was very surprised at how high the quality of the prose was in these workshops. And some of the stuff I mean, some of the workshops were like three hours long and that you would spend a first hour writing, they'd give you a prompt. They shared a kitchen table and there's some family event go off and write a scene. And for the most part, that that the things that people wrote were excellent. So I had to really come down off my high horse and get my nose, you know, unstuck from being snobby and going, Wow, workshops can be pretty cool. So, I mean

Betty Mayfield [00:30:05] We're all learners. Yeah. You know,

Kate O'Neill [00:30:09] Let me interject. I think Ivan might have forgiven you for Fishtrap because its mission is to support good writing in and about the West.

David Laskin [00:30:18] The West, yeah. And I was just going to say.

Kate O'Neill [00:30:19] Though I think that that has a particular that got maybe would get a pass.

David Laskin [00:30:25] Maybe would get a pass and and I think also Ivan is revered in Wallowa County which is where Joseph is and Fishtrap. I think people who participate in Fishtrap many many of them know and love his work. And so it was a really good fit for Fishtrap. And but even, you know, non Western workshops I think can have some value too.

Kate O'Neill [00:30:51] Yeah.

David Laskin [00:30:51] So yeah.

Betty Mayfield [00:30:52] And I think also about the archives in the early diaries. I mean, Ivan did do those workshops. If you think about when we met him, he was well beyond like, Roy and I realized, wow, this guy is a bigwig and we didn't even know that. But in the early diaries, he, he does interviews. There is lots of, you know, tapes, cassette tapes that he was being interviewed. And I think part of that might have been, you know, when the book trail, you know, once he's written a book. But he was doing that. And then I and then I think he realized that his time became more and more precious. And certainly after, you know, he got ill, I think that was it. He just narrowed everything down to writing. So but I do I do recall a lot of those tapes where he's been interviewed by people, maybe not so much giving workshops, but certainly spending more time and even spending time doing reviews, which I know he didn't do very many. Later on when we got to know him, I didn't I don't remember him doing very many except for Tony Angell.

David Laskin [00:31:58] So you know it's funny, Betty, when, you know, the archives is probably better than anybody. But we go through and I I've spent some time there physically, you know, not just online, but kind of flipping through this stuff at MSU, which is wonderful, by the way, but just put in a plug for the archives there. Ivan did a lot, wrote in a lot of different genres and venues and outlets at the beginning of his career, including I think there was some piece on something to do with kids or parenting or something.

Betty Mayfield [00:32:25] Wow.

David Laskin [00:32:26] I was surprised by. But um Carol and Carol's nodding. So what do you remember?

Carol Doig [00:32:31] It was Parents Magazine when he was still freelancing.

David Laskin [00:32:34] He was still up for it. Right. So that surprised me. But Ivan also did some travel writing for The New York Times travel section. And so that was a gig that I also I still do travel writing for The New York Times, and I think so, yeah, I even wore many different hats before he put on that Stetson, and that Stetson never came off.

Betty Mayfield [00:32:54] Yeah.

David Laskin [00:32:55] Once it got fixed on his head.

Betty Mayfield [00:32:58] That's great. Okay, well, now we get to the tough part moving into Ivan's illness. And I know we all knew he was fighting a cancer from the early days. I. I remember him being very forthright about him, talking to us about what it was that he was going through, but he never seemed to dwell on it. We would get to his house and he would say medical report and he would tell us things that he was going through. Much of it I didn't really understand because he was, you know, talking about blood tests and things that I didn't quite understand. But he always downplayed it. So never got to be too worried. And then when I got a phone call from him. Asking me to help him organize his very organized archives. I realized that things were probably not going as well as he let me believe. I'm just wondering what your memories are. When did you think it was pretty serious or, I'm sure that we had the same experience where he talked about his health for a little bit and then we just went on to other things. So talk about his health.

David Laskin [00:34:21] I think Ivan broke the news to us over the phone and he downplayed it a bit. You know, you know this better than I do, Betty, but I think there's

something in the archives that where he was writing about multiple myeloma and said always fatal, invariably, invariably, fatal or something like that.

Betty Mayfield [00:34:44] Typed on a card.

