

"I HEAR THEM! I HEAR THEM!" VOICES THAT COME TO A WRITER IN A LIBRARY

BY IVAN DOIG

I know these are not easy times for libraries and librarians. You are faced with people who are more than willing to come in and tell you what books you ought to get rid of. And with other people who want you to have all the books and services imaginable, so long as you don't spend any money doing it. And with still other people who think you don't really need books at all any more, you should just wire up the inside of the building like an electronic jukebox.

Well, after a lot of thought about what libraries and librarians are up against these days, I decided just to come here tonight and sing under your window.

I don't usually think of myself as a wandering minstrel, yet when I count up the libraries I have been to for the sake of my work, and the literary melodies that have been put into my books by these libraries, something like minstrelsy it seems to be.

I took the title for this talk from a friend of mine, another book person, the Missoula writer and teacher of fiction, Bill Kittredge. Kittredge came up with it when he was being interviewed for a book of oral history called *The Ranchers*, about the changes in his life since he grew up on a ranch of more than a million acres down toward Klamath Falls in eastern Oregon. "In the landscapes of our minds, we have to learn how we can make a place for ourselves," Bill Kittredge told the interviewer's tape recorder. He went on:

I'm much less interested in the world's view of me than in my own past. It's still alive in my head. Even though it's not there any more—it is. The valley I grew up in was full of horses. And in my head the horses are still there. . . . I hear them! I hear them!

Those of you who have enough trouble with the noise level in your libraries will be relieved that I **don't** hear horses clattering amid the stacks. But I've heard a lot else, and I want to do you some stanzas of it tonight.

So now, quick as this, you are eighteen years old. You have come by train—which tells how long ago this is—from a Montana town with a population of 75, to begin college at Northwestern University, in suburban Chicago. And you set off to walk this campus you have never laid eyes on before, and there on a slight rise atop a wide green sweep of spotless lawn stands the university library, Deering Library. Deering is a library like they don't build 'em any more—similar to the original portion of Suzzallo Library on the University of Washington campus, the high

roof, but with a pair of gothic towers poking up at each end. Deering had architectural fame of a sort. The story was that Frank Lloyd Wright had driven past the Northwestern campus on Lake Shore Drive one day, looked at Deering Library with those gothic towers nobly poking into the air, and said, "It looks like a pig on its back."

I think what he really didn't like about it, though, was that Deering Library so much resembled a cathedral. And there's where Mr. Wright was wrong. There was nothing inappropriate about that resemblance, that library was a kind of cathedral, in several ways it behaved like a cathedral. You step now into the reading room of Deering, you find that the banks of lights hang just above the tables, they hang all the way from the vaulted ceiling, they hang down what seems to be thousands of feet just for your reading convenience, they hang there like the watchfobs of the gods. You sit with your book there in the golden pool of reflection, the lens of light brings the printed words up into your eyes. The diarist Bruce Frederick Cummings has written of "the desire every book has to be taken down and read, to live, to come into being in somebody's mind."

Passing by out there on Lake Shore Drive, Frank Lloyd Wright is not listening to the desires of the books. But you are there in the great reading room, and you do. You hear them. You hear them.

Now it is last summer—July—and this is Scotland. St. Andrews. The oldest university in Scotland, one of the most venerable in all of Great Britain, so venerable it takes a couple of days to do a graduation ceremony, with all the customs and traditions to be observed.

Be that as it may, the St. Andrews library is a modern one just a few years old and going through a summer of teething pains. I walk in the first morning and on floor after floor, I pass white-haired maintenance men in blue dustcoats, staring silently forlornly down at the electrical trenches in the floor, into the mysterious entrails of wiring to which they are going to have to figure how to hook up the new computer terminals. I step over to learn the catalogue system. Its basic fact is that all books before 1906, whatever their topic, are in the basement. I venture down, and immediately learn that the basement is a good ten degrees cooler than the floors above, so whenever I want a book that was published before 1906 I had better put my coat on. I return to the catalogue system. There is a set of bound volumes which catalogues some books. There is horizontal microfiche which catalogues other books. There is vertical microfiche cataloguing still others. The back-and-forthing between the fiches has my eyes swimming. In none of the systems

Ivan Doig is the author of *This House of Sky* (1978), *Winter Brothers* (1980), *The Sea Runners* (1982), *Inside This House of Sky* (1983) and *English Creek* (1984). Copyright held by Ivan Doig.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Text is from the WLA Conference banquet speech given April 19, 1985.

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remarking that he wanted to, "attack Walsdorf for his shortcomings. It is a long book, and it appears to have been proofread carelessly." This is my favorite negative review, because my editor at Oryx wrote a letter to the editor rebutting the review. In printing her letter, they misspelled Oryx.

One of the truly good things about publishing is the royalties—all those million dollar deals one reads about for the Irving Stones of the publishing world will soon be mine, thinks the author. In my own case, I invested \$29,000 out of pocket over fifteen years to collect the nearly 1,000

books I used in writing my Morris bibliography. I then waited two and a half years while I used my "free time" to write, edit and proofread the manuscript, and finally, after paying for photocopying and typing charges, I have pocketed just over \$3,000. This is truly a very, very gentlemanly way of growing rich very, very slowly.

In closing, I would not like to discourage any of you from writing books. The money is not great, but you do get fame. I saw this for myself on visiting a chain bookstore in Philadelphia a few years ago when I was in that city for the A.L.A Conven-

tion. I noticed two young women, in their thirties, looking about for a book, I overheard one say to the other, "They must have my book; it's in all the bookstores." I then heard her ask the shop assistant for "her book" by title and author, to which he replied, "Oh, that one. We had 10 copies in for about two months. It was a dog, didn't move, so we sent them all back to the publisher." So much for fame, and longevity in the life of a published author.

