

12 Oct. '05

Dear Nancy Bunge--

A nice fresh copy of *Master Class* arrived in the mail, and I hope you are properly excited and gratified by the existence of the book. It's a very handsome job, well worth the time you put in on it, I'd say. Many thanks for your care in the handling of my interview.

By the way, if Iowa hasn't already done so, a review copy should be sent to the *Seattle Times*, on the chance that my presence and Bill Stafford's might catch notice there. The address: Mary Ann Gwinn, Books Editor, *Seattle Times*, Fairview Ave. N. and John St., Seattle WA 98111.

Best wishes,

Nancy Bunge
2376 Burcham Drive
East Lansing, MI 48823
(517) 333-4131
bunge@msu.edu

June 19, 2005

Dear Ivan Doig,

I'm reviewing page proofs for the Iowa collection that includes my interview with you and, much to my embarrassment, I apparently overlooked some of the copyeditor's changes. A series of commas have been replaced with dashes.

Here are the relevant phrases:

1. "The forest fire scene in *English Creek*, four forest rangers of four different generations read that for me," becomes "The forest fire scene in *English Creek*--four forest rangers of four different generations read that for me,"
2. "And the Russian lingo in *Mariah Montana*, my college Russian is pretty rusty," becomes "And the Russian lingo in *Mariah Montana*--my college Russian is pretty rusty,"
3. "Hemingway, it was sometimes his muscles, but so what?" becomes "Hemingway--it was sometimes his muscles, but so what?"

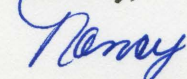
She also changed double quotation marks to single in the excerpt you quote from your writing diary. I had thought it was a quotation within a quotation and explained the change to you that way, but now I see that she changed the marks to make them consistent with an earlier diary entry where you used single quotes. I would assume that is all right with you.

I'm a little late getting to this because I also had to do an index and because a professional proofreader is comparing the copyedited manuscript and a set of page proofs, so I felt as though I should first complete the task for which I had no backup. I should get everything in the mail to Iowa by Friday, so if you want to register an objection, you need to do it quickly. Feel free to call me any time and leave a message if I'm not there. I enclose a phone card with \$1.69 on it; at 6 cents a minute, it should easily cover the cost of your call.

If you can live with these changes, there's no need for you to contact me.

I'm very sorry about this.

Sincerely,



Nancy Bunge

Nancy Bunge
2376 Burcham Drive
East Lansing, MI 48823
(517) 333-4131
bunge@msu.edu March 12, 2005

Dear Ivan Doig,

I did my best to convey all your complaints to Iowa. Not surprisingly, there is still one area of confusion, though. I've attached copies of my letter to you and your reply so that you can follow along.

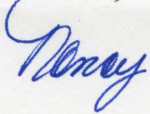
The question is about #14 on both sheets. Everything that the copyeditor wants to put in brackets is material that you added. So, according to your comment in #14, the parentheses should stay. But they are the same kinds of comments she bracketed in #5 and #7 and you thought that was fine. So, it seems to me, for consistency's sake, the comments mentioned in #14 should be bracketed—and they are editorial comments, even if you made them. So, I told her to go ahead with the brackets because I had to get the manuscript in the mail. I thought about calling you, but I decided it would create a snarl to try to sort this out over the phone. If nothing else, I can change my errors—if I made any--on the page proofs.

Also, while I'm pestering you, in #13, I thought you'd like to minimize the commas even after "Montana" gets dropped, so that's what I told them. That would make it: "slides of Fort Peck and the small towns"—just the way you have it. If I'm wrong, please let me know.

I put stars next to corrections from writers and sent copies of my letter to the copyeditor to the acquisitions editor as well as the managing editor in an attempt to force them to make the changes. If you want me to raise your corrections with them again and make sure they're obeying orders, just let me know.

I'm both grateful and sorry for all your trouble. And please don't bother to write me about this unless I got something wrong.

All the best,



Best wishes,

Nancy Bunge
2376 Burcham Drive
East Lansing, MI 48823
(517) 333-4131
bunge@msu.edu

March 1, 2005

Dear Ivan Doig,

As you may recall, I asked your permission to use an interview I did with you in an Iowa book. To my unpleasant surprise, yesterday, I received a copyedited manuscript full of tiny changes—virtually all of them involving punctuation. I'm writing to make sure that they're all right with you. If anything bothers you, please signal as soon as possible. Iowa needs everything back by the 14th; if you can get your complaints to me by the 11th, I'll assert your view with the copyeditor. I'm sending two copies of this letter so that you can make changes on it, if you find them necessary.

The copyeditor always puts in a comma before the "and" in a series and always takes out the comma I put in after "So" at the beginning of a sentence.

