Bella Voce Book Club, May 24 '12

When I began in the writing trade, as a young western workhorse harnessed to a newspaper job--as my family referred to it, "back east in Illinois"--I dreamed ahead to somehow joining one or another of the literary lineages aboard Shakespeare's ark--the lions of narrative, the foxes of mystery, the griffins of science fiction and fantasy, the watchful herons of history, the gazelles and dolphins of poetry, the badgers of biography, the lop-eared leopards of memoir. Little did I imagine that going up that gangplank would have me voyaging along the Columbia and the Willamette to here, with my thirteen books in my seabag, for an occasion like this.
My job on deck here, for the next thirty-five minutes or so, is to think out loud to you about some of the makings of books—how a writer, at least this one, tries to bring fictional characters to life on a page; how the research is gathered from the nooks and corners of history and experience; and finally some thoughts about the craft of putting words on a page.

I mentioned my baker's dozen of books, of which *Work Song* is the thirteenth, but that doesn't count a couple more that are edging their way onto the stage here with me. One, a bit more shy than the other at the moment because it's not quite finished, is a sequel to *Work Song*--more Morrie! he returns to Butte, the scamp, after the doings you've been reading about--and that's next year's book. The more pushy piece of
work is this year’s book, the soon-to-be published novel titled The Bartender’s Tale. I get to come back to Portland on its behalf in mid-September, at Powell’s and at Graham’s bookstore in Lake Oswego.

Why do I cite these subsequent two books? It’s not just an author counting on his fingers to keep track of how he’s doing, honest. Norman Maclean, who made an illustrious writing career out of one splendid book, A River Runs Through It, used to tease me that I was in danger of becoming prolific. I would always point out to Norman that I was not a pensioned-off University of Chicago English professor like someone I could mention, I’m a professional writer who actually makes a living from his words. The long and short of it is, Work Song and its sequel and The Bartender’s Tale represent the past five years of my life. They
show where I am as a writer, they’re my latest news from the territory of
my imagination, and so, with occasional exceptions—particularly The
Whistling Season where my character Morrie Morgan first appears—this
trio of books will provide the examples of what I’m talking about today.
Which I guess means you get a world premiere of at least one scene
never read in public before.

Let’s begin with the people who live within the covers of a book, the
characters. Life sometimes puts us through a rehearsal for a role not yet
written. I was mostly raised, like my narrator Rusty in The Bartender’s
Tale, by my father after my mother’s early death. My dad—Charles
Campbell Doig, “Charlie” to all—was a haymaker: a haying contractor, a
kind of free-lance foreman, who would hire his own crew and put up
As to that bartender who’s stepping up into a book of his own, all
the way back there in **English Creek** when I first plucked him from my
imagination, he has been called Tom Harry. Is that a first name and a
last name, or a double-truck first name, like a woman named Mary Jane?
I finally had to face that—it is a first and last name—but here again in **The
Bartender’s Tale**, names become part of the plot in the story of Tom and
the bright, inquisitive kid—his son Russell, known as Rusty—whom I’ve
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rowdily in the reader's mind? Which is to say, what is the voice, the characteristic sound or memorable mannerism, of the person talking on the page?

Please meet, as I did on a stroll of my imagination, Oliver Milliron, widower father of three in *The Whistling Season*. All I knew of him, back then, was what my narrator tells me on the second page of manuscript: "Father had a short sniffing way of laughing, as if anything funny had to prove it to his nose first." That's a start, though, in giving readers something to remember Oliver by.
I think you can see the story taking a certain turn here. And what leads Morrie, and us as readers, to that turn, are certain crystalizing details—the sumptuous oak table, the reading lights hanging down like the watchfobs of the gods, and most of all, the feel of that tanned leather cover when Morrie picks up that volume of Caesar.

Now to that second part of Nabokov’s acrobatic trick of writerly performance, doing it with the precision of the artist. To me, this is a matter of making it all dance together on the page. The names, the noises, the descriptions, probably noses and all. Here is that promised world premiere, a passage from The Bartender’s Tale where a new character has to be introduced.
Writers aren’t always up to all the tricks that critics think they’re catching us at as we carpenter our books. Sometimes, though, in the making of a book, yes, the writer consciously resorts to some literary device or another that best seems to do the job for a particular scene, and one of those is to bring the emotional and the physical actuality together there on the page. The point is to try to get the writing to the frontier, there on the page and in the reader’s mind, where a character’s circumstance is both physical and metaphysical. Here is Morrie, at a climactic point near the end of Work Song, once again in that evocative

Butte Public Library:

I switched on the mezzanine lights. The Reading Room below was as dark and hushed as the audience portion of a theater. Up on
the literary classics. It was as if the risk-taking lifetimes of composition, the reckless romances with language, the tricky business of plots stealing onto pages, all the wiles of the glorious books answered to my touch. There was no mistaking their message: sometimes you must set sail on the winds of chance.”

There, for the moment, we must leave Morrie. But with his wise words about the winds of chance, shipmates that we all are on the life, I think we gather on the deck of Shakespeare’s ark to writers tell what we hope are their endless stories. To ourselves with what one of my novelist compatriots, Shirley Hazzard, once defined as the reward of literature: to relieve the soul
voyage of life, I think we gather on the deck of Shakespeare’s ark to listen to writers tell what we hope are their endless stories. To nurture ourselves with what one of my novelist compatriots, Shirley Hazzard, once defined as the reward of literature: to relieve the soul of incoherence. The impulse to do so I think is the one that has been in us ever since art began to dance off the cave walls to us—storytelling, writing, literature, perhaps begins there, in the painted bison running in the tunnels of time, and the hunting escapades they represent being told around the fire. I think stories still can be our way of sharing light, whether it’s the white sheen of a page in a book or the nebulae of cyberspace—of sitting together around humanity’s fire with the universal dark all around us. I believe it is
Thanks for listening, and I'll be glad to take your questions.

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Launched us:

Worth the passion and the precision, the long devotion each book

Takes to sail on that magical ocean of words where Shakespeare
Bella Voce Book Club, May 24 '12  (35-min. version)

When I began in the writing trade, as a young western workhorse harnessed to a newspaper job—as my family referred to it, “back east in Illinois”—I dreamed ahead to somehow joining one or another of the literary lineages aboard Shakespeare’s ark—the lions of narrative, the foxes of mystery, the griffins of science fiction and fantasy, the watchful herons of history, the gazelles and dolphins of poetry, the badgers of biography, the lop-eared leopards of memoir. Little did I imagine that going up that gangplank would have me voyaging along the Columbia and the Willamette to here, with my thirteen books in my seabag, for an occasion like this.

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I mentioned my baker’s dozen of books, of which Work Song is the thirteenth, but that doesn’t count a couple more that are edging their way onto the stage here with me. One, a bit more shy than the other at the moment because it’s not quite finished, is a sequel to Work Song—more Morrie! he returns to Butte, the scamp, after the doings you’ve been reading about—and that’s next year’s book. The more pushy piece of work is this year’s book, the soon-to-be published novel titled The Bartender’s Tale. I get to come back to Portland on its behalf in mid-September, at Powell’s and at Graham’s bookstore in Lake Oswego.

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**Whistling Season** where my character Morrie Morgan first appears--this trio of books will provide the examples of what I’m talking about today. Which I guess means you get a world premiere of at least one scene never read in public before.

Let’s begin with the people who live within the covers of a book, the characters. Life sometimes puts us through a rehearsal for a role not yet written. I was mostly raised, like my narrator Rusty in *The Bartender’s Tale*, by my father after my mother’s early death. My dad--Charles Campbell Doig, “Charlie” to all--was a haymaker: a haying contractor, a kind of free-lance foreman, who would hire his own crew and put up ranchers’ hay crops. Bars where I was lucky enough to tag along with him were his hiring halls, so when I was about as tall as his elbow as he judiciously bent it in the nine drinking spots of our small Montana town, I saw a lot of character on display, in the ranch hands and shepherders and saloonkeepers of half a century ago. Surely it was at life’s prompting, back then, that I developed an abiding interest in the trait called character and its even more seductive flowering into a plural form, characters. How could I not, when Dad’s rounds took him and the redheaded sharp-eared kid always at his side from neon oasis to oasis presided over by those personalities behind the bar; our favorite, Pete McCabe in the Stockman, passing along news as generously as he poured; the now nameless sad-faced bartender in the Pioneer who would murmur “Hullo, Charlie, hullo, Red,” as we stepped in, pull a glass of beer for Dad and open a bottle of Orange Crush pop for me, and say no more until “Take it easy, Charlie, take it easy, Red,” as we left; then perhaps to the mix of saloon and short-order joint presided over by the well-fed proprietor known only as Ham and Eggs--Ham for short--where other nicknamed denizens such as Mulligan John, Diamond Tony, and Hoppy Hopkins hung out. Small wonder, then, that my novels tend to have a bartender somewhere in the cast of characters. And the one of *The Bartender’s Tale*, has persistently shown up, skunk stripe in his black pompadour and his towel tirelessly polishing the bar wood, in a supporting role in three previous novels. It dawned on me that if he was such good company that I kept writing him into books, maybe he deserved top billing.

As we look at the idea of this bartender, the walk-on actor who now is going to have a starring role, how do I go about creating him on the page, bringing him to life in the eyes and ears and hearts of you, the readers? The realm of each novel I attempt has to be populated from somewhere. By rough count, I figure I’ve now employed more than 500 characters in ten works of fiction.
Fathering and for that matter mothering entire populations of books probably is beyond reasonable explanation even for someone who earns a living by making things up. But I begin by handing out names, noises, and noses.

First, names. Or as I usually go about it, first names before last, way before.

What to call each of them, the sudden new citizens who need passports onto my pages? To an extent that seems to startle academic questioners, my characters’ names tend to be determined more by linguistic chimings than, say, mythological implications or the nearest phone book.

“America. Montana. Those words with their ends open.” Thus mused my narrator, Angus McCaskill, in Dancing at the Rascal Fair as he and a lifelong chum set forth from Scotland in 1889 to take up homesteads in the American West. Not accidentally, the same aspirant vowel of promise, hope, boundless prospect, characterizes the romantic prospects whom Angus and other yearning hearts meet up with in that book and its successors in my Montana trilogy, English Creek and Ride with Me, Mariah Montana: Anna, Marcella, Leona, Lexa, and to add a slightly chestier note of unconformity, Mariah with an aitch. The men of these women’s lives tend to come with conclusive consonants: Isaac, Jick, Alec, Mitch.

But as a writer I believe literary rules aren’t worth having unless they can be improved on. So now, leap across the years these more recent books and we find, back there in Morrie’s one-room school in The Whistling Season, and then with her own set of unruly students in Work Song, and depend on it, an even more unruly Butte bunch in the sequel to come, the girlish mischief-maker Barbara, who turns her name pretty much backwards to become “Rrabrab” and then simply Rab.”