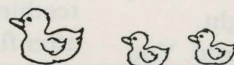
Once Upon A Time

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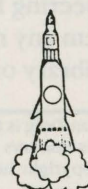
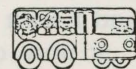
Trudy Wright

Flannel Board Sets



- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. What Shall I Give You?----- | \$15.00 |
| 2. Transportation----- | \$15.00 |
| 3. Three Little Kittens----- | \$15.00 |
| 4. Great Enormous Turnip----- | \$15.00 |
| 5. Farmer In The Dell----- | \$15.00 |
| 6. Five Little Pumpkins-----no faces: \$6.50-----with faces----- | \$ 8.50 |
| 7. Ten Little Pumpkins----- | \$ 6.50 |
| 8. Five Little Apples----- | \$ 6.50 |
| 9. Five Little Ducks----- | \$ 8.50 |
| 10. Five Little Chicks----- | \$ 6.50 |
| 11. Five Little Easter Bunnies----- | \$ 6.50 |
| 12. Five Dinosaurs----- | \$15.00 |
| 13. Roll-A-Snowman----- | \$ 8.50 |
| 14. The Egg Who Couldn't Decide----- | \$12.00 |
| 15. Old McDonald Had a Farm----- | \$20.00 |
| 16. Three Billy Goats Gruff----- | \$15.00 |
| 17. The Gingerbread Boy----- | \$15.00 |

(Complete with characters, story, rhyme or song)



can I deduce how to find what I am after, material about the Scottish working class in western Scotland in the late 19th century. Somehow I stumble onto a promising book with "toil" in its title. Aha! There is a catalogue computer terminal by now, added to the three prior systems though I have been warned that only a fraction of the library's holdings are in it yet. But at least I have the magic word "toil," and at the punch of a few buttons I'll get every title about the Scottish working class in whatever holdings have been computerized. I punch those buttons, and the screen fills, with the promise of more screenfuls to come. I begin joyfully to take down the titles—*Technology and Toil in 19th Century Britain*; *Toilers of the Linen Trade*. But the third title—the third title is *The Lady at Her Toilet*—and it is all toiletry, cosmetic and other modes, after that.

Eventually, perseverance and a saintly librarian did help me track down the books I was after, and now began the photocopying. The St. Andrews library machine took only five-pence pieces, which are about the size of an American fifty-cent piece. I had hundreds of pages to do,

ters of working class and emigrants who left that region of Scotland in the late 1880s, as the main characters of my next novel are to do. The archivist produces some letter collections for me, leads me into the reading room, and as I begin to sit down at a capacious table nicely lit by a window, he says, "Eh—there's the matter of the airrr." The airrr, in his thick Fifeshire burr. Does he mean error, is this some Scotch Calvinist probing of my scholarly soul? Can he somehow mean the Scottish town of Ayr, that Robert Burns wrote of—"Old Ayr, whom never a town surpasses, for honest men and bonnie lasses?" That's cryptic, even from an archivist.

But no, the airrr proved to be the air conditioning, which was blowing a gale at the end of the room I had contemplated sitting at. I took the archivist's point and established myself at the opposite end of the room, noticing as I did that there was a heavy tartan lap robe in the chair beside me. Within minutes I was using that lap robe, and at lunch time I went home and—despite the fact that Scotland was sweltering under its hottest summer in a century—I put on a sweater under my sport jacket, came

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so Carol said she'd go to the bank and get me some rolls of five-pence pieces. Back she came not with rolls of coins, there was no such Scottish thing, but with bulging plastic bags of coins—sort of like overloaded Baggies: a hundred five-pence pieces in each, a truly substantial sum of coins. I tried to get used to walking around lopsided with these coin bags in my pocket and started feeding the five-pences to the photocopy machine. About every other one, it spat back out. The problem here was that there are two kinds of five-pence pieces, new ones minted when Britain went onto the decimal system a dozen or so years ago, and the old shilling pieces which were simply declared to be worth five-pence from then on. My heart sank along with my pockets. Were we going to have to double the bulk of coinage to do my photocopying? Sort out the hundreds of old coins from the hundreds of new? Well, my abiding belief is that machines are at least as eccentric as any of the rest of us. I looked around to be sure no one was watching, and began trying different deliveries of shilling pieces into the coin slot. I pretty quickly found that if I gave each shilling piece a little extra body English—kind of snapped it into the slot—the photocopy machine would gulp hard and swallow it. Of all the sounds that have ever come to me in libraries, that mechanical gulp of dismay was one of the most gratifying.

Next, down to the St. Andrews archives, in another part of the basement—I put my coat on—in search of let-

back and got under the lap robe again. All the while cursing the St. Andrews theory that the best method of preserving archives is to refrigerate them.

But all the while, too, beginning to hear. Hearing the letters in front of me.

During the storm our ship swung like a cork. The screaming of the bosun's whistle, the yells of women and children when she swung over on her side, and tins, trunks, barrels, everything movable flew from side to side . . . We poor human things held on to the bedside like grim death.

David McNeil, that voice, writing to his family in Scotland about his voyage to America as a steerage passenger in 1889. Another letter, McNeil has come by train across America to Colorado: Denver, he reports, "looks as if it commenced last week and might be moved somewhere else next."