Here are the other changes:

1. "free lance" becomes "freelance"
- ② "my subject material, (laughter)" becomes "my subject material (laughter)," (Hint: the comma moves)
3. "was called a 'jug,' a little thing like a jail cell and so the lingo" becomes "was called a 'jug,' a little thing like a jail cell, and so the lingo" (Hint: new comma before "and")
- ④ "wonderful phrase the "gut wagon," (laughter) which" becomes "wonderful phrase the "gut wagon" (laughter), which" [comma moved from after "wagon" to after "(laughter)"]
5. When you replicated your writing journal, you put in lots of parentheses. She has turned them all into brackets.
6. "mid-morning" becomes "midmorning"
7. I'm going to leave the quotes off of this example because it's confusing enough as it is. Your version is: --for the Vancouver I. (Island) section, the line "Three times it snowed, swarm of white from out of the gray." Her version is: --for the Vancouver I [Island] section, the line "Three times it snowed, swarm of white from out of the gray." This section has quotation marks at the beginning—about a page before all of this.
8. "then-editor" becomes "then editor"
9. "not a hell of a long time to do all that research and all that writing, almost simultaneously and then spend" becomes "not a hell of a long time to do all that research and all that writing, almost simultaneously, and then spend" (comma added after "simultaneously").
- ⑩ She has a question for me about this: "I want to keep emphasizing that all this writing career of mine has behind it the best guessing eye of a person who set out to be a professional journalist" She wants to know if the word "is" should be added after "behind it." I'm going to say "No," unless you give me other directions.

- ⑪ She has another question for me about this: "For all three books (the last in the trilogy was *Ride with me, Mariah Montana*), I ran classified ads." I should mention that she changes "*me*" to "*Me*," and then her question is whether the parentheses should be brackets. My answer is, "No," unless you give me other instructions.
- ⑫ "re-imagine" becomes "reimagine" even though my word processing program objects; I will mention this to her.
- ⑬ "Carol's slides of Fort Peck, Montana and the small towns" becomes "Carol's slides of Fort Peck, Montana, and the small towns"
- ⑭ She has a question for me about your parenthetical remark quoting what Jick McCaskill says about Beth: should it be in brackets? My answer will be, "No," unless you tell me otherwise.
15. "To come back from say, Fort Peck, Montana" becomes "To come back from, say, Fort Peck, Montana" (Comma added before "say")
16. "God damn" becomes "Goddamn"
17. "Why I don't give a Goddamn about Donald Barthelme's work and yet think Russell Hoban's tricky book *Riddley Walker*, is high art" loses the comma before "is."
18. "fancypants" becomes fancy-pants"
19. "Metafiction I guess is what I'm writing off" becomes "Metafiction, I guess, is what I'm writing off"
20. "magazine called *Pacific Search* where we" becomes "magazine called *Pacific Search*, where we" (comma before "where")
- ⑮ "semi-serious" becomes "semiserious"

That's it! You asked me to keep you updated on the book's progress. This is probably more information than you wanted! It is supposed to appear in November and you don't have to watch for it because I will send you a copy.

Sorry to have to pester you again. Thanks again for all your help. If I hear nothing from you, I'll assume this is all right.

Best wishes,

5 March '05

Dear Nancy--

My, my. Pecksniff is alive and editing in Iowa, hmm? Most of the niggling changes I can swallow, and I'll simply list the ones here that seem to me a little too crazy.

#2--Putting the comma at the end of the phrase makes it read as if my subject matter is laughter, i.e. parenthetically referred to.

#4--Similar construction here; I'd say leave the original comma alone, for consistency's sake.

#10--You're absolutely right that there should not be an "is" added; that would totally turn around the emphasis I wanted to make. If it would help for clarity's sake (although it detracts a little from the sentence's vernacular rhythm), an "of" could be added to make it read "all of this writing career of mine".

#11--The copy editor is right, the title indeed is *Ride with Me, Mariah Montana*. I'm with you on the parentheses, which attribute the phrase to me as we would like.

#12--Try to make her keep "re-imagine," maybe on the basis that I was emphasizing the "re-" the way I said it; "reimagine" is needly confusing to the reader's eye, it looks like the name of a prescription drug or something.

#13--Ai yi yi, why don't we just drop "Montana" out of that phrase, to keep the emphasis where I wanted it on Fort Peck and the small towns.

#14--I don't mind brackets there if it doesn't upset some consistency you want. That is, I occasionally speak in parentheses and those should be kept, but insertions by you or the editor can have brackets, right?

#21--As with #12, "semi-" keeps the tonal emphasis I want; "semiserious" looks and sounds like some kind of sinus snuffling you might dose with reimagine.