Morrie’s own name when he first appears there on a train depot in homesteader country in The Whistling Season I would like to say I worked on long and hard, for that chiming sound of first and last name, Morris Morgan. The truth is, it just came to me, as soon as I saw him in my mind. But the matter of names, and nicknames—the aforementioned Rab, and the thin, thin boy called Russian Famine, and Sam Sandison also known as the Earl of Hell, and so on—has given me a plot element for the Morrie books. Not to give away part of the story here in Work Song and beyond, but Morrie has what might be called an identity problem. His neck is
perpetually at risk from those who identify him too closely. That is a continuing gift to me as someone who must produce words and pages and books.

As to that bartender who's stepping up into a book of his own, all the way back there in *English Creek* when I first plucked him from my imagination, he has been called Tom Harry. Is that a first name and a last name, or a double-truck first name, like a woman named Mary Jane? I finally had to face that--it is a first and last name--but here again in *The Bartender's Tale*, names become part of the plot in the story of Tom and the bright, inquisitive kid--his son Russell, known as Rusty--whom I've given him to cope with, and bring up by himself as a bachelor father, along with living up to his reputation as the best bartender who ever lived.

So, name affixed, what noise in the world must a character make to not only stand up over time but continue to march, cavort, and sing rowdily in the reader's mind? Which is to say, what is the voice, the characteristic sound or memorable mannerism, of the person talking on the page?

Please meet, as I did on a stroll of my imagination, Oliver Milliron, widower father of three in *The Whistling Season*. All I knew of him, back then, was what my narrator tells me on the second page of manuscript: "Father had a short sniffing way of laughing, as if anything funny had to prove it to his nose first." That's a start, though, in giving readers something to remember Oliver by. Generally, small auditory touches count most effectively toward larger character dimension, I believe. Perhaps a word that a character owns, unobtrusively but consistently, throughout the story. Here in *Work Song*, the boy called Russian Famine gets a lot out of simple "Huh?" While Morrie every so often will say a wise, "Ah." And Sam Sandison, whom one reviewer generously described as the most unforgettable librarian in American fiction, deploys "Heh" and "Hah" with effectiveness.

If a character's manner comes out on the page as vocals, physical appearance perhaps presents the melody line. As the example of Oliver Milliron indicates, problematic as they are for the novelist who has already reached into that bin of characteristics for several books' worth, things such as noses have to be faced. Also eyes, ears, hairline, the whole physiognomy, and beyond that, lo, the soul.

Call me analog, but I believe memorable fictional creation is usually best served by physical magnitudes rather than minimalist digits of dis and data. Descriptive turns of phrase that simply pop to mind--Morrie's Rudyard Kipling-like mustache when he arrives to
us in The Whistling Season is “a soup strainer and a lady tickler and a fashion show, all in one” and while that memorable mustache comes and goes, it’s of course back in Work Song, and in the sequel it has expanded into a full beard), archival photos, revelatory glimpses across a room—the supply of characteristics leading toward character is as broad as a writer’s experience and as deep as he cares to delve. Case in point: I was in a small-town saloon not unlike those my father frequented on his hiring forays, when in came a long-faced leathery rancher. As soon as I was decently out of sight of him, that face entered my notebook: “wrinkles running down cheeks; like a copper coin a bit melted.” And then and there, Oliver Milliron acquired a face to go with his discriminating nose.

That, then, is a sampling of the population of a novelist’s head, at least this one’s, and I should move along now to where the imagination meets the laws of historical gravity—the territory there on the page where the writer has to persuade the reader this made-up stuff is somewhat believable, or at least entitled to that other alibi writers count on—“the willing suspension of disbelief.”

How do you go about it? As a writer, the constant question I have to ask myself is, how do I get from here to there. From names, noses, and noises to completed characters who will have lasting lives there in the pages. How do I get from messy rough draft manuscript pages to those neatly bound pages that go to bookstore shelves throughout the land to take their place in high-class alphabetical company—Dickens, Doig, Dostoevsky?

There’s the story that is told about Vladimir Nabokov when he was teaching his course on the novel, at Cornell. The author of “Lolita” and “Pale Fire” and “Speak, Memory” and other linguistically highly-honed books was famous for a couple of things in the classroom. One was the fiction course he taught, back there in the Eisenhower years, which was nicknamed “dirty lit”—Madame Bovary! Anna Karenina! The other was his customary final day of class, when students had been trying to follow his heavy Russian accent all semester, and now comes the climactic moment when Professor Nabokov peers over the rims of his glasses and gutturally speaks his summary of the writing life: “You must write with the passion of the scientist and the precision of the artist.”

The class, of course, thinks to itself, Yeah, right, the old boy has got it backwards again and they all get busy writing down the proper version—“the precision of the scientist and the passion of the artist”—in the self-defense for the final exam. Everyone gets this
done and looks up and Nabokov is still peering at them over the rims of those glasses, and says: “I repeat: you must write with the passion of the scientist and the precision of the artist.”

Let’s take those one by one, beginning with passion, which often gets things started, doesn’t it. Passionate investigation and discovery, as Nabokov meant—the search and research that goes into a piece of writing. The makings that I’ve never known what to call except “the slow poetry of fact.” The arithmetic of particulars which creatively gets added up into story and gives it a kind of majestic fidelity. Or as it’s sometimes called, crystalizing detail, which leaves in the reader’s mind a crystal of beguiling but valid scene—a memory waiting to happen, there in the pages of a book.

In my own case, the crystalizing details I seek are often in some obscure record of the past—where Google doesn’t go, or at least hadn’t gone yet when I was doing my research. When Morrie—and I—alit into Butte, Montana, because that mining city boasted of itself as The Richest Hill on Earth, back in the days when its copper fed the world’s hunger for electricity, and whatever hunch Morrie had, I figured I could get a novel called Work Song out of a place like Butte. I’m from the other Montana, the one of wide open spaces and communities too small to be called towns, let alone cities—and Butte was known to us, when I was growing up out there in ranch country, as a place as crazily off the charts as, say, Las Vegas is today. Rough, tough, known for altitude and attitude—although as anyone from there is likely to tell you, “Butte is a mile high and a mile deep, but Butte people are on the level.” In dropping Morrie into Butte, I knew I would have to take a look at what’s left of the old city and old mining equipment, and study it historically, from books and photographs. My wife Carol and I went through many, many photos at the state Historical Society library in Helena, of miners at work and people of the time in their downtown clothes, but it was one picture with nobody in it that really caught my imagination. The Butte Public Library of the time: an architectural show-off if there ever was one—a gray granite extravaganza with arched doorways and a balcony and a peaked tower. Just the kind of place Morrie would go to consult the city directory for some job worthy of his unique talents, as he now tells us about in this excerpt from Work Song:
“There is an old story that any Londoners with a madman in the family would drop him off at the library of the British Museum for the day. I was given a searching look as if I might be the Butte version when I presented myself at the desk of the public library that next morning and requested both the *City Directory* and Julius Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* in the original Latin.

The stout woman I took to be the head librarian--she had eyeglasses enchained around her neck commandingly enough for it--scrutinized me some moments more, then marched off into the maze of shelves while I found a seat at a broad oaken table. Everything was substantial, the brass-banistered stairway up to the mezzanine of books in tall rows, the green-shaded electrical lights hanging down from the high ceiling like watchfobs of the gods. I have always felt at home among books, so when the woman from the desk plopped my requested two in front of me, they seemed like old friends dropping by.

Aware that I should get down to business, I instead drew the *Gallic Wars* to me first, unable to resist. I had ordered it up by habit, as a test. To me, a repository of books is not a library without that volume in the mother of languages. Handling the book fondly as I was, I became aware of its own touch: tanned leather, not the more common calfskin cover put on for show. I examined the binding: sewn rather than glued. On the pages, lovely to finger, the sentences practically rose from the paper in a strong clear Caslon typeface. What I was holding was an exceptionally fine copy, so much so that I momentarily found myself envious of the Butte Public Library.”

I think you can see the story taking a certain turn here. And what leads Morrie, and us as readers, to that turn, are certain crystalizing details--the sumptuous oak table, the reading lights hanging down like the watchfobs of the gods, and most of all, the feel of that tanned leather cover when Morrie picks up that volume of Caesar.

Now to that second part of Nabokov’s acrobatic trick of writerly performance, doing it with the precision of the artist. To me, this is a matter of making it all dance together on the page. The names, the noises, the descriptions, probably noses and all. Here is that promised world premiere, a passage from *The Bartender’s Tale* where a new character has to be introduced.

Rusty, the narrator, is twelve at the time--1960--and pretty much lives in the back of the joint, as his gruff but gifted father Tom Harry calls his Medicine Lodge saloon, regarded as “a nearly holy oasis” in the town of Gros Ventre and the Two Medicine country of
northern Montana. In their bachelor life, Tom and Rusty eat supper at the cafe down the street, the Top Spot, best described as reliably mediocre, and Tom--who eats first because of his bartending shift--comes into the back of the joint one day to tell Rusty a new couple--Butte people, coincidentally enough--are running the cafe. Here's where that leads:

"Guess what. They got a kid about your age."

"What's his name?" I asked unenthusiastically.

"Go get yourself some supper," Pop blew a stream of smoke that significantly clouded the matter, "and find out."

The Spot showed it had indeed changed as soon as I walked in, because Melina Constantine herself was behind the counter in the cleanest waitress apron the cafe had seen in ages. Mrs. Constantine was squat, built along the lines of a fireplug, but with large warm eyes and a welcoming manner. She greeted me as if I was an old customer--actually, I was--and plucked out the meal ticket Pop had just inaugurated. Activity in the kitchen sounded hectic, and her husband the cook hurried past the serving window, giving me a dodgy nod. No kid my age was in sight, which was a relief.

"Now then, Russell," Mrs. Constantine smiled in motherly fashion as I hoisted onto my accustomed stool at the end of the counter, "what would you like for supper? The special is pot roast, nice and done."

Her smile dimmed when I ordered my usual butterscotch milkshake and cheeseburger, but she punched the meal ticket without saying anything.

Wouldn't you know, though, muffled conversation was taking place in the kitchen, and from where I sat, I could just see the top of a dark mop of hair as someone about my height stood waiting while Pete, cook and father rolled into one, dished up a plate of food and instructed that it all be consumed. I heard the new kid groan at the plateload.

I waited tensely as you do when someone from a different page enters the script of your life. Would he be hard to get along with? Would I?
The kitchen’s swinging door was kicked open—it took a couple of thundrous kicks—and, meal in hand as if it weighed a tragically amount, out came a girl.

“Hi,” she said faintly.

“Hi,” I said identically.

Zoe was her name, and she seemed to come from that foreign end of the alphabet, a gypsyslike wisp who slipped past me to a table in the back corner before I finished blinking. Her mother corrected that in nothing flat. “Russell, I’ll bring yours over to the table too, if you don’t mind.”