David Laskin [00:34:45] Yes. So he knew what he was facing. He didn't bring that up to us, but he actually kind of I think he enjoyed is the wrong word. But I think that it did him some good to talk about the treatments, as you said, and explain them. I remember thalidomide was part of the treatment in that that totally bizarre to me. But Ivan, you know, would explain why and how the drugs were used and, how what the progress was and this is a painful memory for me, but I think when I really understood how dire things were, were when Carol called me and said, well, we have a little bit of a situation here, Carol kind of downplayed it. Can you come over? And I came over and Ivan was lying down on a bed and was unable to get up. And he said it. And I think that was the point of the illness where it had gone into his bones and he was in a lot of pain and had a lot of back, you know, sort of skeletal pain. And he said, well, just grab me and haul me up and I'm going to yell like hell, but it'll be one second and then I'll be over and I'll be back up. And I started to lift him, and I just thought, no, I'm not qualified to do this. And what if I break his back or something? It just, you know, his would holding him like that. I realized how frail he was. So we ended up calling 911, and they sent some big, burly guys who basically just did what he could do. I don't think that they. I don't know. He was okay. He and. But I think that was a real wake up call for me. Very serious. So, yeah, I think as Ivan, I think as things closed in, I think there are two impulses that Ivan had visa vee us, and Kate you can talk about it after work after I'm done. But I think he was both grateful that we were neighbors and were present and especially were able to support Carol to some extent.

Betty Mayfield [00:37:08] Yeah.

David Laskin [00:37:08] And just do some practical things. But I also think there is a sort of opposite impulse to kind of, keep things to himself. I don't think he was. I think he didn't really want to share a lot. So I think that there was a little bit of a tension there between wanting us to be part of this very painful chapter and wanting to be private. And I think my memory, Carol, was that it was important for Carol that we were involved because it was really hard on her to just shoulder everything alone.

Carol Doig [00:37:51] My gratitude.

David Laskin [00:37:54] Anyway, to Kate. I don't know if you want to add something there.

Kate O'Neill [00:37:58] Well, I'd actually add something that's less gloomy because Ivan got his diagnosis, which was not a good one. But he was actually remarkably well and wrote like the Dickens for years after that diagnosis. And the illness really was not evident to me or I don't think to David for quite a while. And I remember the, you know, coming to the door and we'd get the medical news. And if the good news was whatever, you know, blood tests and whatnot were done, were stable, he would be, you know, delighted and offer us a stiff scotch to celebrate. So my memory was actually of a long period of health, relative health, apparent health productivity. He didn't talk about it a lot except to give positive bulletins when he got good news. But things went badly rather suddenly toward the end. And David's description of that, it was very painful. I have one very specific memory. I have two very specific memories that I'd like to share. One was, I think the last time that Ivan was able to come to our house for dinner. It was wintertime approaching Christmas like now. And. We have an [00:39:41] Eames [0.0s] chair, big comfortable chair,

in our TV room. And for some reason we had decided that it would be fun to have dinner and then to watch the James Joyce movie The-

David Laskin [00:39:57] The Dead.

Kate O'Neill [00:39:58] The Dead, John Houston's John Houston movie about the James Joyce story, The Dead, which is just a beautiful movie. And Ivan sat in our big [00:40:09]Eames [0.0s] chair, and he was I he I think he was mesmerized since it couldn't have been a more lovely thing to watch together toward the end. And then the other memory I have, which is just odd and reveals maybe too much about my brain, the day that we learned that Ivan had passed away. I was out walking my dog dogs in one of our local green belts, and I saw a great big pileated woodpecker. You know the kind. Yeah. And I thought Ivan's spirit is lying about because, of course, he was a redhead.

Betty Mayfield [00:41:03] That's great. I mean, that's my memory, too. Is that for the longest time, he didn't seem ill. I mean, he. I remember there was a he did some tests and he couldn't see anybody. I think they took his stem cells or something, and he couldn't see anybody for six months. And he he said, you know, you won't be invited over because we can't, you know. And I remember that that was somewhere maybe towards the last couple of years. But that's what that's why I wasn't sure. And like David said, in another interview, it's like we could have looked this up easily and figured it all out and we just and he just I don't know, I just feel like he made me feel so at ease about, you know, he wanted us to know what he was going through. And we were, you know, there to help if we could. But it just it just and then when it came so quickly at the end, I was I was pretty surprised. So.