As ever—as Deering Library was a quarter of a century before, as all the libraries in between have been—a library voice which was worth coming the distance to hear.

What a writer—or at least this writer—listens for in a library is not always what anybody else wants to spend ear time on.

Let me propound to you Doig's Law, which has not been tested quite as many times as Murphy's, but pretty close. Doig's Law, briefly put, is this: The more obscure the book, and the longer it has been taking up shelf space, and the less it has been used—the more valuable that book is to a writer named Doig. Efficiency experts and con-

sultants are never going to be fond of Doig's Law. Yet it proves out time and again. In the stacks of the Shoreline Community College Library is an eccentric old volume by Edmund Pearson titled *Queer Books*, which a friend who shall remain nameless has rescued from purge after purge for me. Those of you who have read my last book, *English Creek*, may remember that there's an unusual 4th of July speech in the middle of that book—a speech without the usual rosy patriotic hue.

To set the scene for that speech, I had the person who introduces the speaker do it this way: From the book—

This is a holiday particularly American. Sometimes, if the person on the stump such as I am at this moment doesn't watch his enthusiasm, it can become a little too much so. I am always reminded of the mock speech which Mose Skinner, a Will Rogers of his day, proposed for this nation's one-hundredth birthday in 1876: "Any person who insinuates in the remotest degree that America isn't the biggest and best country in the world, and far ahead of every other country in everything, will be filled with gunpowder and touched off."

Those words of Mose Skinner for some reason whispered into Pearson's memory and from his into

it wasn't really much of a book, and Big Horn County wasn't much of a place: then as now, its main claim to fame is the Custer Battlefield.

But start through that book, with its oval photos of men in uniform and a paragraph apiece about their military service, and you begin to notice it goes on and on and on. There are 202 soldiers from that Montana stretch of grassland, in this section of the book. And then you find there are even more—a section called The Men Who Gave All:

Clifford A. Ross, contracted influenza and died three days later, at Camp Dodge, Iowa.

Daniel C. Schutte, while returning from a furlough in France, was killed in a train wreck between Paris and Brest.

Emmett C. Smith, killed in action at Cantigny.

Leonard J. Tudor, saw front-line service in France, died of wounds.

Spencer D. Willey, saw service in France, taken ill with influenza, died in hospital of lobar pneumonia.

Albert Dent, fought in the Battle of the Argonne, died

For the fact seems to be, as I look back over my behavior as a writer, that I'm infatuated with libraries.

mine, and from mine back into another book now, maybe to start a circle of murmur again.

The Montana novel I'm writing now, the next in a trilogy about the McCaskill family of *English Creek*, goes back across the period from 1889 until just after World War One. Early in my research I came across this paragraph in the Malone and Roeder history of Montana:

Montana demonstrated its support of the war—World War One—by surpassing all other states in enlistment rates and draft quotas for the armed forces. 12,500 young Montana males volunteered for service. And due apparently to confused population estimates, the Selective Service drafted nearly 28,000 more. So nearly 40,000 men—about ten percent of the state's population; not just of the military-age men, but of the total population—about ten percent of Montana's population went to war, a rate of contribution that no other state even approached.

That rate of course is astounding. Did Sparta ever send such a proportion of young Spartans off to its wars? If the U.S. had sent military forces to the Vietnam War at that rate, the total would have been twenty million soldiers. So if I'm to write fiction about Montana during World War One, there is the colossal impact of that war to keep in mind. Again, an obscure voice from a library shelf spells it out for me. *Big Horn County in the World War*, the title of the book said when I browsed across it in the UW's Northwest Collection—a dark brown book, about the size and shape of a high school annual, with an eagle on the cover. Published by the local newspaper editor in the county seat of Hardin—out east of Billings—

of wounds.

Louis A. Gemuent, killed in the battle of the Marne.

Stephen Chief at Night, entered the service at Salem Indian Training School in Oregon, died of tuberculosis at the Letterman General Hospital, San Francisco.

The names, and the ways of death, go on—there are several more—until the final one:

Walter W. Kollmar, killed by a high explosive shell two days before the signing of the Armistice.

I hear them. I hear them.

Fortunately, not all the heroic echoes that occur in a library have been fatal ones. I like the heroic story of the WPA Federal Writers Project for Montana. During the 1930s, as part of that New Deal project which also produced the famous state guidebooks, local people were put to work gathering local lore, often from their neighbors, sometimes even from themselves. In Montana that gathering was done in every county, the material accumulated, and files of it ended up at the state Historical Society in Helena. But a day in 1943, a history professor from Montana State College in Bozeman, Merrill Burlingame, decided to ride along with another faculty member on a trip to Butte, where the other faculty member needed to look at some sort of river-and-stream study that had ended up in the warehouse of the Works Progress Administration, the WPA, which was phasing out of existence. As Merrill Burlingame told the story when I asked him for it:

We found the files we wanted near the loading door. Even

closer—to the loading dock door—were six or eight file cases marked Writers' Project. I investigated ever so lightly and began to drool. At that moment the woman in charge appeared. We questioned her about the destination of these files, and she informed us that they would go to the Butte City Dump in the morning. We backed her into whatever corner was available and told her she could not do that! She assured us in unprintable but perfectly clear English that she could and would.

She told us that in an early stage of closing the records she had sent a portion of these Writers' Project records to the Montana Historical Society, which was the approved depository. There, numerous writers of sorts, largely of the newspaper variety, had used generous portions of the materials without giving WPA the least credit.

She didn't approve of that, and she would make sure that the Historical Society did not get one more folder of those records.