It actually is quite lovely that you are this near to having the finished book. I know how long you've worked on this, and like you, I'm keen to hold a copy in my hand, come November or whenever.

Best wishes,

Nancy Bunge
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Sorry to have to pester you again. Thanks again for all your help. If I hear nothing from you, I'll assume this is all right.

Best wishes,

Nancy Bunge

2376 Burcham Drive

East Lansing, MI 48823

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

January 16, 2004
2376 Burcham Drive
East Lansing, MI 48823
517-333-4131

Mr. Ivan Doig
17021 10th Avenue NW
Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Ivan Doig,

I have an advance contract with the University of Iowa press for an interview collection tentatively entitled "Master Class" and I'd like to version of the interview I did with you a few years ago. You've already approved a longer rendition of it, so there is nothing new here; but I want to make certain that it's all right with you if I use it.

Enclosed please find two copies of the interview and two consent forms. If you are willing to let me print this version, please make any corrections you like on it and return it to me with a signed consent form. If you don't like it, but think it can be saved, please give me some hints and I'll do my best to improve it.

On January 30th, I'm going to Cambridge, Massachusetts where I'm spending my sabbatical as a visiting scholar. I'll come back to Michigan for good on May 10th. So, you'll find two address labels enclosed. My e-mail address is constant: bunge@msu.edu. And I also have a cell phone with the number 517-420-1806.

Thanks very much for talking with me. I hope you find the interview acceptable because I would really like to use it.

Best wishes,

Nancy Bunge
Nancy Bunge

*P.S. There are stamps on both
sides of the sheet.*

NB

COLLEGE OF
ARTS AND LETTERS

Department of Writing,
Rhetoric and American
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235 Ernst Bessey Hall
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January 16, 2004
2376 Burcham Drive
East Lansing, MI 48823
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MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

13 March '04

Mr. Ivan Doig
17021 10th Avenue NW
Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Nancy Bunge--

It took a couple of months for your interview packet to catch up with me-- please note the new address in the letterhead--but here's my vetted version. It still seems to me quite a good interview, and sure, I hope you'll use it.

I didn't know if you have some chronology by which you wanted to stick with our original '95 version, or you prefer an updated version. So, here are both. It didn't take a whole lot of work to update matters, mostly changing references to *Bucking the Sun* to past tense from present, and chipping in an example from the novel I'm working on now instead of the example from that one. Either version is fine with me, it should be your decision.

I'm sticking one of my bio sheets in on the chance it'll be helpful. I hope your sabbatical has gone well, and all the best of luck on the Iowa Press contract. Do keep me informed about the imminence of the book.

Regards,

On January 30th, I'm going to Cambridge, Massachusetts where I'm spending my sabbatical as a visiting scholar. I'll come back to Michigan for good on May 10th. So, you'll find two address labels enclosed. My e-mail address is constant: bunge@msu.edu. And I also have a cell phone with the number 517-420-1805.

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Best wishes,
Nancy Bunge
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P.S. There are stamps on the
sides of the sheet.

COLLEGE OF
ARTS AND LETTERS
Department of Writing,
Rhetoric and American
Cultures
Michigan State University
325 East Gessy Hall
East Lansing, MI
48824-1023
517-325-2400
FAX: 517-325-2520

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that Nancy Bunge may use the attached version of her interview with you about your writing and/or teaching in print and that you may be identified as the source of these remarks.

Signed Nancy Bunge

Date 13 March 2004

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Nancy Bunge, 2376 Burcham Drive, East Lansing, MI 48823; phone: 517-333-4131; e-mail: bunge@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonynously, if you wish—Ashir Kumar, M.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, email: ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

original

Ivan Doig Interview

"Getting It As Right As It Can Be Got"

It must have taken a lot of courage to put aside magazine free-lancing and trust through the long process of writing This House of Sky.

Carol had more faith than I. I was never consecutively convinced that there was a living in it as well as a life. It turns out that indeed there is. I'm now published by Simon and Schuster, and one book has had movie rights sold, and on and on. But it took fifteen years or so. And there was no guarantee, ever.

Didn't you begin This House of Sky as a play when you and your wife spent her sabbatical year in England?