At the table, the two of us sat across from each other as trapped as strangers in a dining car. Given my first full look at Zoe, the wide mouth, the pert nose, the inquisitive gaze right back at me, I must have just stared. My education until then had not included time with a girl. But the incontrovertible fact facing me was that Zoe Constantine possessed deep brown eyes that were hard to look away from and she had an olive-skinned complexion that no doubt suntanned nice as toast, unlike mine. For all of these arresting features, she was so skinny—call it thin to be polite—that she reminded me of those famished waifs in news photos of DP refugee camps. But that was misleading, according to the indifferent way she toyed with her food while I waited edgily for mine. I was close to panic, thinking of endless suppertime ahead with the two of us about as conversational as the salt and pepper shakers; how was this going to work?

She spoke first....Idly mashing potatoes that were already mashed, she caught me even more by surprise as she conspiratorially lowered her voice enough that neither her mother behind the counter nor her father in the kitchen could hear:

“How come he and you eat here? Where’s your mother? Can’t she cook better grub than this?”

“She’s, she’s not around any more.”

Her voice dropped to an eager whisper. “Did they split the blanket?”
“Uh-huh,” I whispered back, although I wasn’t sure why divorce was a whispering matter. “When I was real little. I wouldn’t know her if I saw her.”

“You’re so lucky,” she said.

I was so stunned I could hardly squeak out: “Because I don’t have a mother I’ve ever seen?”

“No, silly, I mean because you’ve got only one parent to boss you around,” she whispered, with either world-weary assurance or perfectly done mischief, it was impossible to tell which. “That’s plenty, isn’t it?” She peered critically toward the kitchen. “I’d give up my dad, I think, if it came to that.”

“Wh-why?” I sneaked a look at her father in his undersized cook’s hat, flipping a slice of Velveeta onto my cheeseburger as if he’d just remembered that ingredient. “What’s the matter with him?”

Zoe waved that away with her fork. “Nothing much. He’s just not swuft about a lot of things.”

This was another stunner from her. Swift did not merely mean quick at handling things, it meant swift-minded, brainy, sensible, and quite a number of other sterling qualities she evidently found lacking in her father.

“He couldn’t beat up anybody in a fight, like I bet your dad can,” she was saying as if she would trade with me on the spot... Her face was always a show, her generous mouth sometimes sly, sometimes pursed, the tip of her tongue indicating when she was really thinking, her eyes going big beyond belief when something pleased her, and when something didn’t, she could curl her lip practically to the tip of her nose.

Well, that’s the start of the story of Rusty and Zoe, and I hope this and the other examples have shown you some of the makings of a book, and there’s one last one I’d like to share with you to take us to the end here.

Writers aren’t always up to all the tricks that critics think they’re catching us at as we carpenter our books. Sometimes, though, in the making of a book, yes, the writer consciously resorts to some literary device or another that best seems to do the job for a particular scene, and one of those is to bring the emotional and the physical actuality together there on the page. The point is to try to get
the writing to the frontier, there on the page and in the reader’s mind, where a character’s circumstance is both physical and metaphysical. Here is Morrie, at a climactic point near the end of Work Song, once again in that evocative Butte Public Library:

I switched on the mezzanine lights. The Reading Room below was as dark and hushed as the audience portion of a theater. Up on stage, so to speak, the books waited in titled ranks, and in their reassuring company I moved idly along the laden shelves, running the tips of my fingers over the exquisite spines, taking down an old loved volume every so often and opening it to the stored glory of words. Around me was the wealth of minds down through all of recorded time.

In such company, you wonder about your own tale in the long book of life. What would they have made of me, these grandmasters of storytelling?... No matter how I looked at it, my story lacked conclusion.

Suddenly I knew what to do. Can inspiration come off on the fingers? I rubbed my hands together appreciatively, there among the literary classics. It was as if the risk-taking lifetimes of composition, the reckless romances with language, the tricky business of plots stealing onto pages, all the wiles of the glorious books answered to my touch. There was no mistaking their message: sometimes you must set sail on the winds of chance.”

There, for the moment, we must leave Morrie. But his wise words about the winds of chance can steer us, shipmates that we all are on the voyage of life, as we gather on the deck of Shakespeare’s ark to listen to writers tell what we hope are their endless stories.

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Thanks for listening, and I’ll be glad to take your questions.
clear his desk a bit. It may take into next week before information about
the book tour can be assembled. Meanwhile, in planning for Portland it
would be helpful to know if we'll be met or whether we'll rent a car.

My best guess right now is that we'll fly down the afternoon of May 23 and
return to Seattle the morning of the 25th.

Carol

On Apr 11, 2012, at 1:25 PM, Kate Gannon wrote:

Hi Carol -
Thank you for letting me know about the book plates! We are very
happy to send you some flight options if you can let us know what time
of day you'd like to leave and return. There are flights from SEA to
PDX leaving about every hour starting at 6:30 AM up until 11:00 PM. I
assume you'd still like to fly in on the 23rd and out on the 25th?
The flight is only an hour, so you could even fly in the same day if
you wanted. When we are ready to book, I'll need both of your names
as they appear on your ID's and your birthdays!

As for other venues where Ivan might be a good fit when his book comes
out, can you let me know the dates and locations of the book tour? Do
they have that information yet? I ask because I don't want to muddy
the waters of what Riverhead is doing in terms of publicity (free)
appearances for the book. Stanford for one, doesn't really pay a fee
- $1000 at most and they often do people who are on book tour. I'd be
happy to pass the woman's name on who we have worked with there -
would be good for Riverhead to be in touch with them.

All best,
Kate

Kate Gannon
Lyceum Agency
915 SE 35th Avenue, #205
Portland, OR 97214
cell: 503-880-5348 tel: 503-467-4622
www.lyceumagency.com

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12 April '12

Teresa Ainsworth  
Bella Voce Coordinator  
First Independent Bank  
1220 Main St., Suite 300  
Vancouver WA 98660

Dear Ms. Ainsworth--

Here are the signed bookplates, along with my admiration for First Independent's stout support of Bella Voce. I'm greatly looking forward to the May 24th event--Portland has long been one of my strongholds of readership. My wife, Carol, another Portland adherent, will be with me on the trip. See you then.

All best,
From: carol doig <cddoig@comcast.net>
Subject: *bella voce and beyond?*
Date: April 11, 2012 8:52:47 AM PDT
To: Kate Gannon <kate@lyceumagency.com>

Good morning and happy springtime, Kate. Ivan wanted to let you know he has signed the bookplates and will ship them to Teresa Ainsworth pronto. A couple of other things while we're at this:

We still have plane tickets to resolve. Shall I look up shuttle schedule and confer with you?

Ivan's new book, *The Bartender's Tale*, is gathering steam, with the Riverhead publicity department starting to plan appearances, etc. He's spoken twice, some time back, in the San Francisco A&E series. We realize a slot there might not be available at this point of the year, but might there be some other -- Commonwealth club? Stanford? AAUW speakers series or the like? You've mentioned alliance or at least collegiality with Katharine Barker and Steve's agency, and so we wonder if great minds can converge and produce something here in September-December.

Best,
Carol
Attn: Kate Gannon

Good morning, Kate. Ivan is wondering whether the book club has chosen a title yet. He's also looking ahead to signing the bookplates and would appreciate several weeks to accomplish that, which would allow him to do a moderate number at the end of his work days.

There's still plenty of time to attend to other details, including plane flights on what we used to call the Horizon shuttle and which I guess are now designated Alaska. We plan to come down on May 23, time to be discussed.

All's well here. We've just finished reading page proofs for The Bartender's Tale, and Penguin has finally given us a pub date: August 21.

Best,
Carol
Thanks, Ivan + Carol! We are looking forward to working with you + seeing you in Portland.

Kate

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www.lyceumagency.com
Hi, Heather. The Bella Voce folks seem to be veteran at their speaking series and have their own ways of going about it. But you're right, it wouldn't hurt for you to be in touch with their coordinator. Her email teresa.ainsworth@firstindy.com

Best,
Ivan

On Mar 28, 2012, at 11:01 AM, Connor, Heather wrote:

Hi Ivan,
This is fantastic! If you'd like to pass along the contact person for Bellá Voce, I'd be happy to connect with them to help in ordering books or sending along any materials they need.

Best,
Heather

Heather A. Connor
Publicity Manager
Berkley, NAL, Perige & Riverhead Trade Paperbacks
375 Hudson St., 5th Fl., New York, NY 10014
PH: 212-366-2149
a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.
Please think of the environment before printing!

-----Original Message-----
From: carol doig [mailto:ccdsoig@comcast.net]
Sent: Tuesday, March 27, 2012 11:32 AM
To: Connor, Heather
Cc: Saletan, Rebecca
Subject: Work Song bonanza

Heather, hi. A bit of good news. The Portland book club, Bella Voce, that I'm speaking to on May 24, will be featuring Work Song, they tell
LYCEUM AGENCY: Engagement Summary

Co-Broker: First Independent Bank – 5/24/2012

Sponsor Contact:

Stacey Graham, Executive VP & Chief Strategy Officer
First Independent Strategy & Development Group Bella Voce Book Club
First Independent Bank
1220 Main Street, Suite 500

Other Event Contact:

Miriam Feuerle
Lyceum Agency
915 SE 35th Avenue, #205
Portland, OR 97214
Tel: 503-467-4621
Cell: 503-577-9361

Kate Gannon
Lyceum Agency
Tel: 503-467-4622
Cell: 503-880-5348

Vancouver, WA 98660-

Tel: (360) 619-4484 Ext: Cell: (503) 805-6758
Fax: (360) 619-4429 Home: WWW: firstindy.com
Email: Stacey.Graham@firstindy.com

Fee: $12,500
☑️ Contract Signed
☑️ Promotional Packet Sent

Engagement Start: Thursday, May 24, 2012
Engagement End: Thursday, May 24, 2012

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Thursday, May 24, 2012
11:00 AM VIP Reception Meet & Greet (author encouraged to do 10-15 minutes of mingling prior to start of luncheon, lunch seating begins at 11:30 AM).

Thursday, May 24, 2012
12:00 PM 35-minute lecture about Mr. Doig’s experiences, books and work as an author followed by 15-20 minutes of Q & A.

Thursday, May 24, 2012
1:30 PM Book sales and signing followed by photos with event organizers (obligations about 30 minutes).

Special Request: Bank would like to send Mr. Doig bookplates (up to 300) to pre-sign in advance of his appearance. The bank will also buy copies of one book by the author, which will be given to each attendee. Additional stock will be on hand at the luncheon should anyone wish to purchase another copy or buy other titles by the author.

Sponsor requests that Mr. Doig not schedule any other public appearances in the Portland Metropolitan Area (Portland, Vancouver) in the two months prior to the event and two months following. Unpublicized private events would not be a concern.

Production Requirements: The performance space will be equipped with a raised platform, podium, microphone and appropriate lighting. For audience Q & A the presenter uses floor mics.
LYCEUM AGENCY: Engagement Summary

Co-Broker: First Independent Bank – 5/24/2012

Venue: Multnomah Athletic Club (Portland, OR)
Hotel: To be booked by Sponsor.
Flight to: To be booked by Lyceum in consultation with Mr. Doig.
Flight from: To be booked by Lyceum in consultation with Mr. Doig.
Ground Transport: To be booked by Sponsor.
Other Comments:
Engagement Contract: Ivan Doig

This Engagement Contract ("Contract") entered into effective as of 9/12/2011 (the "Effective Date") by and between The Lyceum Agency, LLC (915 SE 35th Avenue, #205, Portland, OR 97214), the authorized agency of the Speaker (as defined below), hereafter referred to as "Agency" and First Independent Bank, hereafter referred to as "Sponsor."