David Laskin [00:41:57] Yeah.

David Laskin [00:41:58] What I'd like to add, Betty, is that even though Ivan was in so much pain toward the end, he never lost his mental acuity. Yeah. And Carol, I'm sure remembers this, I think it was two or maybe three days before Ivan passed. I was sitting at his bedside reading the galley for Last Bus and going, you know, Ivan was making corrections. And, you know, he was very present. So I think that that really that beacon like brain of his thank God.

Betty Mayfield [00:42:35] Yes.

David Laskin [00:42:35] He he kept that.

Betty Mayfield [00:42:38] Yeah.

David Laskin [00:42:39] The very end.

Betty Mayfield [00:42:40] Yeah.

David Laskin [00:42:40] Yeah. It made it easier for us I think.

Betty Mayfield [00:42:43] Yeah. Yeah.

Betty Mayfield [00:42:46] Well I guess. Just in conclusion, I guess what I wanted to talk about was actually the duo. Carol and Ivan. Ivan and Carol. It was like one word. And it they have a strong relationship that I think just we, we all, you know, got a lot out of that. And then after Carol actually right before Ivan died we got a message from Carol, an email

from Carol, and she said, Communicate. And, you know, I wrote a card to Ivan, which I believe he got in the end. And everybody was writing back and forth to each other and. But then after he died, I think Carol has kept Ivan alive for for me. I know, but I'm sure for you guys, I didn't. I was thinking about this. I didn't actually meet Kate until after Ivan had died. But I had heard this phrase over and over at our dinners. You've got to meet Kate and David. You got to meet Kate and David. And, you know, we finally did. And I feel like we've known each other forever, but it isn't truly that long. And then Carol just kept communicating. She had us over in groups. She had us over for dinner. We've taken over her kitchen many times as you guys, you know have. And she asked us to carry his ashes to the Dungeonus Spit, and we all threw little bits of him into the to the sea where they had spent so much time. And then in her 90th birthday, I remember I know you guys weren't there, but it was such a I just felt Ivan was present. Tony Angell said to Carol. What's it like to be 90 Carol and and that conversation. The whole room, I don't know there about 12 or 15 people there. And the whole room stops, you know, the little conversations that broke out here over there, the whole room just stopped. And listen, we just talked and I just talked about Ivan. Talk about Ivan and Carol and and their relationship and how wonderful it was. And that was just a really wonderful time. So maybe your last comments are the the duo. Let's talk about Carol in the room and Ivan.

David Laskin [00:45:13] Well, I've probably said this before, Betty and some other interview, but it's worth repeating. You know, Ivan and I talked a lot about a lot of things, but didn't really get into emotional things that much. But at one point I remember driving with Ivan somewhere and he said, Well, some kid, I was at a school or something and some kid said, who is your first love? That was the kid's question. And Ivan said, I married her. And yeah, so I think Ivan and Carol's relationship was an inspiration for us, for a certainly for me. And I just felt they had a real partnership. Well, a partnership in every way. But I think the part one of the parts that I was really intrigued by was the working relationship that Carol would accompany Ivan on research trips and do many, many different things. Take taking notes, taking photographs, organizing things, getting up at ungodly hours to see the sunrise or what have you. And then it was so I think we knew a little bit about those trips when during the span of our friendship. But then reading the diaries and things, it was always interesting to see how they worked together and how they collaborated. And also, I think Carol was Ivan's the first audience for all of Ivan's books. Yeah. And I think that was also... It's funny. You know, early on, I used to sometimes read things to Kate. And Kate is a very stern critic. And I would get my nose at like, well, I thought it was good. And then I just stopped showing her anything. And for for years and years, because it was too painful. But now I've started again and I think my ego is a little more propped up or my skin is thicker or something. But, you know, or when I'm stuck, I'll say to Kate, you know, I can't figure out this character or I can't make this scene work and we'll talk about it. But I think Ivan and Carol, I don't know whether Ivan talked with with you, Carol, about constructing scenes and so on, But I think Ivan... Carol was always there for Ivan in every way, but professionally was one of the ways. And so I think that was. It just really meant a lot, I think. And it also when Ivan was alive, you know, I'd get up and I'd start working at certain 9:30 or something. And I think Ivan's already probably written like a thousand words by now. Ivan had gotten up at the crack of dawn. And you know, he was he had this ferocious work ethic which made me feel like a complete slacker. But it was always good to know that Ivan was here just down the hill. You know, we live half a mile away. And Ivan was very regimented. And, you know, if he didn't get those words in, the day would go on until they were done and no day passed without those words. Ivan was very, very strict with himself and that work ethic. I think it's been good. Sometimes it's a lash that I lash myself with you lazy jerk you've only written two sentences today. But more often, it's it's a kind of source of strength.