I had in the back of my mind some sort of book about the homestead generation of my parents. My dad was born on a homestead, and my mother grew up on the next thing to one. As early as 1968, certainly a solid four years ahead of sitting down a few blocks from Hyde Park (laughter) and beginning a play about a Montana haying crew, I had begun tape recording people in Montana, starting with my dad and my grandmother. And I pecked away at that. I went back to Montana several times while my grandmother was still alive and I accumulated material without entirely realizing it was going to be *This House of Sky*. So, I suppose the material was in slow germination. Then the increasing preposterousness of the economics of being a free lance helped turn me to working on the

book more fully. And ever since we've been in Seattle, I've had the safety net of my wife's job. A working spouse is not a bad idea for a professional writer of any kind. I do mention too in the forward of *This House of Sky* and should underline a bit, the presence of a friend--still our oldest friend, Ann Nelson--who was acting as agent for me at the time; that got a third mind working on the book process besides the two in this household.

The play attempt ended up with nothing at all to do with *This House of Sky*. Bits of it did find their way into my second novel, *English Creek*; the name of the central character, Jick, and some of the bunkhouse material originated in that play.

Why a play? Did you think a play would be more profitable than a novel?

No. None of this was keyed to any estimates of profits, because they are so unpredictable. If you're a magazine free-lance, you're accustomed to doing things and seeing if there's going to be *any* profit. I'd just always been interested in drama. Didn't take very long for me to see that my subject material, (laughter) Montana's immense landscapes and people's lives against those, were better rendered in something else I'd been tinkering with: poetry put into prose.

In the forward to This House of Sky, you mention looking at your journal and realizing that the book began to move when you started focusing on your father's voice. Have you always kept a journal?

I can't tell you exactly when the journal started, but sometime in the late 60's or early 70's. I'd long kept various kinds of notebooks, and on the trip to Great Britain, I began keeping a diary as well. That's long been my habit--not dailiness of grace but at least weekliness of grace in getting words, ideas, down into a journal.

Is it about writing or is it about everything?

The diary is probably mainly about writing since that's mostly what I do. It has other material in it, though, jumbled in. ⁱⁿ But the other journals I keep, there are separate categories. There's one here [indicates a shelf] called "Phrasing," another called "Comparison and Description," "Anecdotes," "Technique," "Lingo," and "Ideas." Into them go turns of phrase that pop into my head, or ideas, or good stories I hear.

Do you sit down once a week and grab the right notebook, or...

No, it's oftener than once a week. I always carry a pocket notebook, so these are often the typed transcription of that. The stuff grows and grows out of that. Behind me here you see the file cards which are the iceberg of the book I'm on now, a novel called *Bucking the Sun*. These are research cards, but many of them, too, are turns of phrase, or possible snatches of dialogue. One thing I'm doing in this book--sometimes I wonder if it's worth all the damned effort, but--there's a lot of description of how people speak at the moment.

How do you find out something like that?

Well, I watch people. As you just now looked at me, a little crimp came between your eyebrows. That's how I find it. One of my characters is already doing what you just did; I won't swipe it from you (laughter) but I need a lot of ammunition of that kind in a book. So I swipe some from how people behave, and I make up some. This is the storehouse of that material.

But, back to your earlier question, there are generations of notebooks on my dad. When I began accumulating the material for *This House of Sky*, I would sit down and type what I could remember of details and circumstances onto lined notebook binder paper, because sometimes I'd handwrite instead. Into that would go, perhaps, turns of phrase my dad and my grandmother had used. Details of lambing, what some of the technical phrases were: where we put the ewe and her new lamb was called a "jug," a little thing like a jail cell and so the lingo came from that mock jailing of them. Or the wonderful phrase the "gut wagon," (laughter) which was the maternity wagon for the sheep.

Ultimately, I found file cards easier for me to handle. A *New York Times Book Review* piece about Anne Tyler mentioned that she was using file cards for small details she was going to sort into her manuscript. "Cobb wears knee socks when she dusts the house," I think was Tyler's example. I thought, "Well, hell, I can do that. I've been to graduate school." File cards turn out to be a pretty good idea for someone of my habit patterns and so there are now tens of thousands of them around here through the soon-to-be eight books.

You were asking about my journal habits. I don't know where I got the stamina, but on my first book of fiction, *The Sea Runners*, I managed to keep an almost day-by-day journal of what I was doing in the writing. I'll show you a couple of those entries:

"10 March '81--the month's name is apt so far; the past 7 writing days, I've marched on schedule, averaging 5 pp/day as intended. Most of it is choppy, written by the graf (paragraph), sometimes just a sentence lifted from the file cards; it's the effort to get a critical mass accumulated, so I can get the revising and adding-to underway.

"Today during the (daily mid-morning) walk it occurred to me to add the couple of proverbial bits--'Paper is the schoolman's forest,' etc.--to the Rosenberg (governor of Russian America--Alaska--in the 1850's) scene, and to say something here about the effort I'm making to put a proverbial sound into this ms. (manuscript). The aim is to tap into the interest proverbs hold for us; they're nuggets of idea and language, and we all respond to their gleam. Thus, the proverbial tang of M's (the character Melander's) dialogue; and I'm considering whether to put biblical flavor into W's (the character Wennberg's) monologues. Have ransacked a number of books of seamen's slang and the like, to pattern M's talk on. Also, I trust that my proverbs aren't diluted too much by the fact a number of them, I've made up."