Agency will provide to Sponsor the services of Ivan Doig, hereafter referred to as "Speaker," to lecture at:

PLACE: Multnomah Athletic Club (Portland, OR)
DATE: Thursday, May 24, 2012
TIME: 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM

PROGRAM:

1) 11:00 AM—VIP Reception Meet & Greet (author encouraged to do 10-15 minutes of mingling prior to start of luncheon, lunch seating begins at 11:30 AM).

2) 12:00 PM—35-minute lecture about Mr. Doig's experiences, books and work as an author followed by 15-20 minutes of Q & A.

NOTE: Please allow sufficient time prior to the lecture to allow for full A/V check with professional tech person.

3) 1:30 PM—Book sales and signing followed by photos with event organizers (obligations about 30 minutes).

SPECIAL REQUEST: Bank would like to send Mr. Doig bookplates (up to 300) to pre-sign in advance of his appearance. The bank will also buy copies of one book by the author, which will be given to each attendee. Additional stock will be on hand at the luncheon should anyone wish to purchase another copy or buy other titles by the author.

EXCLUSIVITY: Sponsor requests that Mr. Doig not schedule any other public appearances in the Portland Metropolitan Area (Portland, Vancouver) in the two months prior to the event and two months following. Unpublicized private events would not be a concern.

PRODUCTION REQUIREMENTS: The performance space will be equipped with a raised platform, podium, microphone and appropriate lighting. For audience Q & A the presenter uses floor mics.

OTHER: Any other activities must be cleared through our office in advance of the event. No lecture or program or any part thereof is to be reproduced, including but not limited to the reproduction by broadcasting, visual recording or audio recording without the written permission of the Agency or the Speaker.

TERMS: A fee of $12,500, plus refundable fare ticket for round trip coach air travel for 2 (when coming from the east coast author must arrive the day before the event), as many as 2 nights of hotel accommodations, meals and all local ground transportation in Portland, OR.

Agency will book air travel and invoice the Sponsor. Sponsor is responsible for booking hotel (which must have a restaurant or be in a walkable area) and arranging for local ground transportation (which must be provided through professional car service that is licensed and bonded or by an employee or official representative of Sponsor).

The Sponsor agrees to pay the Agency as consideration for Speaker's services the amount set forth in the terms above. A deposit of 50% ($6,250) is required to validate this agreement and is due upon Sponsor's receipt of an
executed Contract. In the event of a cancellation, every effort will be made to reschedule Speaker's presentation within the following 12 months. If the event cannot be rescheduled and cancellation is due to Sponsor, the deposit is non-refundable. If cancellation is due to Speaker, the deposit will be refunded. Balance of payment must be sent to the Agency the day of the appearance. Checks should be made payable to The Lyceum Agency, LLC (EIN 20-1863814).

COLLECTION: If Sponsor fails to pay the Agency for services performed by the Speaker as outlined above and a lawyer must collect fees and costs due under this agreement from Sponsor, Sponsor agrees to pay the reasonable expenses and attorney fees for the time and the costs to do the collection.

It is understood that this Contract is binding on both parties; it cannot be cancelled except as follows: The Agency and the Sponsor mutually agree that either party may cancel this Contract and all parties shall be released from any liability or damages hereunder, if the Speaker or the Sponsor is unable to fulfill the terms of this Contract due to an act of God or any other legitimate conditions beyond the control of the Speaker or the Sponsor. However, it is agreed by both parties that best efforts will be made by both parties to so adapt that the lecture be presented as scheduled.

SPONSOR SIGNATORY:
Stacey Graham
Executive VP & Chief Strategy Officer
Bella Voce Book Club
First Independent Strategy & Development Group
First Independent Bank
1220 Main Street, Suite 500
Vancouver, WA 98660
Tel: 360-619-4484
Cell: 503-805-6758
Email: Stacey.Graham@firstindy.com

EVENT CONTACT:
Miriam Feuerle
Lyceum Agency
915 SE 35th Avenue, #205
Portland, OR 97214
Tel: 503-467-4621
Cell: 503-577-6361

Kate Gannon
Lyceum Agency
Tel: 503-467-4622
Cell: 503-880-5348

The representative of the Sponsor in signing this Contract warrants that he/she signs as a duly authorized representative of the Sponsor and does not assume personal liability. The Agency representative in signing this Contract warrants that the Agency has the expressed authority to sign on behalf of the Speaker.

Your signed copy of the Contract is acknowledgement that the Speaker has accepted this engagement and has agreed to appear at the time and place specified above. The Lyceum Agency reserves the right to withdraw this offer should this signed Contract and deposit (if required) not be received by the Agency within 21 days of the date “entered into.”

This Contract is governed by the laws of the State of Oregon and cannot be changed except in writing and signed by both parties.

For The Lyceum Agency, LLC
Miriam Feuerle

By:
(Agency)

For First Independent Bank
Stacey Graham, Executive Vice-President &
Chief Strategy Officer

By:
(Sponsor)

Please print and sign three copies of this Contract and return all three to us for counter signatures, we will then send you a signed original for your records and an invoice for lecture fee/deposit.

The Lyceum Agency agrees to pay Speaker (Ivan Doig) $10,000 for his services; Lyceum will retain $2,500 (20% commission to agency) of the $12,500 negotiated above with Sponsor. Lyceum will work with Speaker to book travel and take care of all of Speaker's logistical arrangements for this engagement. Lyceum will invoice Sponsor for all appropriate expenses as detailed above. We will issue payment to Speaker within one week of payment from Sponsor.

MIRIAM FEUERLE
Name of Lyceum Representative

Signature

Date 10/10/11

I have read the above contract and agree to fulfill the "Speaker" responsibilities as outlined herein.

Ivan Doig
Speaker Name

Signature

Date 9/15/2011
Ivan likes that photo (taken in our living room), Kate. By all means go ahead and use it.

The bio should be updated to read 10 previous novels, with Work Song added to the most recent list. If more bio is needed, we'll gladly provide it.

Three signed copies of the contract are in today's outgoing mail. Many thanks for your prompt attention to all this.

Carol

On Sep 15, 2011, at 9:43 AM, Kate Gannon wrote:

Thanks, Carol. Yes, the regular old mail is just fine! I will let you know when we receive it.

With regard to the headshot and bio, I've attached a photo here from the web that is nice. Would this work? Below is what Riverhead/Penguin has up on their site for Ivan's short bio:

Ivan Doig was born in Montana and grew up along the Rocky Mountain Front, the dramatic landscape that has inspired much of his writing. A former ranch hand, newspaperman, and magazine editor, with a Ph.D. in history, Doig is the author of nine previous novels, most recently The Whistling Season and The Eleventh Man, and three works of nonfiction, including his classic first book, the memoir This House of Sky. He has been a National Book Award finalist and has received the Wallace Stegner Award, a Distinguished Achievement Award from the Western Literature Association, and multiple PNBA and MPBA Book Awards, among other honors. He lives in Seattle.

I can send this to the bank for now and if they require something longer, I can get back with you.

We are very much looking forward to meeting you both!

Kate

Kate Gannon
Lyceum Agency
915 SE 35th Avenue, #205
Portland, OR 97214
cell: 503.880.5348 | Tel: 503.467.4622
www.lyceumagency.com

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Good morning, Kate. Ivan likes your contract and has signed it. I don't have scanning capability -- iMacs are infamous for not playing well with scanners -- but I could fax it or, since we have lots of lead time, I could drop it in my mailbox and provide you a cleaner copy. Preference?
Good morning, Kate. Ivan likes your contract and has signed it. I don’t have scanning capability -- iMacs are infamous for not playing well with scanners -- but I could fax it or, since we have lots of lead time, I could drop it in my mailbox and provide you a cleaner copy. Preference?

Ivan will tackle the bio and headshot info. Could it wait a bit, as he is so deep into finishing the current ms. that I can barely see him! I expect he’ll send it off to his editor next week.

Regards

Carol

On Sep 13, 2011, at 4:25 PM, Kate Gannon wrote:

Hi Carol,
As promised, you will find our contract attached here for your review. At the bottom of the second page is where Ivan should sign off if all looks good and he agrees! Of course, we will return a fully-executed copy to you after we have the bank sign off.

Please let me know if you have any questions at all. Also the bank will be after a high-resolution headshot and bio – do you something you could send me?

Have a great evening,
Kate

---

Hi Carol –
Thanks for your note! I have to confess, I am a little bit of a newbie to Portland – on my 3rd year – so I didn’t know the Heathman went through a rough patch. It is lovely now and the restaurant is one of the best in the city.

We are delighted to draw up a contract and send it over for your review first before sending it on to the bank. That should be over to you a bit later this afternoon, but please let me know if you have any questions in the meantime.
Hi Carol,

As promised, you will find our contract attached here for your review. At the bottom of the second page is where Ivan should sign off if all looks good and he agrees! Of course, we will return a fully-executed copy to you after we have the bank sign off.

Please let me know if you have any questions at all. Also the bank will be after a high-resolution headshot and bio – do you something you could send me?

Have a great evening,
Kate

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Hi Carol —

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We are delighted to draw up a contract and send it over for your review first before sending it on to the bank. That should be over to you a bit later this afternoon, but please let me know if you have any questions in the meantime.

All best,
Kate

Kate Gannon
Lyceum Agency
915 SE 35th Avenue, #205
Let's try the Heathman, Kate. Years ago, when Mary Arstad was general manager, the place hummed with hospitality, and we stayed there a number of times. She'd assign us a junior suite, and we'd settle in for a fine time. After she left, the hotel went through a rough patch, and we haven't tried it since. Time to give it a new look, and we would like to spend two nights.

Ivan doesn't have a standard contract form, so let's have a look at yours.

Many thanks,
Carol

On Sep 12, 2011, at 11:03 AM, Kate Gannon wrote:

Hi Carol –
This is great news, thank you! They will be so pleased to hear this – and that you will be coming too. Typically, they put people up at the Heathman Hotel (one of Portland’s only luxury hotels) – would that be amendable to you or does the location of the Westin suit you better? The Heathman is right downtown, within walking distance to many restaurants/shops and very near the venue, about a 3-min drive. You're transportation in Portland to/from the airport and to/from the venue as needed, will definitely be covered by car service. Parking at SeaTac, too! Speaking of flights, their invite stated that they would pay for 1 round trip first class ticket – but because you are coming along, we can have the bank pay for 2 coach tickets on Horizon.