The dump loomed. Burlingame goes on:

We assured the good lady that nothing of that kind would happen at Montana State College, and that we would take special care that WPA did get credit. About 4:30 we got her permission to take them, but we were sure that speed was of the essence. We telephoned the college physical plant office and pressured them to provide a truck and driver in Butte as early as possible the following morning. And at that early hour, I came back with the driver.

the swamper, the guy who sweeps the floor, at the grocery store in my hometown of White Sulphur Springs. The next day too is bright blue, and I am talking to the old man, Tony Hunolt, in his dark bachelor room in White Sulphur Springs. "Yeah," Tony tells me in his Missourian voice, "knowed your daddy since I landed into this country in '36, at shearing time at the Dogie. He staked me for my bedroll, I was so dead busted. Didn't have to do it neither, but he done 'er'"—and even though Tony Hunolt is dead by the time *This House of Sky* is published the next year, those words of his speak in its pages. Tony had told me too that I ought to go talk to so-and-so about some ranch topic—"He knows A to Why about that"—and that line speaks in the pages of *English Creek*, last fall. And Tony had said to me, about another man he and my father worked with there on the Dogie, "He was an SOB on six wheels"—and that line is sure to speak in the pages of some future book of mine. There is simply no telling how long Tony Hunolt will go on, speaking in my pages, by way of library ventriloquism.

Time after time I have loved libraries not just for themselves, but for the company they keep.

I am eternally thankful that he did. Nearly forty years later, I was beginning to write a novel set in Montana in the 1930s, and in I came to the Special Collections at the Montana State University library and merrily ransacked those invaluable first-hand accounts of life during the Depression, that Merrill Burlingame heroically saved from the Butte dump. The people of my novel *English Creek* dance to a square dance call from out of those files, they remember great cattle roundups recounted therein, they enjoy at their Fourth of July picnic the succulent small spring frying chickens menued there. And yes, in my acknowledgments, I sing out a credit to the Montana Writers' Project of the WPA era, and to Merrill Burlingame.

I mentioned earlier that obscure voices are often the most valuable ones to me in a library. There's another sort of library voice that I don't even know what to call, except ventriloquism. I have this example.

Now, like the rescued Montana Writers' Project records, we are in Bozeman—on a fine blue June day in 1977 when the five mountain ranges around the Gallatin Valley all stand up into the sky. In the MSU library's Special Collections, I am going through a box of payroll records of the Dogie ranch, where my father worked for several years as a ranch hand and eventually foreman, and where my mother was the cook during lambing seasons. I find their names on the payroll records, and other names as well, one I recognize dimly—an old man who now is

I want to end this talk in the next few minutes, on a note such as you might find in a lovesong. For the fact seems to be, as I look back over my behavior as a writer, that I'm infatuated with libraries. There's more to it than that—there always is in the affairs of the heart—divided or otherwise.

Time after time I have loved libraries not just for themselves but for the company they keep, I think of the Alaska Historical Library in Juneau, during my *Sea Runners* research—of how I would take a break there by going out onto a balcony of that building above Juneau and watch the white cruise ships come up Gastineau Channel between the dark timbered avalanches of Alaskan mountains. It was like stepping directly from the library to a mountaintop. And, I remember, more years ago, after a morning spent in the Reading Room of the British Museum, a lunchtime. On the other side of Great Russell Street was a pub which shrewdly called itself the Museum Tavern. You can hear the domestic dialogues that choice of name created—"And where have you been this long while?" "Where have I been, I was in the Museum."

Well, in I went, sat at the end of the bar, ordered a smoked salmon sandwich and a half of bitter. Next to me sat a huge character who was chatting with the bartender and his young helper. I sat, sipping and munching, in that snug harbor so close by the British Museum's ocean of books. The bartender went to tend customers at the far end of the bar. The huge character leaned in on the young

helper and said: "You've got the money now?" The young helper nodded nervously. The huge character ordered: "Give it me, with the change for my next pint." I realized that I was seeing a loan shark at work, and I fervently hoped that he was going to go on ignoring me, the invisible American. The young helper grew even more nervous; instead of passing his payoff to the shark with the change for a drink, he turned his body and shoved the money across the bar, the shark snatched it, it disappeared—just as the bartender looked down the bar, knowing he had seen something happen. I went back to the Reading Room of the British Museum with the reminder that not all the world's stories were in *its* books.

And I think back again to Scotland last summer, to Glasgow. The people of Glasgow, the Glawegians, have a reputation as the Cockneys or the Brooklynese of Scotland, and while British person after British person told us we would find Glasgow generally hospitable enough, in a raffish kind of way, for heaven's sake, Carol and I—we naive library types—must never go into the pubs of that city of hard men.

I spent a first morning in Glasgow's Mitchell Library, a sleek enterprise which proclaims itself the largest public reference library in Europe and likely is. Carol met me and said, "I think I've found us a lunch place." It was a mere half-block away and it was called the Ritz Bar, and

of course it was a pub. In we went, to a place of gleaming dark wood, and gorgeous high pressed-tin ceiling, and the most orderly of clientele, and impeccable service which included the motherly cook coming out of the kitchen to ask us, "Is the soup all right, dears?" Fearsome Glasgow pubs, ay? May they take over the world.

