Jordan Swanson / (406) 844-0177
OK for 19th

writing poetry class @ UGF
@ Fittred CC

reviewing for Tribune
250 mi to GT

Get + Northern - not busy on earth @ 7

camp # 065 750
"WHITEFISH RANGE, MONTANA"

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Ivan + Caride!

Merry Christmas, you two! Ivan, thank you for the wonderful info on your Scottish connections. I really do love Scotland. I did a lot of research when I was there in May.

May the joys of the season be with you throughout the new year.

but I love many more miles to walk before I sleep "with this project, it can see it happening & widening before me, the more I research. I hope this finds you well in your new home. We miss you, always, there in Montana. Happy New Year! Jo Ann

[Signature]
Dear Jo-Ann--

Hey, your project sounds just dandy. No, I don’t think you’re batty to wonder about the Scottish influence in Montana writing; Norman and me and I guess Guthrie, I don’t know that we have a lot else in common except general orneriness...

I see your departure date for Scotland is May, so I’m bundling you some stuff quick and dirty. Most of it is genealogy from a shirttail relative computer geek in California--every family needs one, right?--who has waded into Doig genealogy. The material on the Peter Scott Doig generation (he was my grandfather who came to Montana) maybe will give you a slight flavor of their life in the old country--tailoring and gardening, mostly, it looks like.

I jotted basics in your questionnaire, but will deal with #6 here to try to give you a bit more amplitude about my experience of Scotland. Have been there three times, and once--I think ‘84--specifically on research for Dancing at the Rascal Fair. I like the place a lot, find the Scots humorous instead of dour, etc. Probably some of Scotch logic or orderliness or reason or whatever it is resonates with me--to this day, you could plop me down in Edinburgh and I could navigate my way around, by its landmarks and street pattern, better than I can in Seattle. And to cite you a couple of affinities:

--gardening; I hadn’t connected this until now, but for no rational reason I have been a diehard gardener ever since Carol and I lit into Seattle 36 years ago. Nothing in Montana accounts for it. I’m mostly a vegetable guy, and in this new house have, at last, exquisite growing circumstances; but for most of my gardening career I just did it because it felt right.

--The Timeweavers piece is the one time I’ve tried to write about an affinity with Scotland, and you’ll find in reading it the affinity was not with my forebears’ specific home area, but nearby, where there were other Doigs. Can’t explain it, but Brechin just really felt like the place I wanted to base my fictional Nethermuir on.

Now for a letdown: no way did the Monikie area strike me as anything like “home”, that is, Montana or anywhere that could be construed as genetic tugging--it more reminded me of the coast of Maine. Yup, it surprised me, but in a backward way. My dad’s generation had always asked their parents, i.e. the firstcomers, why they lit way back up there in the Tierney Basin, near Sixteenmile Canyon. Ah, they were always told, it reminded us of home, the sage so much like the heather, you know. Hell, I couldn’t see any heather within 30 miles of Monikie, and it’s all coastal plain, not a mountain or even a real ridge in sight!

One last note on affinity: I’ve taken considerable care in the McCaskill novels to have a connection back to Scotland by way of the Stevensons--Robert Louis’s forebears, the lighthouse builders. (If you haven’t come across it yet, get hold of The Lighthouse Stevensons, by Bella Bathurst, a terrific group biography.) Couple of reasons: the lighthouse theme connects the McCaskills to the coastal area, around Arbroath, of the Doigs; and mainly I think Robert Louis Stevenson was a mighty writer and it just feels right to have my characters move around in a bit of his aura.

Hope some of this helps; have a great trip.
Dear Jo-Ann–

Hi there. Carol and I are going to be traveling in your direction in a couple of weeks, along with another couple from Seattle, and we wondered if you'd like to join us for dinner in Whitefish on June 19. How about giving me a call—(206)562-6658—to let me know one way or the other; we hope you're available, and we can all hear about your Scotland travels, but if not, we'll try some other time. The four of us will be staying at the Buck Inn, will have spent the day driving around in Glacier Park, etc., so we're just going to have dinner in town there rather than tackling Bigfork or Kalispell. Hope all is well with you. We're fine here, and my next book comes out this fall—Montana book tour is only the last 10 days of Sept.