For the solidifying of this event, we will need to draw up a contract with the bank for Ivan's appearance. We are happy to use our typical contract template language or if you have a contract that is preferred, we are just as happy to use that. Just let me know and I will get to work on it. Because Ivan is not an exclusive client with us, we will need him to sign an addendum to the contract outlining the terms of our working relationship for this event (as discussed, Lyceum does all of the logistics, invoicing, contracting, payment, etc. and in turn takes a 20% commission from the fee) – we will send that along with a copy the contract. We also will need a copy of his W9 for payment when the time comes.

Please do let me know if you have any questions at all – we are very happy to be working with you both on this event.

Regards,
Kate

Kate Gannon
Lyceum Agency
915 SE 35th Avenue, #205
Portland, OR 97214
cell: 503.880.5348 | Tel: 503.467.4622
www.lyceumagency.com

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Ivan accepts the invitation as proffered, for a $12,500 fee, Kate. He can accommodate their preferred date of Thursday, May 24, and will sign bookplates ahead of time.

We'll fly down on Horizon's shuttle, and would appreciate two nights at a hotel, as offered. We like the Westin, but if they have a special arrangement somewhere else, Ivan would consider it.

His choice of a book would be The Whistling Season, which is the first of a trilogy and so the logical pick. Work Song is the second, and the final volume will be started after Ivan is done with the current ms. The Whistling Season has been a great favorite of book clubs and community reads, and is a surefire pleaser.

We understand normal expenses will be covered, including SeaTac parking and whatever transportation we need to hire around town.

No doubt there will be other items to discuss, but perhaps this is enough to get us going.

Best,

Carol

On Sep 9, 2011, at 2:27 PM, Kate Gannon wrote:

Hi Carol –
That was quick - you might not have even read my email from this morning yet! Attached is the formal offer invite from the bank book club that we’ve be talking about. They did ultimately decide to stick with May as the month they would like to host Ivan. When planning the schedule for their season, we try very hard to accommodate when authors have new books to be published, so I’m sorry this couldn’t be timed for October. Once you’ve had time to look this over with Ivan, please let me know if you have any questions at all.

When Ivan and I first spoke, he wasn’t sure if he’d rather fly or take the train. Just in case, the bank has offered to pay for first class airfare but he is welcome to take the train instead and of course they will pay for that! If he does choose to accept this invite, we’d love to have you as well. This is a great group of women and very lovely event.

Thank you very much for your consideration and have a great weekend,

Kate

Kate Gannon
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cell: 503.880.5348 | Tel: 503.467.4622
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<Invitation Proposal Ivan Doig - May 2012.pdf>
LYCEUM AGENCY

FORMAL INVITATION PROPOSAL
Ivan Doig

Organization: First Independent Bank (Vancouver, WA)

Event: Bella Voce Book Club: Author's Luncheon (3 luncheons annually).

Venue: Multnomah Athletic Club (Portland, OR)

Date/Time (or range of proposed dates): Weekday in May 2012 (11 AM to about 2 PM), see below.

Thursday, May 24 (1st choice), Thursday, May 17 (2nd choice, other dates available if needed)

Purpose: The First Independent Bank’s Bella Voce Book Club Author Luncheon Series brings notable authors to the region to speak to an engaged audience interested in literature and the arts. Other Bella Voce presenters include Sue Monk Kidd, Michael Chabon, Ayelet Waldman, Susan Orlean, Alice Hoffman, Anita Shreve and Pulitzer Prize winners Elizabeth Strout, Rick Bragg and Michael Cunningham, Ann Patchett.

Audience (size/composition): The audience typically anticipated for this event is about 250 people, primarily educated women ages 25-75.

Event Format: This is a formal seated luncheon event—estimated duration from 11 AM to about 2 PM, attire is business casual.

1) VIP Reception Meet & Greet prior to start of luncheon (30 minutes);

2) Presentation (on raised stage with podium): After a brief introduction by the event sponsors, author will speak for 30-35 minutes (about books, life and experiences as a writer). Presentation is followed by 15 to 20 minutes of audience Q & A using floor mics; and

3) Book sales & signing following presentation, and photos with bank sponsors (30 minutes)

Additional Activities: Bank would like to send author bookplates to pre-sign in advance of appearance. The bank will also buy copies of one book by the author, which will be given to each attendee. Additional stock will be on hand at the luncheon should anyone wish to purchase another copy or buy other titles by the author.

Exclusivity: We request that author not schedule any other public appearances in the Portland Metropolitan Area (Portland, Vancouver) in the two months prior to the event and two months following. Unpublicized private events would not be a concern.

Proposed Terms: $12,500, plus RT first class airfare for 1 person, up to 2 nights of hotel (when coming from the East Coast author must arrive the day before the event), and all local ground transportation in Portland.

Sponsor Contact Information:
Miriam Feuerle (co-brokering agency on behalf of Stacey Graham)
Lyceum Agency
915 SE 35th Avenue, #205
Portland, OR 97214
cell: 503.577.6361

Sponsor Signatory:
Stacey A Graham, Executive VP & Chief Strategy Officer
First Independent Strategy & Development Group
First Independent Bank
1220 Main Street, Suite 440
Vancouver, WA 98660

Please call me if you have any questions, 503-577-6361. –Thank you, Miriam
Thanks so much, Carol. As you know, the bank is going back and forth between May and October, trying to figure out what works best for everyone in their series. It is looking like they will invite Ivan for May – I will be back in touch very soon.

Thanks for your patience on this!

Kate

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HI, Kate. Ivan has talked with his editor and the publication date, which is more than a year away, is undetermined. If the bank needs an October date, later in the month probably would be safest.

About the book: It features a beloved figure who has shown up in Ivan's previous novels, such as English Creek and Bucking the Sun, an iconic bartender who now has a son to raise by himself. An early reader of the manuscript calls it warm and funny, and a hoot. So we have high hopes for this one, Ivan's 11th novel!

Our best,

Carol

On Sep 7, 2011, at 5:13 PM, Kate Gannon wrote:

Hi Carol!
Dear Kate,

Ivan has talked with his editor and the publication date, which is more than a year away, is undetermined. If the bank needs an October date, later in the month probably would be safest.

About the book: It features a beloved figure who has shown up in Ivan's previous novels, such as English Creek and Bucking the Sun, an iconic bartender who now has a son to raise by himself. An early reader of the manuscript calls it warm and funny, and a hoot. So we have high hopes for this one, Ivan's 11th novel!

Our best,
Carol

On Sep 7, 2011, at 5:13 PM, Kate Gannon wrote:

Hi Carol!

I hope you are well and enjoying the last days of summer. The bank (who sponsors the book club) is now back from summer vacation and getting their invites ready for their next season. It looks very likely that they will put in an offer to Ivan to come speak to this lovely group of ladies but are figuring out dates. Do you have any information on when in October the new book will be published? Also, if there is any little snippet on the topic that I can share with them, that would be great.

Thanks so much for any info you can provide!

All best,
Kate

Kate Gannon
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If the book club would like a new hardback, then we'd go with October, which Ivan is willing to do.
Kate
Hi Carol!

I hope you are well and enjoying the last days of summer. The bank (who sponsors the book club) is now back from summer vacation and getting their invites ready for their next season. It looks very likely that they will put in an offer to Ivan to come speak to this lovely group of ladies but are figuring out dates. Do you have any information on when in October the new book will be published? Also, if there is any little snippet on the topic that I can share with them, that would be great.

Thanks so much for any info you can provide!

All best,
Kate

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From: carol doig [mailto:ccdgoig@comcast.net]
Sent: Monday, July 11, 2011 1:50 PM
To: Kate Gannon
Subject: Re: Bella Voce Book Club - Portland, OR

If the book club would like a new hardback, then we'd go with October, which Ivan is willing to do, Kate

Regards, Carol

On Jul 11, 2011, at 11:20 AM, Kate Gannon wrote:

Hi Carol -

Thanks for your email – very pleased to meet you! Yes, the bank does do hardbacks and actually prefers them to paperback. If the offer does come in, that would be fantastic if there was a new book! That publication date slated for around October 2012, yes? Ivan let me know that May was his preferred timeframe and I've let the bank know about the possibility of a new book.
Hi, Becky. I'm doing Ivan's email while he sprints ahead on the ms. Kate Gannon of the speaker's agency has replied: "Yes, the bank does do hardbacks and actually prefers them to paperbacks."

I replied that in that case Ivan would take October, if a contract is agreed on. We're told he's "shortlisted," whatever that means.

Best,
Carol

On Jul 11, 2011, at 10:29 AM, Saletan, Rebecca wrote:

Ivan,
I talked over the schedule with Geoff. It looks like spring/summer 2011 is overfull with fiction already and we'd be better served all around by waiting for fall. If we think the summer turns out to be the best time we can still cheat it into August but we don't need to cross that bridge right now.
Do let me know about the bank club – which book they'd want to use.
All best,
Becky

Rebecca Saletan
Editorial Director, Riverhead Books
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014-3657
212 366 2908
212 366 2922 (fax)
Hi Carol -

Thanks for your email – very pleased to meet you! Yes, the bank does do hardbacks and actually prefers them to paperbacks. If the offer does come in, that would be fantastic if there was a new book! That publication date slated for around October 2012, yes? Ivan let me know that May was his preferred timeframe and I’ve let the bank know about the possibility of new book.

All the best,
Kate

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From: carol doig [mailto:cddoig@comcast.net]
Sent: Monday, July 11, 2011 9:39 AM
To: Kate Gannon
Subject: Re: Bella Voce Book Club - Portland, OR

Hello, Kate. I'm pleased to handle the email as Ivan sprints toward completion of the next novel. The immediate question is whether the book club ever buys hardbacks. Or do they inevitably order paperbacks? There's just a chance that if a contract is agreed to, a new hardback could be available. His editor would need to work on the schedule.

Best,
Carol
Ivan,
I talked over the schedule with Geoff. It looks like spring/summer 2011 is overfull with fiction already and we’d be better served all around by waiting for fall. If we think the summer turns out to be the best time we can still cheat it into August but we don’t need to cross that bridge right now.
Do let me know about the bank club – which book they’d want to use.
All best,
Becky

Rebecca Saletan
Editorial Director, Riverhead Books
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212 366 2908
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Hi Carol —
I had the pleasure of speaking with Ivan today by phone and we decided that I better get in touch with you via email! So, hello!

We run a lecture agency, the Lyceum Agency, here in Portland and represent about 40 authors exclusively for their speaking engagements. We are sometimes asked to seek out authors who we don’t rep exclusively for venues we work with. To this end, we work with a bank book club every year to book their speakers and Ivan is on their shortlist of consideration. I’ve given Ivan the preliminary info: 45-min luncheon lecture on his life and work as a writer followed by a book signing. They do purchase a copy of the book for every patron (about 350) and also have book sales at the event. The group is mainly women and are great to work with!

Also, we are also great friends with the Steven Barclay Agency, who I understand you’ve worked with in the past! We work very much like them, so you know what to expect.

I will be in touch as the bank decides but please let me know if you have any questions in the meantime.