I don't know what you make of incidents such as these, but I suggest that it's no coincidence that memorable watering-holes so often come to mind together with memorable libraries. After all, aren't librarians the bartenders of information? Behind your polished wood, don't you deal with all manner of customers who step in through that door from the street? Aren't strange concoctions ordered up from you? Don't you see almost every sort of human behavior, and begin regularly to recite the ancient prayer that must have originated in a pub somewhere—"Please, Lord, not on my shift"? And don't you preside over shelves of intoxicating items, some of which are never opened until the day a bearded customer comes in and asks, "Do you have a brand called Doig's Law?" And at closing time, isn't there a cosmic chorus of librarians, all of you saying wearily to yourselves—at least I helped humankind make it through one more day?

That's what I hear.



Mary Carr and Ivan Doig

"I HEAR THEM! I HEAR THEM!" VOICES THAT COME TO A WRITER IN A LIBRARY

BY IVAN DOIG

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Well, after a lot of thought about what libraries and librarians are up against these days, I decided just to come here tonight and sing under your window.

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I took the title for this talk from a friend of mine, another book person, the Missoula writer and teacher of fiction, Bill Kittredge. Kittredge came up with it when he was being interviewed for a book of oral history called *The Ranchers*, about the changes in his life since he grew up on a ranch of more than a million acres down toward Klamath Falls in eastern Oregon. "In the landscapes of our minds, we have to learn how we can make a place for ourselves," Bill Kittredge told the interviewer's tape recorder. He went on:

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Those of you who have enough trouble with the noise level in your libraries will be relieved that I **don't** hear horses clattering amid the stacks. But I've heard a lot else, and I want to do you some stanzas of it tonight.

So now, quick as this, you are eighteen years old. You have come by train—which tells how long ago this is—from a Montana town with a population of 75, to begin college at Northwestern University, in suburban Chicago. And you set off to walk this campus you have never laid eyes on before, and there on a slight rise atop a wide green sweep of spotless lawn stands the university library, Deering Library. Deering is a library like they don't build 'em any more—similar to the original portion of Suzzallo Library on the University of Washington campus, the high

roof, but with a pair of gothic towers poking up at each end. Deering had architectural fame of a sort. The story was that Frank Lloyd Wright had driven past the Northwestern campus on Lake Shore Drive one day, looked at Deering Library with those gothic towers nobly poking into the air, and said, "It looks like a pig on its back."

I think what he really didn't like about it, though, was that Deering Library so much resembled a cathedral. And there's where Mr. Wright was wrong. There was nothing inappropriate about that resemblance, that library was a kind of cathedral, in several ways it behaved like a cathedral. You step now into the reading room of Deering, you find that the banks of lights hang just above the tables, they hang all the way from the vaulted ceiling, they hang down what seems to be thousands of feet just for your reading convenience, they hang there like the watchfobs of the gods. You sit with your book there in the golden pool of reflection, the lens of light brings the printed words up into your eyes. The diarist Bruce Frederick Cummings has written of "the desire every book has to be taken down and read, to live, to come into being in somebody's mind."

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Be that as it may, the St. Andrews library is a modern one just a few years old and going through a summer of teething pains. I walk in the first morning and on floor after floor, I pass white-haired maintenance men in blue dustcoats, staring silently forlornly down at the electrical trenches in the floor, into the mysterious entrails of wiring to which they are going to have to figure how to hook up the new computer terminals. I step over to learn the catalogue system. Its basic fact is that all books before 1906, whatever their topic, are in the basement. I venture down, and immediately learn that the basement is a good ten degrees cooler than the floors above, so whenever I want a book that was published before 1906 I had better put my coat on. I return to the catalogue system. There is a set of bound volumes which catalogues some books. There is horizontal microfiche which catalogues other books. There is vertical microfiche cataloguing still others. The back-and-forthing between the fiches has my eyes swimming. In none of the systems

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Text is from the WLA Conference banquet speech given April 19, 1985.

The friendship and cooperation now present between university libraries and private collectors is most important...

remarking that he wanted to, "attack Walsdorf for his shortcomings. It is a long book, and it appears to have been proofread carelessly." This is my favorite negative review, because my editor at Oryx wrote a letter to the editor rebutting the review. In printing her letter, they misspelled Oryx.

One of the truly good things about publishing is the royalties—all those million dollar deals one reads about for the Irving Stones of the publishing world will soon be mine, thinks the author. In my own case, I invested \$29,000 out of pocket over fifteen years to collect the nearly 1,000

books I used in writing my Morris bibliography. I then waited two and a half years while I used my "free time" to write, edit and proofread the manuscript, and finally, after paying for photocopying and typing charges, I have pocketed just over \$3,000. This is truly a very, very gentlemanly way of growing rich very, very slowly.

In closing, I would not like to discourage any of you from writing books. The money is not great, but you do get fame. I saw this for myself on visiting a chain bookstore in Philadelphia a few years ago when I was in that city for the A.L.A Conven-

tion. I noticed two young women, in their thirties, looking about for a book, I overheard one say to the other, "They must have my book; it's in all the bookstores." I then heard her ask the shop assistant for "her book" by title and author, to which he replied, "Oh, that one. We had 10 copies in for about two months. It was a dog, didn't move, so we sent them all back to the publisher." So much for fame, and longevity in the life of a published author.