...

"3 Dec. '81, 9:30 a.m.--This morning, and for the most part the days of this week, at last are the point at which the ms. begins to knit itself together. With no intention at all of it, I spent Monday and most of Tuesday on the Makah whaling scene, which has become one of the longer and stronger of the book, I think. At once this morning I set to reworking the ShiShi scene, and in not much more than an hour had refashioned the 3 pp.

of K (the character Karlsson) at the seastacks into 4 pp., including a couple of new interior monologue grafts. Then went to Edmonds for coffee break, and while driving 3 new bits for the ms. came to me:

--B. (the character Braaf) suggesting milk cow etc. to W's notion of wintering where they are;

--the men as chilled as if cold water had been poured into their bones;

--for the Vancouver I. (Island) section, the line "Three times it snowed, swarm of white from out of the gray."

Those journal entries remind me a bit of the intuitive process you followed when setting up This House of Sky. Did you follow the same procedure for your later books or were you more organized?

(Laughter.) Well, let me try to parse through book to book and we'll see whether it adds up to organized or not. My next book was *Winter Brothers*. Max Shulman once wrote in a humor column that I read in college in the *Daily Northwestern*, "God never told nobody to be stupid," so that's a watchword around here. I knew when *This House of Sky* had been accepted, enthused over and nominated for a National Book Award, that was the time to get on right away with the next book idea--time not to be stupid, right? I had wanted to do something with the diaries of James Swan. My friend who'd been acting as an agent was 1000% pregnant then and had to drop out of the picture, so off I went to New York. Over lunch in New York City, I told my then-editor what I had in mind, and got no static. It's one of the few points in a career when you can go in and say, "I want to

write about elephants" and they'll say, "OK." Out of that came in some ways my oddest book: in essence, a diary of a diary. *Winter Brothers* has always been difficult to explain, and it's always been difficult for cataloguers. Do you call it biography? No, it's partly autobiography, it's partly history, it's partly something else. But the book is still in print, still sells a few thousand a year--it's ended up making quite a little money for the publisher and been done on public television out here.

Did you grope your way towards that or did you understand what you wanted to do?

I understood what I wanted to do, and I understood that I wanted to do it in one winter and day by day. So, I was back there negotiating a book contract with not a hell of a long time to do all that research and all that writing, almost simultaneously and then spend another year or so polishing it up. All that was a logistical nightmare: to know enough about Swan's diaries, as well as be at certain places during the winter in real time and coincide with his experiences at the same points of the season. But I came out of that winter with the material to do the book, did I ever.

In looking up a sociologist's reference on Swan, lucky for me the sociologist was off a few issues of an old newspaper in his citation and in one of those wrong issues, I saw [the story that became] *The Sea Runners*. Right away I ran a photocopy of that 10 or 11-inch newspaper story. Couldn't find enough about it to do it as nonfiction, and so, being kind of a flat-footed Scotch Calvinist, I thought: "Let's see, what are the other possibilities? Well, fiction." Indeed, that became my first fiction ever. I'd never even

tried a short story, but I had been a professional writer of various kinds for quite a while, so I thought, "Well, why not?" And my next four books were fiction.

I want to keep emphasizing that all this writing career of mine has behind it the best guessing eye of a person who set out to be a professional journalist from the spring of his senior year in high school. I went off to ~~Journalism~~ School at Northwestern and I went on the job track from there as quick as I could. I've always been aware of career hurdles. You write a first book that's well accepted, well, you've got to do a good sophomore book of some kind then, don't you? It didn't bother me, from that point of view, that *Winter Brothers* was kind of strange--so much the better. And that book did fine. Then, OK, you want to write fiction--well, now you've got to write a good first novel, if you're going to keep the career going, in terms of how the book's going to sell, of trying to build it up into a living as well as a life. And everything clicked through those first three books: the first two nonfiction, and then *The Sea Runners*.

Next, I'd long had in mind to try to write about the homestead period. I took my dad out of that and wrote about his life separately in *This House of Sky*, but I still thought the homestead period in the West was a big tasty kettle of history. I wanted the writing to be about Montana, where I still had the murmurings in the inner ear from people I'd grown up around. I also knew that the story of a quarter of a million people coming to Montana to homestead, mostly in the decade pivoting on World War I, exists back in the National Archives in their individual paperwork. Scholars haven't much gotten to it. And I was aware of Montana's centennial coming at the end of the 1980's and I got to thinking, "Well, there's a lot of history there to be used. What if I do a set of books, a centennial trilogy?"