All best,
Kate

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Michael Cunningham
When I began in the writing trade, as a young western workhorse harnessed to a newspaper job—as my family referred to it, “back east in Illinois”—I dreamed ahead to somehow joining one or another of the literary lineages aboard Shakespeare’s ark—the lions of narrative, the foxes of mystery, the griffins of science fiction and fantasy, the watchful herons of history, the gazelles and dolphins of poetry, the badgers of biography, the lop-eared leopards of memoir. Little did I imagine that going up that gangplank would have me voyaging along the Columbia and the Willamette to here, with my thirteen books in my seabag, for an occasion like this.

My job on deck here, for the next thirty-five minutes or so, is to think out loud to you about some of the makings of books—how a writer, at least this one, tries to bring fictional characters to life on a page; how the research is gathered from the nooks and corners of history and experience; and finally some thoughts about the craft of putting words on a page.

I mentioned my baker’s dozen of books, of which Work Song is the thirteenth, but that doesn’t count a couple more that are edging their way onto the stage here with me. One, a bit more shy than the other at the moment because it’s not quite finished, is a sequel to Work Song—more Morrie! He returns to Butte, the scamp, after the doings you’ve been reading about—and that’s next year’s book. The more pushy piece of work is this year’s book, the soon-to-be-published novel titled The Bartender’s Tale. I get to come back to Portland on its behalf in mid-September, at Powell’s and at Graham’s bookstore in Lake Oswego.

Why do I cite these subsequent two books? It’s not just an author counting on his fingers to keep track of how he’s doing, honest. Norman Maclean, who made an illustrious writing career out of one splendid book, A River Runs Through It, used to tease me that I was in danger of becoming prolific. I would always point out to Norman that I was not a pensioned-off University of Chicago English professor like someone I could mention, I’m a professional writer who actually makes a living from his words. The long and short of it is, Work Song and its sequel and The Bartender’s Tale represent the past five years of my life. They show where I am
as a writer, they’re my latest news from the territory of my imagination, and so, with occasional exceptions—particularly The Whistling Season where my character Morrie Morgan first appears—this trio of books will provide the examples of what I’m talking about today. Which I guess means you get a world premiere of at least one scene never read in public before.

Let’s begin with the people who live within the covers of a book, the characters. Life sometimes puts us through a rehearsal for a role not yet written. I was mostly raised, like my narrator Rusty in The Bartender’s Tale, by my father after my mother’s early death. My dad—Charles Campbell Doig, “Charlie” to all—was a haymaker: a haying contractor, a kind of free-lance foreman, who would hire his own crew and put up ranchers’ hay crops. Bars where I was lucky enough to tag along with him were his hiring halls, so when I was about as tall as his elbow as he judiciously bent it in the nine drinking spots of our small Montana town, I saw a lot of character on display, in the ranch hands and shepherders and saloonkeepers of half a century ago. Surely it was at life’s prompting, back then, that I developed an abiding interest in the trait called character and its even more seductive flowering into a plural form, characters. How could I not, when Dad’s rounds took him and the redheaded sharp-eared kid always at his side from neon oasis to oasis presided over by those personalities behind the bar; our favorite, Pete McCabe in the Stockman, passing along news as generously as he poured; the now nameless sad-faced bartender in the Pioneer who would murmur “Hullo, Charlie, hullo, Red,” as we stepped in, pull a glass of beer for Dad and open a bottle of Orange Crush pop for me, and say no more until “Take it easy, Charlie, take it easy, Red,” as we left; then perhaps to the mix of saloon and short-order joint presided over by the well-fed proprietor known only as Ham and Eggs—Ham for short—where other nicknamed denizens such as Mulligan John, Diamond Tony, and Hoppy Hopkins hung out. Small wonder, then, that my novels tend to have a bartender somewhere in the cast of characters. And the one of The Bartender’s Tale, has persistently shown up, skunk stripe in his black pompadour and his towel tirelessly polishing the bar wood, in a supporting role in three previous novels. It dawned on me that if he was such good company that I kept writing him into books, maybe he deserved top billing.

As we look at the idea of this bartender, the walk-on actor who now is going to have a starring role, how do I go about creating him on the page, bringing him to life in the eyes and ears and hearts of you, the readers? The realm of each novel I attempt has to be populated from somewhere. By rough count, I figure I’ve now employed more than 500 characters in ten works of fiction. I grant that
there are scenes in War and Peace and Moby Dick where there seems to be a cast that size occupying a single page—and that doesn’t count the armies and the whales—but my bunch have been sorting themselves out, down through their generations and across landscapes from New Guinea to Sitka to Harlem to Butte, as steadily as I’ve been able to foreman them for the past three decades now. Fathering and for that matter mothering entire populations of books probably is beyond reasonable explanation even for someone who earns a living by making things up. But I begin by handing out names, noises, and noses.

First, names. Or as I usually go about it, first names before last, way before.

What to call each of them, the sudden new citizens who need passports onto my pages? The literary slate is not permissively blank. “Ishmael” of course is taken—that name has been called. “Emma” is the shared property of the long-established firm of Austen and Flaubert. and so on. The mouth magic, though, that gives each of us identification to the rest of humankind in a single word constantly flourishes and renews there in the alphabetic combinations we are forever tinkering with, in the inexhaustible prop shop called language. And so, to an extent that seems to startle academic questioners, my characters’ names tend to be determined more by linguistic chimings than, say, mythological implications or the nearest phone book.

“Amer...
Morrie’s own name when he first appears there on a train depot in homesteader country in *The Whistling Season* I would like to say I worked on long and hard, for that chiming sound of first and last name, Morris Morgan. The truth is, it just came to me, as soon as I saw him in my mind. But the matter of names, and nicknames—the aforementioned Rab, and the thin, thin boy called Russian Famine, and Sam Sandison also known as the Earl of Hell, and so on—has given me a plot element for the Morrie books. Not to give away part of the story here in *Work Song* and beyond, but Morrie has what might be called an identity problem. His neck is perpetually at risk from those who identify him too closely. That is a continuing gift to me as someone who must produce words and pages and books.

As to that bartender who’s stepping up into a book of his own, all the way back there in *English Creek* when I first plucked him from my imagination, he has been called Tom Harry. Is that a first name and a last name, or a double-truck first name, like a woman named Mary Jane? I finally had to face that—it is a first and last name—but here again in *The Bartender’s Tale*, names become part of the plot in the story of Tom and the bright, inquisitive kid—his son Russell, known as Rusty—whom I’ve given him to cope with, and bring up by himself as a bachelor father, along with living up to his reputation as the best bartender who ever lived.

So, name affixed, what noise in the world must a character make to not only stand up over time but continue to march, cavort, and sing rowdily in the reader’s mind? Which is to say, what is the voice, the characteristic sound or memorable mannerism, of the person talking on the page?

Please meet, as I did on a stroll of my imagination, Oliver Milliron, widower father of three in *The Whistling Season*. All I knew of him, back then, was what my narrator tells me on the second page of manuscript: “Father had a short sniffing way of laughing, as if anything funny had to prove it to his nose first.” That’s a start, though, in giving readers something to remember Oliver by.

Occasionally all the organ stops can be pulled out: back in *English Creek*, a windbag character named Good Help Hebner has a braying way speaking that “would blow a crowbar out of your hand.” But generally small auditory touches count most effectively toward larger character dimension, I believe. Perhaps a word that a character owns, unobtrusively but consistently, throughout the story. Here in *Work Song*, the boy called Russian Famine gets a lot out of simple “Huh?” While Morrie every so often will say a wise,
“Ah.” And Sam Sandison, whom one reviewer generously described as the most unforgettable librarian in American fiction, deploys “Heh” and “Hah” with effectiveness.

If a character’s manner comes out on the page as vocals, physical appearance perhaps presents the melody line. As the example of Oliver Milliron indicates, problematic as they are for the novelist who has already reached into that bin of characteristics for several books’ worth, things such as noses have to be faced. Also eyes, ears, hairline, the whole physiognomy, and beyond that, lo, the soul.

Call me analog, but I believe memorable fictional creation is usually best served by physical magnitudes rather than minimalist digits of dis and data. Descriptive turns of phrase that simply pop to mind—Morrie’s Rudyard Kipling-like mustache when he arrives to us in *The Whistling Season* is “a soup strainer and a lady tickler and a fashion show, all in one” and while it comes and goes, it’s of course back in *Work Song*, and in the sequel it has expanded into a full beard), archival photos, revelatory glimpses across a room—the supply of characteristics leading toward character is as broad as a writer’s experience and as deep as he cares to delve. Of course, some rules or at least strictures of common sense apply. I never use my friends as models for my fictional people; and relatives, I say, are best saved for memoirs. Nor, except in minor roles, do I usually employ actual historical personalities—in most cases, they carry too many awkward truths to wear a fictional guise convincingly. But virtually all else is fair game. Case in point: I was in a small-town saloon not unlike those my father frequented on his hiring forays, when in came a long-faced leathery rancher. As soon as I was decently out of sight of him, that face entered my notebook: “wrinkles running down cheeks; like a copper coin a bit melted.” And then and there, Oliver Milliron acquired a face to go with his discriminating nose.

That, then, is a sampling of the population of a novelist’s head, at least this one’s, and I should move along now to where the imagination meets the laws of historical gravity—the territory there on the page where the writer has to persuade the reader this made-up stuff is somewhat believable, or at least entitled to that other alibi writers count on—“the willing suspension of disbelief.”

How do you go about it? As a writer, the constant question I have to ask myself is, how do I get from here to there. From names, noses, and noises to completed characters who will have lasting lives there in the pages. How do I get from messy rough draft
manuscript pages to those neatly bound pages that go to bookstore shelves throughout the land to take their place in high-class alphabetical company—Dickens, Doig, Dostoevsky?

There’s the story that is told about Vladimir Nabokov when he was teaching his course on the novel, at Cornell. The author of “Lolita” and “Pale Fire” and “Speak, Memory” and other linguistically highly-honed books was famous for a couple of things in the classroom. One was the fiction course he taught, back there in the Eisenhower years, which was nicknamed “dirty lit”—Madame Bovary! Anna Karenina! The other was his customary final day of class, when students had been trying to follow his heavy Russian accent all semester, and now comes the climactic moment when Professor Nabokov peers over the rims of his glasses and gutturally speaks his summary of the writing life: “You must write with the passion of the scientist and the precision of the artist.”

The class, of course, thinks to itself, Yeah, right, the old boy has got it backwards again and they all get busy writing down the proper version—“the precision of the scientist and the passion of the artist”—in the self-defense for the final exam. Everyone gets this done and looks up and Nabokov is still peering at them over the rims of those glasses, and says: “I repeat: you must write with the passion of the scientist and the precision of the artist.”

Let’s take those one by one, beginning with passion, which often gets things started, doesn’t it. Passionate investigation and discovery, as Nabokov meant—the search and research that goes into a piece of writing. The makings that I’ve never known what to call except “the slow poetry of fact.” The arithmetic of particulars which creatively gets added up into story and gives it a kind of majestic fidelity. Or as it’s sometimes called, crystalizing detail, which leaves in the reader’s mind a crystal of beguiling but valid scene—a memory waiting to happen, there in the pages of a book. Think of that moment in Madame Bovary when Flaubert sends notes tinkling from Emma Bovary’s piano and at the other end of the village the bailiff’s clerk, “passing along the highroad, bareheaded and in decorated slippers, stopped to listen, his sheet of paper in his hand” and so from that one sentence we fully picture that music-struck clerk—bareheaded, in nice slippers, sheet of paper in hand—and we listen there with him ever after.