Betty Mayfield [00:48:55] Anything to add, Kate?

Kate O'Neill [00:48:57] Well, I think that Ivan often credited Carol for having the steady income and benefits that were very important early in their married life together. So I think that it's important to acknowledge. Yeah. So when we were talking earlier about Ivan's hostility to workshops, I was thinking about Carol and how involved she was with his work, both in terms of the research, but also in reading drafts and then reading proofs. And I thought I suspect that Ivan didn't need workshops because he kind of had an in-house.

Betty Mayfield [00:49:43] Yeah, it's true. Yeah.

Kate O'Neill [00:49:47] What's the word interlocutors to talk about a lot of things. So I think that's an important part of the relationship. And then, you know, I think that you and Roy have experienced this, and we certainly did. I think they were gracious hosts. Together, they created this welcoming atmosphere and we'd have drinks and dinner and, you know, Ivan would be barbecuing the salmon just so. And Carol would be in charge or whatever had to be done in the kitchen. And, you know, there was a nice informal but well orchestrated social. What's the word? You know, a kind of a social release. I think they both worked extremely hard, but they were very good at relaxing into entertainment. Entertaining friends,

Betty Mayfield [00:50:53] Yeah. Yeah.

David Laskin [00:50:54] I think I'll add Betty is Ivan was very, I would say, maybe hyper responsible in every aspect of his life. But I think one of them was toward Carol. And Carol had some health issues years back and Ivan had to go do something and be on the road. And he said to me, well, will you kind of check in on Carol now and then? And I think I called, you know, like every time I left the house, Hi Carol checking in and, you know, several times a day. Well, that meant a lot to Ivan. And I think that was kind of a real step forward in our friendship, because Ivan thought, okay, he's not just our writer neighbor pal, but he's a good guy who takes responsibilities seriously and that is very important to Ivan. And I think he knew that that he could rely on me and Kate. And I think that meant a lot. And I think it still means a lot to all of us. And I love your description of us being siblings because, you know, I think I'll never forget sitting in the living room here. And it was kind of in lieu of a memorial service and Tony and Lee were here and you and Roy and I think maybe Marshall and Anne and maybe one of Tony's kids. And we just talked about Ivan and our memories of Ivan. And I think it was a tremendous bonding for us survivors. And then we adopted all of your friends, Carol. Ivan's friends, became our friends. [crosstalk] And so, yeah, and really, you know, Ivan had this expression, make friends, your family. And I think that that really became you became part of our family. So.

Betty Mayfield [00:52:55] Yeah, yeah. It's it's interesting. A few memories have popped in my head with you talking. I remember, Kate, when you're talking about Carol supporting Ivan in those early days. And I remember him telling me this funny story about trying to get a mortgage. And he said, you know, we went in and what do you you know, of course, looking to the man, What do you do? I'm a writer. But Professor, Professor, is the one that got the mortgage? And and he very was very proud of that.

David Laskin [00:53:28] And I remember one of our dinners, Ivan turned to me and said, Well, of course the two of us are self unemployed. And it's the it's the women who are, you know, college. Now, Ivan floated his ship very handsomely. That's why I.

Kate O'Neill [00:53:43] Say I really think of his generation of the men I've known. Ivan was probably the best feminist. And he never there was never even a whiff of anything other than respect for Carol. But for women in general, there was none of that kind of issue, which is so common. You know, it's kind of looking down on little lady, on the little lady or none of that. I think he really was a great feminist.