With the homestead book idea as the gangplank to all this, I plunged into the generation *after* the homesteaders, and wrote *English Creek* first. I knew it was going to be the quickest book of the three, because I had the voices in my head. Even though it's set in 1939, much of that time in Montana was quite similar to what I remember well from the late 1940's; much of Montana small-town life was frozen into place by the Depression and World War II: horses were still being used in haying, for instance. Then came buckling down to imagining the homesteaders, in *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, ferreting out a lot of the history on my own. For all three books (the last in the trilogy was *Ride with me, Mariah Montana*), I ran ~~small~~ ^{small-town} classified ads in Montana newspapers asking for people who had raked hay with horses or who had done laundry for hay crews or something of that sort, to tell me about it.

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And in *Heart Earth*, I also went back to Arizona and to Montana again. Part of the process is always going and taking a look at what I'm writing about.

So, you always look at settings while you're writing?

Very much so. One of these [notebooks] is settings: Carol's slides of Fort Peck, Montana and the small towns around it and the Missouri River--for 600 miles, actually.

(Laughter.)

Do you do the research before the books or simultaneously?

It's always a three-ring act. To me, a book is a circus rather than a one-trick pony, and so I do as much research as I can beforehand, but I don't postpone the writing forever for the sake of the research. I end up doing some research to fill in things after I have a lot of the draft done. I'm facing that right now in the current novel. It involves the building of the biggest earthen dam in the world during the Depression, so one of my characters is a diver. You wouldn't necessarily expect, in essence, a deep-sea diver on the Missouri River, but indeed a large part of the daily work there was that this guy had to go under the river and work on the footings of the trestles and the railroad bridges. So, I've got to have a rapture-of-the-deep set of research. I'm just now starting to face that. I know what the diving suit is down to the last detail; I've put on the diving suit, mentally, time after time. That's the kind of thing you come up against as you keep pushing your characters to the edge of their own spots in life.

Some fiction writers talk about their characters taking over.

Mine do when they start getting onto the file cards, actually. Some of it is with my help, of course. It turned out I wanted to have somebody talk a certain way, so...Beth McCaskill in *English Creek* talks with those capital letters partly because I wanted some character to do that. (The narrator Jick McCaskill in *English Creek* remarks of his mother, Beth: "...(M)y mother forever tried to tell the other three of us. That the past is a taker, not a giver. It was a warning she felt she had to put out, in that particular tone of voice with punctuation all through it, fairly often in our family. When we could start hearing her commas and capital letters we knew the topic had become Facing Facts, Not Going Around with Our Heads Stuck in Yesterday.") By the time I thought of that characteristic, she was the logical candidate. So, you give her that characteristic, by God. And that begins to do a lot of personality shaping for the character, and changes how certain things happen. Putting a few capital letters on a character's viewpoint has quite a ripple consequence.

In *Sea Runners*, as I worked through that book, it kept having a 19th century flavor in the language. I figured, "Well, then, somebody ought to know something about the Bible, in this book." I already had the other three main characters created, so Wennberg, the fourth one to show up--the least likely to be familiar with the Bible--I thought, "Well, ~~Hell~~ let him be the least likely," because I like to work on complicated characters.

Readers seem to like my characters, even though I'm not sure I've ever been entirely satisfied with a character. I've always wished there was a way to show a little more on the page. So, I'm conscious that I want them to be surprising. I think I'm getting more of that in this novel (*Bucking the Sun*) I'm working on now. There's a series of surprises through the plot, but some of the characters do startling things, too. Anyway, yes, the characters do take on some life of their own; they certainly take on some qualities I hadn't necessarily intended. Stanley Meixell took over more of *English Creek* than I ever planned, because as I got to writing his voice and how he looked and the way he could slope into any scene ... all of a sudden, dialogue would begin going on around him. His Missourian-Montanan way of talking gave me a way to get a lot of lingo in. I was trying to write a poetry of the vernacular into the entire trilogy, so Stanley was often the bard of that.

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Montana, which is the setting of this book, and know that we went in there and in one day found everything that a diver wore in the 1930's, and photos of this and that about the dam, well, yeah, that's fun.