In my own case, the crystalizing details I seek are often in some obscure record of the past—where Google doesn’t go, or at least hadn’t gone yet when I was doing my research. When Morrie—and I—alit into Butte, Montana, because that mining city boasted of itself
as The Richest Hill on Earth, back in the days when its copper fed the world’s hunger for electricity, and whatever hunch Morrie had, I figured I could get a novel called **Work Song** out of a place like Butte. I’m from the other Montana, the one of wide open spaces and communities too small to be called towns, let alone cities—and Butte was known to us, when I was growing up out there in ranch country, as a place as crazily off the charts as, say, Las Vegas is today. Rough, tough, known for altitude and attitude—although as anyone from there is likely to tell you, “Butte is a mile high and a mile deep, but Butte people are on the level.” In dropping Morrie into Butte, I knew I would have to take a look at what’s left of the old city and old mining equipment, and study it historically, from books and photographs. My wife Carol and I went through many, many photos at the state Historical Society library in Helena, showing miners at work and people of the time in their downtown clothes, but one picture with nobody in it caught my imagination. It showed the Butte Public Library of the time. The current Butte library is efficient and wonderfully helpful, but it’s also a bland modern building. The first library was an architectural show-off—a gray granite extravaganza with arched doorways and a balcony and a peaked tower. Just the kind of place Morrie would go to consult the city directory for some job worthy of his unique talents, as he now tells us about:

“There is an old story that any Londoners with a madman in the family would drop him off at the library of the British Museum for the day. I was given a searching look as if I might be the Butte version when I presented myself at the desk of the public library that next morning and requested both the **City Directory** and Julius Caesar’s **Gallic Wars** in the original Latin.

The stout woman I took to be the head librarian—she had eyeglasses enchained around her neck commandingly enough for it—scrutinized me some moments more, then marched off into the maze of shelves while I found a seat at a broad oaken table. Everything was substantial, the brass-banistered stairway up to the mezzanine of books in tall rows, the green-shaded electrical lights hanging down from the high ceiling like watchfobs of the gods. I have always felt at home among books, so when the woman from the desk plopped my requested two in front of me, they seemed like old friends dropping by.

Aware that I should get down to business, I instead drew the **Gallic Wars** to me first, unable to resist. I had ordered it up by habit, as a test. To me, a repository of books is not a library without that volume in the mother of languages. Handling the book fondly as I was, I became aware of its own touch: tanned leather, not the more common calfskin cover put on for show. I examined the
binding: sewn rather than glued. On the pages, lovely to finger, the sentences practically rose from the paper in a strong clear Caslon typeface. What I was holding was an exceptionally fine copy, so much so that I momentarily found myself envious of the Butte Public Library.”

Morrie reluctantly puts Caesar aside and tries to tend to business in the city directory.

“But something about the Gallic Wars at my elbow kept diverting me. Even when they are closed, some books do not shut up. Why was this beautifully sewn leather edition, a collector’s item if I had ever seen one, spending its existence on a public shelf in a none too fastidious mining town? Once more I peered at those tiers on the mezzanine, and if I was not severely mistaken, many other handsome volumes sat there beckoning in bindings of royal reds and greens and blues and buffs. Curiosity got the better of me. Up the stairwell I went.”

I think you can see the story taking a certain turn here. And what leads Morrie, and us as readers, to that turn, are certain crystalizing details—the sumptuous oak table, the reading lights hanging down like the watchfobs of the gods, and most of all, the feel of that tanned leather cover when Morrie picks up that volume of Caesar.

Now to that second part of Nabokov’s acrobatic trick of writerly performance, doing it with the precision of the artist. To me, this is a matter of making it all dance together on the page. The names, the noises, the descriptions, probably noses and all. Here is that promised world premiere, a passage from The Bartender’s Tale where a new character has to be introduced.

Rusty, the narrator, is twelve at the time—1960—and pretty much lives in the back of the joint, as his gruff but gifted father Tom Harry calls his Medicine Lodge saloon, regarded as “a nearly holy oasis” in the town of Gros Ventre and the Two Medicine country of northern Montana. In their bachelor life, Tom and Rusty eat supper at the cafe down the street, the Top Spot, best described as reliably mediocre, and Tom—who eats first because of his bartending shift—comes into the back of the joint one day to tell Rusty a new couple—Butte people, coincidentally enough—are running the cafe. Here’s where that leads:

“Guess what. They got a kid about your age.”
Aw, crud, was my first thought. Every youngster knows the complication of such a situation, the burden of being expected to make friends with a new kid just because he was new. Why weren’t twelve-year-olds entitled to the same system as adults, to merely grunt to any newcomer, “How you doing?” and go on about your own business?

“What’s his name?” I asked unenthusiastically.

“Go get yourself some supper,” Pop blew a stream of smoke that significantly clouded the matter, “and find out.”

The Spot showed it had indeed changed as soon as I walked in, because Melina Constantine herself was behind the counter in the cleanest waitress apron the cafe had seen in ages. Mrs. Constantine was squat, built along the lines of a fireplug, but with large warm eyes and a welcoming manner. She greeted me as if I was an old customer–actually, I was–and plucked out the meal ticket Pop had just inaugurated. Activity in the kitchen sounded hectic, and her husband the cook hurried past the serving window, giving me a dodgy nod. No kid my age was in sight, which was a relief.

“Now then, Russell,” Mrs. Constantine smiled in motherly fashion as I hoisted onto my accustomed stool at the end of the counter, “what would you like for supper? The special is pot roast, nice and done.”

Her smile dimmed a bit when I ordered my usual butterscotch milkshake and cheeseburger, but she punched the meal ticket without saying anything.

Wouldn’t you know, though, muffled conversation was taking place in the kitchen, and from where I sat, I could just see the top of a dark mop of hair as someone about my height stood waiting while Pete, cook and father rolled into one, dished up a plate of food and instructed that it all be consumed. I heard the new kid groan at the plateload.

Listening in, Mrs. Constantine beamed in my direction again and provided, “You’re about to have company.” I waited tensely as you do when someone from a different page enters the script of your life. Would he be hard to get along with? Would I?

The kitchen’s swinging door was kicked open—it took a couple of thundrous kicks—and, meal in hand as if it weighed a tragic amount, out came a girl.
“Hi,” she said faintly.

“Hi,” I said identically.

Zoe was her name, and she seemed to come from that foreign end of the alphabet, a gypsylike wisp who slipped past me to a table in the back corner before I finished blinking. Her mother corrected that in nothing flat. “Russell, I’ll bring yours over to the table too, if you don’t mind.”

You bet I minded. All my years in Gros Ventre, I had been contentedly eating supper at the counter. In the manner of old customers, I felt I owned that spot at the Spot. But tugboat that she was, Mrs. Constantine had me maneuvered into changing seats before I could think of a way out of it. “Sure, I guess,” I muttered and reluctantly slid off my prized stool to go over to make friends, as grownups always saw it, or to meet the opposition, as kids generally saw it.

At the table, the two of us sat across from each other as trapped as strangers in a dining car. Given my first full look at Zoe, the wide mouth, the pert nose, the inquisitive gaze right back at me, I must have just stared. My education until then had not included time with a girl. Male and female relationships in school were literally a joke. “Your eyes are like pools. Cesspools. Your skin is like milk. Milk of magnesia.” But the incontrovertible fact facing me was that Zoe Constantine possessed deep brown eyes that were hard to look away from and she had an olive-skinned complexion that no doubt suntanned nice as toast, unlike mine. Her hair was not quite as richly black as my own, but at the time I thought no one in the world had hair as dark as mine and Pop’s. For all of these arresting features, she was so skinny—call it thin to be polite—that she reminded me of those famished waifs in news photos of DP refugee camps. But that was misleading, according to the indifferent way she toyed with her food while I waited edgily for mine. I was close to panic, thinking of endless suppertime ahead with the two of us about as conversational as the salt and pepper shakers; how was this going to work?

She spoke first....Idly mashing potatoes that were already mashed, she caught me even more by surprise as she conspiratorially lowered her voice enough that neither her mother behind the counter nor her father in the kitchen could hear:

“How come he and you eat here? Where’s your mother? Can’t she cook better grub than this?”
“She’s, she’s not around any more.”
Her voice dropped to an eager whisper. “Did they split the blanket?”

“Uh-huh,” I whispered back, although I wasn’t sure why divorce was a whispering matter. “When I was real little. I wouldn’t know her if I saw her.”

“Wild! Are you making that up?”

“You can’t make something like that up, nobody would believe it.”

“Ooh, you’re a half orphan, then.” That jolted me. It was nothing to what she said next. “You’re so lucky.”

I was so stunned I could hardly squeak out: “Because I don’t have a mother I’ve ever seen?”

“No, silly, I mean because you’ve got only one parent to boss you around,” she whispered, with either world-weary assurance or perfectly done mischief, it was impossible to tell which. “That’s plenty, isn’t it?” She peered critically toward the kitchen. “I’d give up my dad, I think, if it came to that.”

“Wh-why?” I sneaked a look at her father in his undersized cook’s hat, flipping a slice of Velveeta onto my cheeseburger as if he’d just remembered that ingredient. “What’s the matter with him?”

Zoe waved that away with her fork. “Nothing much. He’s just not swuft about a lot of things.”

This was another stunner from her. Swuft did not merely mean quick at handling things, it meant swift-minded, brainy, sensible, and quite a number of other sterling qualities she evidently found lacking in her father.

“He couldn’t beat up anybody in a fight, like I bet your dad can,” she was saying as if she would trade with me on the spot...

Her face was always a show, her generous mouth sometimes sly, sometimes pursed, the tip of her tongue indicating when she was really thinking, her eyes going big beyond belief when something pleased her, and when something didn’t, she could curl her lip practically to the tip of her nose. “Besides,” she was saying now, “my mom could have made your burger while he’s standing around looking at it.”

In fact, Mrs. Constantine kept revving the milkshake machine as she waited for that cheeseburger to ever find its way out of the kitchen; my shake was going to be thin as water.”
Well, that's the start of the story of Rusty and Zoe, and I hope this and the other examples have shown you some of the makings of a book, and there's one last one I'd like to share with you to take us to the end here.