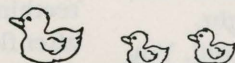
Once Upon A Time

Vicki Smith

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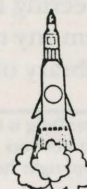
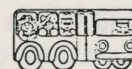
Trudy Wright

Flannel Board Sets



- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. What Shall I Give You?----- | \$15.00 |
| 2. Transportation----- | \$15.00 |
| 3. Three Little Kittens----- | \$15.00 |
| 4. Great Enormous Turnip----- | \$15.00 |
| 5. Farmer In The Dell----- | \$15.00 |
| 6. Five Little Pumpkins-----no faces: \$6.50-----with faces----- | \$ 8.50 |
| 7. Ten Little Pumpkins----- | \$ 6.50 |
| 8. Five Little Apples----- | \$ 6.50 |
| 9. Five Little Ducks----- | \$ 8.50 |
| 10. Five Little Chicks----- | \$ 6.50 |
| 11. Five Little Easter Bunnies----- | \$ 6.50 |
| 12. Five Dinosaurs----- | \$15.00 |
| 13. Roll-A-Snowman----- | \$ 8.50 |
| 14. The Egg Who Couldn't Decide----- | \$12.00 |
| 15. Old McDonald Had a Farm----- | \$20.00 |
| 16. Three Billy Goats Gruff----- | \$15.00 |
| 17. The Gingerbread Boy----- | \$15.00 |

(Complete with characters, story, rhyme or song)



can I deduce how to find what I am after, material about the Scottish working class in western Scotland in the late 19th century. Somehow I stumble onto a promising book with "toil" in its title. Aha! There is a catalogue computer terminal by now, added to the three prior systems though I have been warned that only a fraction of the library's holdings are in it yet. But at least I have the magic word "toil," and at the punch of a few buttons I'll get every title about the Scottish working class in whatever holdings have been computerized. I punch those buttons, and the screen fills, with the promise of more screenfuls to come. I begin joyfully to take down the titles—*Technology and Toil in 19th Century Britain; Toilers of the Linen Trade*. But the third title—the third title is *The Lady at Her Toilet*—and it is all toiletry, cosmetic and other modes, after that.

Eventually, perseverance and a saintly librarian did help me track down the books I was after, and now began the photocopying. The St. Andrews library machine took only five-pence pieces, which are about the size of an American fifty-cent piece. I had hundreds of pages to do,

ters of working class and emigrants who left that region of Scotland in the late 1880s, as the main characters of my next novel are to do. The archivist produces some letter collections for me, leads me into the reading room, and as I begin to sit down at a capacious table nicely lit by a window, he says, "Eh—there's the matter of the airrr." The airrr, in his thick Fifeshire burr. Does he mean error, is this some Scotch Calvinist probing of my scholarly soul? Can he somehow mean the Scottish town of Ayr, that Robert Burns wrote of—"Old Ayr, whom never a town surpasses, for honest men and bonnie lasses?" That's cryptic, even from an archivist.

But no, the airrr proved to be the air conditioning, which was blowing a gale at the end of the room I had contemplated sitting at. I took the archivist's point and established myself at the opposite end of the room, noticing as I did that there was a heavy tartan lap robe in the chair beside me. Within minutes I was using that lap robe, and at lunch time I went home and—despite the fact that Scotland was sweltering under its hottest summer in a century—I put on a sweater under my sport jacket, came

Doig's Law . . . the more obscure the book, and the longer it has been taking up shelf space, and the less it has been used—the more valuable that book is to a writer named Doig.

so Carol said she'd go to the bank and get me some rolls of five-pence pieces. Back she came not with rolls of coins, there was no such Scottish thing, but with bulging plastic bags of coins—sort of like overloaded Baggies: a hundred five-pence pieces in each, a truly substantial sum of coins. I tried to get used to walking around lopsided with these coin bags in my pocket and started feeding the five-pences to the photocopy machine. About every other one, it spat back out. The problem here was that there are two kinds of five-pence pieces, new ones minted when Britain went onto the decimal system a dozen or so years ago, and the old shilling pieces which were simply declared to be worth five-pence from then on. My heart sank along with my pockets. Were we going to have to double the bulk of coinage to do my photocopying? Sort out the hundreds of old coins from the hundreds of new? Well, my abiding belief is that machines are at least as eccentric as any of the rest of us. I looked around to be sure no one was watching, and began trying different deliveries of shilling pieces into the coin slot. I pretty quickly found that if I gave each shilling piece a little extra body English—kind of snapped it into the slot—the photocopy machine would gulp hard and swallow it. Of all the sounds that have ever come to me in libraries, that mechanical gulp of dismay was one of the most gratifying.

Next, down to the St. Andrews archives, in another part of the basement—I put my coat on—in search of let-

back and got under the lap robe again. All the while cursing the St. Andrews theory that the best method of preserving archives is to refrigerate them.

But all the while, too, beginning to hear. Hearing the letters in front of me.

During the storm our ship swung like a cork. The screaming of the bosun's whistle, the yells of women and children when she swung over on her side, and tins, trunks, barrels, everything movable flew from side to side . . . We poor human things held on to the bedside like grim death.

David McNeil, that voice, writing to his family in Scotland about his voyage to America as a steerage passenger in 1889. Another letter, McNeil has come by train across America to Colorado: Denver, he reports, "looks as if it commenced last week and might be moved somewhere else next."

As ever—as Deering Library was a quarter of a century before, as all the libraries in between have been—a library voice which was worth coming the distance to hear.

What a writer—or at least this writer—listens for in a library is not always what anybody else wants to spend ear time on.