Regards,

[Signature]
IVAN DOIG SCOTTISH BACKGROUND:
1. Geographical area of Scotland: (Sorry, I wrote northwest Scotland in my letter. Your family comes from northeast Scotland, right? Any Viking roots?

Monikie area, N. of Dundee: in '84 there still was a Panbride parish church, where the Doig family had been married and baptized. Possibly Viking roots; a family of the area, whom I think we're related to, and who settled in Montana w/ the Doigs, were the Christisons, evidently Christiansons somewhere in the past.

2. Doig family name: Do you have any Sept and Clan information? I consider us Lowlanders, or at least not Scots in the usual Highland sense; a "Clans & Tartans" book I picked up in Scotland puts Doigs in the Drummond clan or sept.

3. Any other geography/family specifics about Scotland from family reminiscences?

4. Date if family immigration to U.S.? Family came directly to Montana? Shepherding?

5. Why, do you think, your Scottish roots have been so important to you in your writings? You also have chronicled the lives of early Scottish pioneers. Was this choice of subject because you knew the history well, or was it because of your own background?

The tang of the language in my dad, I think. He and his brothers really were quite Scotch-buried in their talk because the Tierney Basin, and thus their one-room school, was so overwhelmingly Scotch, and remote. And they were good storytellers, quite whimsical in their way, and terrific dancers (American, not Highlands-type). It's just a lively intriguing background that lives in my ears enough.

6. You have visited Scotland? Did the visit move you? Did you find an affinity for certain landscapes or areas? Did it feel like a homecoming or sorts, or did its actual physical presence surprise you? Did it remind you of home?

Thank you, Ivan. When I get a finished product, I'll send you a copy. I know that you are interested in these aspects, too. I'm just reading a book about the Montana MacDonalds' Scottish roots. Very interesting research! Your books, too! Wish me lots of luck......
Dear Ivan:

Thanks, again! I’m using the University of Great Falls videotape we made for my Montana literature class, again, this semester, and students still like it. You are very thoughtful and incisive, and those qualities impress even my lackluster students. I appreciate your taking the time a few years back – on a very busy day. I’m enclosing an extra clipping I had of a 1999 book review for the Tribune. I thought you might enjoy it. From the look of the cut-out photo, you seem to be enjoying heroic status!

The reason I’m writing is that I’m doing some Montana-Scottish connections research, and I’m curious as to what you know about your geographic Highland background, other than in your writings. I seem to recall that your grandparents came from northwestern Scotland. I believe that we discussed that one time at a local Great Falls bookstore. Since my family hails from Thurso, I remember remarking on that!

I’ll be traveling to Scotland in May and wonder what you could tell me about where the name Doig fits, in regard to septs and clans and geography. I’m considering some research on genetic memory (as an amateur), but I’m also struck by how so many writers of note in Montana have Scottish names or roots. Do you thinking I’m crazy? I’m enclosing a SASE and a very rough form. I had envisioned a short film, but my filmmaker cohort is in West Virginia, so I’m considering either a magazine story – or perhaps beginning research for a Ph.D. thesis.

I know you’re hard at work during the winter, so rather than force you to write and organize narrative, I’m enclosing a brief sheet to save time. You do not need to color inside the lines! Thanks in advance. Any help at all will help me.

We hope to see you in Montana this summer?! We have moved from Great Falls to the Flathead area (a tough, but pretty, area in the winter! Can’t eat the scenery…etc.), but I still see Trib people (including Wayne Arnst, etc.) on occasion and keep in touch! Do you have anything new coming out? I’d love to review for the Trib. Thanks, again.

Best regards,

Jo-Ann Swanson