Writers aren't always up to all the tricks that critics think they're catching us at as we carpenter our books. Flannery O'Connor was asked once if she had put a black hat on a farmer in one of her Georgia stories to symbolize how mean he was, and she said no, she did it because Georgia farmers wear black hats. Sometimes, though, in the making of a book, yes, the writer consciously resorts to some literary device or another that best seems to do the job for a particular scene, and one of those is to bring the emotional and the physical actuality together there on the page. The point is to try to get the writing to the frontier, there on the page and in the reader's mind, where a character's circumstance is both physical and metaphysical. Here is Morrie, at a climactic point near the end of Work Song, once again in that evocative Butte Public Library:

I switched on the mezzanine lights. The Reading Room below was as dark and hushed as the audience portion of a theater. Up on stage, so to speak, the books waited in titled ranks, and in their reassuring company I moved idly along the laden shelves, running the tips of my fingers over the exquisite spines, taking down an old loved volume every so often and opening it to the stored glory of words. Around me was the wealth of minds down through all of recorded time. The dramatic capacities of Shakespeare, as all-seeing in his foolscap scripts as in the sagacious portrait above the doorway to reading. The gallant confabulations of Cervantes, showing us the universal meaning of quixotic. The Russian army of impossible geniuses, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov. Mark Twain, as fresh on the page as a comet inscribing the dark. Robert Louis Stevenson, master of tales goldenly told....

In such company, you wonder about your own tale in the long book of life. What would they have made of me, these grandmasters of storytelling?... No matter how I looked at it, my story lacked conclusion.

Suddenly I knew what to do. Can inspiration come off on the fingers? I rubbed my hands together appreciatively, there among the literary classics. It was as if the risk-taking lifetimes of composition, the reckless romances with language, the tricky
business of plots stealing onto pages, all the wiles of the glorious books answered to my touch. There was no mistaking their message: sometimes you must set sail on the winds of chance."

There, for the moment, we must leave Morrie. But with his wise words about the winds of chance, shipmates that we all are on the voyage of life, I think we gather on the deck of Shakespeare’s ark to listen to writers tell what we hope are their endless stories. To nurture ourselves with what one of my novelist compatriots, Shirley Hazzard, once defined as the reward of literature: to relieve the soul of incoherence. The impulse to do so I think is the one that has been in us ever since art began to dance off the cave walls to us--storytelling, writing, literature, perhaps begins there, in the painted bison running in the tunnels of time, and the hunting escapades they represent being told around the fire. I think stories still can be our way of sharing light, whether it’s the white sheen of a page in a book or the nebulae of cyberspace--of sitting together around humanity’s fire with the universal dark all around us. I believe it is worth the passion and the precision, the long devotion each book takes, to sail on that magical ocean of words where Shakespeare launched us.

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Thanks for listening, and I’ll be glad to take your questions.
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whales--but my bunch have been sorting themselves out, down through
their generations and across landscapes from New Guinea to Sitka to
Harlem to Butte, as steadily as I've been able to foreman them for the past three decades now. Fathering and for that matter mothering entire populations of books probably is beyond reasonable explanation even for someone who earns a living by making things up. But I begin by handing out names, noises, and noses.

First, names. Or as I usually go about it, first names before last, way before.

What to call each of them, the sudden new citizens who need passports onto my pages? The literary slate is not permissively blank. "Ishmael" of course is taken—that name has been called. "Emma" is the shared property of the long-established firm of Austen and Flaubert, and so on. The mouth magic, though, that gives each of us identification to
the rest of humankind in a single word constantly flourishes and resides there in the alphabetic combinations we are forever tinkering with, an inexhaustible prop shop called language. And so, to an extent that seems to startle academic questioners, my characters’ names tend to be determined more by linguistic chimings than, say, mythological implications or the nearest phone book.

"America. Montana. Those words with their ends open." Thus mused my narrator, Angus McCaskill, in Dancing at the Rascal Fair as he and a lifelong chum set forth from Scotland in 1889 to take up homesteads in the American West. Not accidentally, the same aspirant vowel of promise, hope, boundless prospect, characterizes the romantic prospects whom Angus and other yearning hearts meet up with in that
rowdily in the reader's mind? Which is to say, what is the voice, the characteristic sound or memorable mannerism, of the person talking on the page?

Please meet, as I did on a stroll of my imagination, Oliver Milliron, widower father of three in The Whistling Season. All I knew of him, back then, was what my narrator tells me on the second page of manuscript: “Father had a short sniffing way of laughing, as if anything funny had to prove it to his nose first.” That's a start, though, in giving readers something to remember Oliver by.

Occasionally all the organ stops can be pulled out: back in English Creek, a windbag character named Good Help Hebner has a braying way speaking that “would blow a crowbar out of your hand.” But
things such as noses have to be faced. Also eyes, ears, hairline, the whole physiognomy, and beyond that, lo, the soul.

Call me analog, but I believe memorable fictional creation is usually best served by physical magnitudes rather than minimalist digits of dis and data. Descriptive turns of phrase that simply pop to mind—Morrie’s Rudyard Kipling-like mustache when he arrives to us in *The Whistling Season* is “a soup strainer and a lady tickler and a fashion show, all in one” and while it comes and goes, it’s of course back in *Work Song*, and in the sequel it has expanded into a full beard), archival photos, revelatory glimpses across a room—the supply of characteristics leading toward character is as broad as a writer’s experience and as deep as he cares to delve. Of course, some rules or at least strictures of common
sense apply. I never use my friends as models for my fictional people and relatives, I say, are best saved for memoirs. Nor, except in minor roles, do I usually employ actual historical personalities—in most cases, they carry too many awkward truths to wear a fictional guise convincingly. But virtually all else is fair game. Case in point: I was in a small-town saloon not unlike those my father frequented on his hiring forays, when in came a long-faced leathery rancher. As soon as I was decently out of sight of him, that face entered my notebook: “wrinkles running down cheeks; like a copper coin a bit melted.” And then and there, Oliver Milliron acquired a face to go with his discriminating nose.

That, then, is a sampling of the population of a novelist’s head, at least this one’s, and I should move along now to where the imagination
added up into story and gives it a kind of majestic fidelity. Or as it's sometimes called, crystalizing detail, which leaves in the reader's mind a crystal of beguiling but valid scene—a memory waiting to happen in the pages of a book. Think of that moment in *Madame Bovary* when Flaubert sends notes tinkling from Emma Bovary's piano and at the other end of the village the bailiff's clerk, "passing along the highroad, bareheaded and in decorated slippers, stopped to listen, his sheet of paper in his hand" and so from that one sentence we fully picture that music-struck clerk—bareheaded, in nice slippers, sheet of paper in hand—and we listen there with him ever after.

In my own case, the crystalizing details I seek are often in some obscure record of the past—where Google doesn't go, or at least hadn't
left of the old city and old mining equipment, and study it historically from books and photographs. My wife Carol and I went through many photos at the state Historical Society library in Helena, showing miners at work and people of the time in their downtown clothes, but one picture with nobody in it caught my imagination. It showed the Butte Public Library of the time. The current Butte library is efficient and wonderfully helpful, but it's also a bland modern building. The first library was an architectural show-off—a gray granite extravaganza with arched doorways and a balcony and a peaked tower. Just the kind of place Morrie would go to consult the city directory for some job worthy of his unique talents, as he now tells us about:

**IN THIS EXCERPT FROM WORK SONG:**
fine copy, so much so that I momentarily found myself envious of the Butte Public Library.”

Morrie reluctantly puts Caesar aside and tries to tend to business in the city directory.

“But something about the *Gallic Wars* at my elbow kept diverting me. Even when they are closed, some books do not shut up. Why was this beautifully sewn leather edition, a collector’s item if I had ever seen one, spending its existence on a public shelf in a none too fastidious mining town? Once more I peered at those tiers on the mezzanine, and if I was not severely mistaken, many other handsome volumes sat there beckoning in bindings of royal reds and greens and blues and buffs. Curiosity got the better of me. Up the stairwell I went.”
PP: 27-38 moved to Bartender's reading
ever find its way out of the kitchen; my shake was going to be thin as water."

Well, that’s the start of the story of Rusty and Zoe, and I hope this and the other examples have shown you some of the makings of and there’s one last one I’d like to share with you to take us to the end here.

Writers aren’t always up to all the tricks that critics think they’re catching us at as we carpeter our books. Flannery O’Conner was asked once if she had put a black hat on a farmer in one of her Georgia stories to symbolize how mean he was, and she said no, she did it because Georgia farmers wear black hats. Sometimes, though, in the making of a book, yes, the writer consciously resorts to some literary device or
another that best seems to do the job for a particular scene, and one of those is to bring the emotional and the physical actuality together on the page. The point is to try to get the writing to the forefront of the page and in the reader’s mind, where a character’s circumstances, both physical and metaphysical. Here is Morrie, at a climactic point near the end of Work Song, once again in that evocative Butte Public Library:

I switched on the mezzanine lights. The Reading Room below was as dark and hushed as the audience portion of a theater. Up on stage, so to speak, the books waited in titled ranks, and in their reassuring company I moved idly along the laden shelves, running the tips of my fingers over the exquisite spines, taking down an old
loved volume every so often and opening it to the stored glory of words. Around me was the wealth of minds down through all recorded time. The dramatic capacities of Shakespeare, as all-seeing in his foolscap scripts as in the sagacious portrait above the doorway to reading. The gallant confabulations of Cervantes, showing us the universal meaning of quixotic. The Russian army of impossible geniuses, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov. Mark Twain, as fresh on the page as a comet inscribing the dark. Robert Louis Stevenson, master of tales goldenly told....

In such company, you wonder about your own tale in the long book of life. What would they have made of me, these
grandmasters of storytelling?... No matter how I looked at it, my story lacked conclusion.

Suddenly I knew what to do. Can inspiration come off on the fingers? I rubbed my hands together appreciatively, there among the literary classics. It was as if the risk-taking lifetimes of composition, the reckless romances with language, the tricky business of plots stealing onto pages, all the wiles of the glorious books answered to my touch. There was no mistaking their message: sometimes you must set sail on the winds of chance."

There, for the moment, we must leave Morrie. But with his wise words about the winds of chance, shipmates that we all are on the
Rusty, the narrator, is twelve at the time--1960--and pretty much lives in the back of the joint, as his gruff but gifted father Tom Harry calls his Medicine Lodge saloon, regarded as "a nearly holy oasis" in the town of Gros Ventre and the Two Medicine country of northern Montana. In their bachelor life, Tom and Rusty eat supper at the cafe down the street, the Top Spot, best described as reliably mediocre, and Tom--who eats first because of his bartending shift--comes into the back of the joint one day to tell Rusty a new couple--Butte people, coincidentally enough--are running the cafe. Here's where that leads:

"Guess what. They got a kid about your age."

Aw, crud, was my first thought. Every youngster knows the complication of such a situation, the burden of being expected to
quite a number of other sterling qualities she evidently found lacking in her father.

"He couldn't beat up anybody in a fight, like I bet your dad can," she was saying as if she would trade with me on the spot... Her face was always a show, her generous mouth sometimes sly, sometimes pursed, the tip of her tongue indicating when she was really thinking, her eyes going big beyond belief when something pleased her, and when something didn't, she could curl her lip practically to the tip of her nose.

"Besides," she was saying now, "my mom could have made your burger slow while he's standing around looking at it." In fact, Mrs. Constantine kept revving the milkshake machine as she waited for that cheeseburger to