Let me propound to you Doig's Law, which has not been tested quite as many times as Murphy's, but pretty close. Doig's Law, briefly put, is this: The more obscure the book, and the longer it has been taking up shelf space, and the less it has been used—the more valuable that book is to a writer named Doig. Efficiency experts and con-

sultants are never going to be fond of Doig's Law. Yet it proves out time and again. In the stacks of the Shoreline Community College Library is an eccentric old volume by Edmund Pearson titled *Queer Books*, which a friend who shall remain nameless has rescued from purge after purge for me. Those of you who have read my last book, *English Creek*, may remember that there's an unusual 4th of July speech in the middle of that book—a speech without the usual rosy patriotic hue.

To set the scene for that speech, I had the person who introduces the speaker do it this way: From the book—

This is a holiday particularly American. Sometimes, if the person on the stump such as I am at this moment doesn't watch his enthusiasm, it can become a little too much so. I am always reminded of the mock speech which Mose Skinner, a Will Rogers of his day, proposed for this nation's one-hundredth birthday in 1876: "Any person who insinuates in the remotest degree that America isn't the biggest and best country in the world, and far ahead of every other country in everything, will be filled with gunpowder and touched off."

Those words of Mose Skinner for some reason whispered into Pearson's memory and from his into

it wasn't really much of a book, and Big Horn County wasn't much of a place: then as now, its main claim to fame is the Custer Battlefield.

But start through that book, with its oval photos of men in uniform and a paragraph apiece about their military service, and you begin to notice it goes on and on and on. There are 202 soldiers from that Montana stretch of grassland, in this section of the book. And then you find there are even more—a section called The Men Who Gave All:

Clifford A. Ross, contracted influenza and died three days later, at Camp Dodge, Iowa.

Daniel C. Schutte, while returning from a furlough in France, was killed in a train wreck between Paris and Brest.

Emmett C. Smith, killed in action at Cantigny.

Leonard J. Tudor, saw front-line service in France, died of wounds.

Spencer D. Willey, saw service in France, taken ill with influenza, died in hospital of lobar pneumonia.

Albert Dent, fought in the Battle of the Argonne, died

For the fact seems to be, as I look back over my behavior as a writer, that I'm infatuated with libraries.

mine, and from mine back into another book now, maybe to start a circle of murmur again.

The Montana novel I'm writing now, the next in a trilogy about the McCaskill family of *English Creek*, goes back across the period from 1889 until just after World War One. Early in my research I came across this paragraph in the Malone and Roeder history of Montana:

Montana demonstrated its support of the war—World War One—by surpassing all other states in enlistment rates and draft quotas for the armed forces. 12,500 young Montana males volunteered for service. And due apparently to confused population estimates, the Selective Service drafted nearly 28,000 more. So nearly 40,000 men—about ten percent of the state's population; not just of the military-age men, but of the total population—about ten percent of Montana's population went to war, a rate of contribution that no other state even approached.

That rate of course is astounding. Did Sparta ever send such a proportion of young Spartans off to its wars? If the U.S. had sent military forces to the Vietnam War at that rate, the total would have been twenty million soldiers. So if I'm to write fiction about Montana during World War One, there is the colossal impact of that war to keep in mind. Again, an obscure voice from a library shelf spells it out for me. *Big Horn County in the World War*, the title of the book said when I browsed across it in the UW's Northwest Collection—a dark brown book, about the size and shape of a high school annual, with an eagle on the cover. Published by the local newspaper editor in the county seat of Hardin—out east of Billings—

of wounds.

Louis A. Gemuent, killed in the battle of the Marne.

Stephen Chief at Night, entered the service at Salem Indian Training School in Oregon, died of tuberculosis at the Letterman General Hospital, San Francisco.

The names, and the ways of death, go on—there are several more—until the final one:

Walter W. Kollmar, killed by a high explosive shell two days before the signing of the Armistice.

I hear them. I hear them.

Fortunately, not all the heroic echoes that occur in a library have been fatal ones. I like the heroic story of the WPA Federal Writers Project for Montana. During the 1930s, as part of that New Deal project which also produced the famous state guidebooks, local people were put to work gathering local lore, often from their neighbors, sometimes even from themselves. In Montana that gathering was done in every county, the material accumulated, and files of it ended up at the state Historical Society in Helena. But a day in 1943, a history professor from Montana State College in Bozeman, Merrill Burlingame, decided to ride along with another faculty member on a trip to Butte, where the other faculty member needed to look at some sort of river-and-stream study that had ended up in the warehouse of the Works Progress Administration, the WPA, which was phasing out of existence. As Merrill Burlingame told the story when I asked him for it:

We found the files we wanted near the loading door. Even

closer—to the loading dock door—were six or eight file cases marked Writers' Project. I investigated ever so lightly and began to drool. At that moment the woman in charge appeared. We questioned her about the destination of these files, and she informed us that they would go to the Butte City Dump in the morning. We backed her into whatever corner was available and told her she could not do that! She assured us in unprintable but perfectly clear English that she could and would.

She told us that in an early stage of closing the records she had sent a portion of these Writers' Project records to the Montana Historical Society, which was the approved depository. There, numerous writers of sorts, largely of the newspaper variety, had used generous portions of the materials without giving WPA the least credit.

She didn't approve of that, and she would make sure that the Historical Society did not get one more folder of those records.