Carol Doig [00:54:16] I heard him say more than once. I like women.

Kate O'Neill [00:54:21] He respected them, too.

David Laskin [00:54:23] Yeah. Yes, he respected everybody, I think. I don't think Ivan. You know Ivan.

Kate O'Neill [00:54:29] No. There was some fools.

David Laskin [00:54:30] For well, there were fools, but he didn't he wouldn't judge on the basis of how you dressed or how you spoke or whatever. And Ivan rubbed shoulders with some very wealthy people, as you know, Betty.

Betty Mayfield [00:54:42] Yes.

David Laskin [00:54:43] And very common people. And I don't think the social position or whatever meant a darn to Ivan he, it was in your brain and in your heart that Ivan cared about. And it wasn't like he was putting it on like, I'm just going to kind of, you know, be, you know, folksy or aw shucks to make a good impression. Ivan was Ivan was Ivan. You know, there was no act involved except when he was on stage. But that was the other Ivan.

Kate O'Neill [00:55:14] Well, you can't you can't write novels like that without loving people.

Betty Mayfield [00:55:23] No, no, I mean those characters are so great in those books.

David Laskin [00:55:25] That raises one more thing I hear here. I got to keep saying it last thing. But that we're talking a lot of things come to mind. But this summer, Kate and I were having dinner with some new friends and Joseph people we become friendly with recently, and we'd never been to their house before. And so we as we were leaving, I noticed that this beautiful bookshelf with all of Ivan's works order in hardcover, first editions, every single one. So I said to the guy, are you a fan of Ivan Doig? He said, gosh, I love Ivan's work. So you talked about it. Of course I pulled out the book that's dedicated to me and Kate, David and Marjorie. He was vastly impressed. But one of the things he said was what? What I so value about Ivan is his positivity. He love he embraces life. These are not books that take you down to the depths or, you know, rub your nose in misery or hardship or evil or, you know, the dark side of the human condition. And God knows we have enough of that. But they're not Pollyannaish. But he does really I think he was able to bring to life a lot of positive aspects, especially of younger people. Yeah. And I was I was really glad that Brad, our friend, raised that because that to me has always been one of the things that I most admire in Ivan.

Betty Mayfield [00:56:59] Yeah, that's great. That's great. Well, I've gone through my list, so if Carol or Jan have anything or you guys have anything to add.

David Laskin [00:57:13] Let's move it over to Carol here.

Betty Mayfield [00:57:14] Carol.

Carol Doig [00:57:16] Hi there again. Hey, this was great. You folks really got the guy. You know, you really understood him. And and I give Jan a lot of credit because Betty, you and she know that archive best. And so it's so interesting that you were able to sit in on this Jan because for a change, you got to listen to something about Ivan rather than what you usually do, which is go out and share what you know about him.

Betty Mayfield [00:57:56] Yeah, yeah. I agree about the archives. When David said I know the archives best, I think Jan's probably surpassed me by now by what she's done.

Carol Doig [00:58:04] But you're the two. Of, of course, it was Jan who was the lead on that great film that was made about, Ivan, a couple of years ago.

Jan Zauha [00:58:19] So you're all are you getting me, are you trying to get me to talk here? I was taking a vow of silence. That's very kind of you to say that..

Carol Doig [00:58:31] Well, well-earned.

Betty Mayfield [00:58:34] Right.

Jan Zauha [00:58:34] It's been a pleasure.

Betty Mayfield [00:58:36] It took a while to get this together, but I was sure fun to do.

David Laskin [00:58:39] Yeah. Thanks, Betty.

Carol Doig [00:58:39] It sure was. Thank you.

David Laskin [00:58:41] All questions were great.

Kate O'Neill [00:58:42] And enjoy your sun, it's raining here. Very cold.

David Laskin [00:58:46] Now it is raining.

Betty Mayfield [00:58:47] You can always come down to the book fair, you guys.

Jan Zauha [00:58:49] Okay, so I'm going to stop the recording here, okay? And we can carry on if we want to with other talking.