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We didn't know each other very well; we only had a couple of times together. But, yes, I think there was a mutual accuracy-admiration society. We reached where we are by doing things right, by getting things accurate, by sticking with certain things and telling other things to go to hell. Getting it as right as it can be got. He seemed genuinely to like *English Creek* and *This House of Sky* for that reason. And I think on Stegner's *Collected Stories*, the only blurb is mine. I swallowed pretty hard when that book showed up because I'm not a short story writer. I don't even much like the format. And so, I did a blurb that in essence says: "This collected work of Stegner's shows a gifted writer moving from apprenticeship work to being a master of prose." The book came out and there was a little longer than usual flap-copy biography of Stegner, so I ran my eye down to see what they'd added, which was that Stegner had won all these prizes for short stories early in his career, that I hadn't known at all. Here he had things in *Best American Short Stories* and *O. Henry Prize Stories*, year after year. But, apparently, he had liked this blurb attitude of mine: "By God, learn how to drive the nail straight." (Laughter.)

Probably the acme of my free-lancing was writing travel pieces for the *New York*

Times. I did half a dozen there in one year and so I was, I think, their second most productive writer. Barely made any money, but I got some of the best editing in the universe. An editor there would call and say, "It's a nice piece, it's a nice piece, nice piece, nice piece...just needs a few fixes." (Laughter.) And then, I'd redo it by about 35% and, indeed, the piece would be much better. Those fixes are the kind of thing I still want. How does a forest fire behave when you're setting a backfire? Carol wouldn't let me go see for myself (laughter), so I had to ask the ~~damn~~ forest rangers. The forest fire scene in *English Creek*, four forest rangers of four different generations read that for me, and each one had a different angle on it. And the Russian lingo in *Mariah Montana*, my college Russian is pretty rusty, so a University of Washington professor fixed up my phonetic Russian. And there are going to be engineers to be talked to on this dam book.

Elizabeth Simpson's book about you suggests you like fiction to be moral.

ID: Why I don't give a God damn about Donald Barthelme's work and yet think Russell Hoban's tricky book *Riddley Walker*, is high art, I can't entirely spell out for you, except that to me there's not the breath of real life in, say, the fancypants attitude of Barthelme's work. Metafiction I guess is what I'm writing off. Minimalism, too. On the other hand, I deeply admire experiments pushing the edges in fictional *technique*. But I think you ought to be able to see in a writer's work something of that writer, whether it's his guts or his brains. Hemingway, it was sometimes his muscles, but so what? They were good muscles.

AP?
Barthelme

*There also seems a moral impetus for some of your work. I read that indignation over Spiro Agnew's book contract helped motivate you to write *This House of Sky*. You also seem concerned about the environment.*

Back when I was beginning seriously to work on *This House of Sky*, Watergate came into the open. Let's remember, it's not simply the example of Agnew; almost any co-conspirator, indicted or otherwise, got a book contract or a television miniseries out of one of the biggest cases of public corruption in our history. Agnew's was a fiction contract; there was no reason in the world for him to get that. Spiro T. Agnew writing a novel! Now there's a spur to a professional writer to show the SOBs how it's really done, to get on with my family's story that I'd been telling myself I intended to tell. And I told it. What the bastards do in public life indeed is part of my writing motivation.

Environmental concerns are major with me, too. Much of my free-lance life here locally, much of the writing was for a regional magazine called *Pacific Search* where we were trying to cover environmental issues.

I've thought of myself as a grown-up since about the time I was six, and so I think things count in life. What politicians do, counts. What corporations do, counts. What I do, counts--I and my family tree of writers like Stegner and Maria Sandoz, Hamlin Garland, people who came out of the outback of this country.

up
Mari

When you say, "Writing is a living as well as a life," what's particularly interesting about that life, as opposed to, say, a teaching life?

Well, the chance to be creatively lonesome. And I'm semi-serious about that. The chance to sit around alone and make the language dance is what's behind all of this.

Is that why you like editing best?

I'm probably a more natural editor than I am a first-drafter, so, yes, the farther along I am in work on a manuscript, the happier I am. An entrancement with language and a curiosity and a kind of a lust to see what can be done with it, I suppose, must ultimately be behind all this. The free-lance life, the book-writing life is a chance to do it on your own high wire rather than somebody else's high wire. You don't know how those other buggers put up the high wire. (Laughter.) One of the books I've liked and thought most deeply through is Anthony Storr's *Solitude*. He writes about the work being the companion, and that registers with me. I'm from a line of people where that was always partly true, often pretty fully true of their lives.

Really hard workers.

Yeah, I am from a line of people who worked themselves to death, and from a part of the country where that was often the case. I can recognize that way of life, and Stegner did too. I hope people take various things from my books, but sometimes it's enough that they just savvy we're not alone in this ^{hard} business of life. I think it doesn't hurt that some of us are examples of not ending up in some trash bin of life just because things were tough.