The dump loomed. Burlingame goes on:

We assured the good lady that nothing of that kind would happen at Montana State College, and that we would take special care that WPA did get credit. About 4:30 we got her permission to take them, but we were sure that speed was of the essence. We telephoned the college physical plant office and pressured them to provide a truck and driver in Butte as early as possible the following morning. And at that early hour, I came back with the driver.

the swamper, the guy who sweeps the floor, at the grocery store in my hometown of White Sulphur Springs. The next day too is bright blue, and I am talking to the old man, Tony Hunolt, in his dark bachelor room in White Sulphur Springs. "Yeah," Tony tells me in his Missourian voice, "knowed your daddy since I landed into this country in '36, at shearing time at the Dogie. He staked me for my bedroll, I was so dead busted. Didn't have to do it neither, but he done 'er'"—and even though Tony Hunolt is dead by the time *This House of Sky* is published the next year, those words of his speak in its pages. Tony had told me too that I ought to go talk to so-and-so about some ranch topic—"He knows A to Why about that"—and that line speaks in the pages of *English Creek*, last fall. And Tony had said to me, about another man he and my father worked with there on the Dogie, "He was an SOB on six wheels"—and that line is sure to speak in the pages of some future book of mine. There is simply no telling how long Tony Hunolt will go on, speaking in my pages, by way of library ventriloquism.

Time after time I have loved libraries not just for themselves, but for the company they keep.

I am eternally thankful that he did. Nearly forty years later, I was beginning to write a novel set in Montana in the 1930s, and in I came to the Special Collections at the Montana State University library and merrily ransacked those invaluable first-hand accounts of life during the Depression, that Merrill Burlingame heroically saved from the Butte dump. The people of my novel *English Creek* dance to a square dance call from out of those files, they remember great cattle roundups recounted therein, they enjoy at their Fourth of July picnic the succulent small spring frying chickens menued there. And yes, in my acknowledgments, I sing out a credit to the Montana Writers' Project of the WPA era, and to Merrill Burlingame.

I mentioned earlier that obscure voices are often the most valuable ones to me in a library. There's another sort of library voice that I don't even know what to call, except ventriloquism. I have this example.

Now, like the rescued Montana Writers' Project records, we are in Bozeman—on a fine blue June day in 1977 when the five mountain ranges around the Gallatin Valley all stand up into the sky. In the MSU library's Special Collections, I am going through a box of payroll records of the Dogie ranch, where my father worked for several years as a ranch hand and eventually foreman, and where my mother was the cook during lambing seasons. I find their names on the payroll records, and other names as well, one I recognize dimly—an old man who now is

I want to end this talk in the next few minutes, on a note such as you might find in a lovesong. For the fact seems to be, as I look back over my behavior as a writer, that I'm infatuated with libraries. There's more to it than that—there always is in the affairs of the heart—divided or otherwise.

Time after time I have loved libraries not just for themselves but for the company they keep, I think of the Alaska Historical Library in Juneau, during my *Sea Runners* research—of how I would take a break there by going out onto a balcony of that building above Juneau and watch the white cruise ships come up Gastineau Channel between the dark timbered avalanches of Alaskan mountains. It was like stepping directly from the library to a mountaintop. And, I remember, more years ago, after a morning spent in the Reading Room of the British Museum, a lunchtime. On the other side of Great Russell Street was a pub which shrewdly called itself the Museum Tavern. You can hear the domestic dialogues that choice of name created—"And where have you been this long while?" "Where have I been, I was in the Museum."

Well, in I went, sat at the end of the bar, ordered a smoked salmon sandwich and a half of bitter. Next to me sat a huge character who was chatting with the bartender and his young helper. I sat, sipping and munching, in that snug harbor so close by the British Museum's ocean of books. The bartender went to tend customers at the far end of the bar. The huge character leaned in on the young

helper and said: "You've got the money now?" The young helper nodded nervously. The huge character ordered: "Give it me, with the change for my next pint." I realized that I was seeing a loan shark at work, and I fervently hoped that he was going to go on ignoring me, the invisible American. The young helper grew even more nervous; instead of passing his payoff to the shark with the change for a drink, he turned his body and shoved the money across the bar, the shark snatched it, it disappeared—just as the bartender looked down the bar, knowing he had seen something happen. I went back to the Reading Room of the British Museum with the reminder that not all the world's stories were in *its* books.

And I think back again to Scotland last summer, to Glasgow. The people of Glasgow, the Glawegians, have a reputation as the Cockneys or the Brooklynese of Scotland, and while British person after British person told us we would find Glasgow generally hospitable enough, in a raffish kind of way, for heaven's sake, Carol and I—we naive library types—must never go into the pubs of that city of hard men.

I spent a first morning in Glasgow's Mitchell Library, a sleek enterprise which proclaims itself the largest public reference library in Europe and likely is. Carol met me and said, "I think I've found us a lunch place." It was a mere half-block away and it was called the Ritz Bar, and

of course it was a pub. In we went, to a place of gleaming dark wood, and gorgeous high pressed-tin ceiling, and the most orderly of clientele, and impeccable service which included the motherly cook coming out of the kitchen to ask us, "Is the soup all right, dears?" Fearsome Glasgow pubs, ay? May they take over the world.

I don't know what you make of incidents such as these, but I suggest that it's no coincidence that memorable watering-holes so often come to mind together with memorable libraries. After all, aren't librarians the bartenders of information? Behind your polished wood, don't you deal with all manner of customers who step in through that door from the street? Aren't strange concoctions ordered up from you? Don't you see almost every sort of human behavior, and begin regularly to recite the ancient prayer that must have originated in a pub somewhere—"Please, Lord, not on my shift"? And don't you preside over shelves of intoxicating items, some of which are never opened until the day a bearded customer comes in and asks, "Do you have a brand called Doig's Law?" And at closing time, isn't there a cosmic chorus of librarians, all of you saying wearily to yourselves—at least I helped humankind make it through one more day?

That's what I hear.



Mary Carr and Ivan Doig