Sad things do happen. Strange things happen. My writing contemporary Mary Clearman Blew (author of *All But the Waltz* and *Balsamroot*), who grew up in Montana, ^{not far from where I did} too, has had some tough things in her life, and I'm pretty proud of the fact that Mary and I have ended up as two of the writers pointed to in our generation. [#] It says something about human capacities that books, if they're worth a damn, have some moral quotient in them. People read books for sustenance. Some of that is intellectual, but some of it is a sustenance of life. What does the book's language do; how does this writer fit the language to the story; what story is he telling; "Gosh, is it anything like *my* life's story?" Or, "This is the kind of story I've never heard before, but, God, isn't it interesting?"

Ivan Doig Interview

"Getting It As Right As It Can Be Got"

Version
updated
to '04

It must have taken a lot of courage to put aside magazine free-lancing and trust through the long process of writing This House of Sky.

Carol had more faith than I. I was never consecutively convinced that there was a living in it as well as a life. It turns out that indeed there is. My tenth book (Prairie Nocturne) came out last fall, and there have been awards, ~~and on and on. But it took fifteen~~ ~~years or so. And there was no guarantee, ever.~~ ~~and there have been awards,~~ ~~and on and on. But it took fifteen~~ ~~years or so. And there was no guarantee, ever.~~

Didn't you begin This House of Sky as a play when you and your wife spent her sabbatical year in England?

I had in the back of my mind some sort of book about the homestead generation of my parents. My dad was born on a homestead, and my mother grew up on the next thing to one. As early as 1968, certainly a solid four years ahead of sitting down a few blocks from Hyde Park (laughter) and beginning a play about a Montana haying crew, I had begun tape recording people in Montana, starting with my dad and my grandmother. And I pecked away at that. I went back to Montana several times while my grandmother was still alive and I accumulated material without entirely realizing it was going to be *This House of Sky*. So, I suppose the material was in slow germination. Then the increasing preposterousness of the economics of being a free lance helped turn me to working on the

I can't tell you exactly when the journal started, but sometime in the late 60's or early 70's. I'd long kept various kinds of notebooks, and on the trip to Great Britain, I began keeping a diary as well. That's long been my habit--not dailiness of grace but at least weekliness of grace in getting words, ideas, down into a journal.

Is it about writing or is it about everything?

The diary is probably mainly about writing since that's mostly what I do. It has other material in it, though, jumbled in. ⁱⁿ But the other journals I keep, there are separate categories. There's one here [indicates a shelf] called "Phrasing," another called "Comparison and Description," "Anecdotes," "Technique," "Lingo," and "Ideas." Into them go turns of phrase that pop into my head, or ideas, or good stories I hear.

Do you sit down once a week and grab the right notebook, or...

No, it's oftener than once a week. I always carry a pocket notebook, so these are often the typed transcription of that. The stuff grows and grows out of that. Behind me here you see the file cards which are the iceberg of the book I'm on now, ~~a novel called~~

~~Buckling the Sun~~. These are research cards, but many of them, too, are turns of phrase, or possible snatches of dialogue. One thing ^{I do in my books} ~~I'm doing in this book~~ sometimes I wonder if it's worth all the damned effort, but--there's ^{usually} a lot of description of how people speak at the moment.

How do you find out something like that?

Well, I watch people. As you just now looked at me, a little crimp came between your eyebrows. That's how I find it. One of my characters is already doing what you just did; I won't swipe it from you (laughter) but I need a lot of ammunition of that kind in a book. So I swipe some from how people behave, and I make up some. This is the storehouse of that material.

But, back to your earlier question, there are generations of notebooks on my dad. When I began accumulating the material for *This House of Sky*, I would sit down and type what I could remember of details and circumstances onto lined notebook binder paper, because sometimes I'd handwrite instead. Into that would go, perhaps, turns of phrase my dad and my grandmother had used. Details of lambing, what some of the technical phrases were: where we put the ewe and her new lamb was called a "jug," a little thing like a jail cell and so the the lingo came from that mock jailing of them. Or the wonderful phrase the "gut wagon," (laughter) which was the maternity wagon for the sheep.

Ultimately, I found file cards easier for me to handle. A *New York Times Book Review* piece about Anne Tyler mentioned that she was using file cards for small details she was going to sort into her manuscript. "Cobb wears knee socks when she dusts the house," I think was Tyler's example. I thought, "Well, hell, I can do that. I've been to graduate school." File cards turn out to be a pretty good idea for someone of my habit patterns and so there are now tens of thousands of them around here through the soon-to-be ^{eleven} ~~eight~~ books.

With the homestead book idea as the gangplank to all this, I plunged into the generation *after* the homesteaders, and wrote *English Creek* first. I knew it was going to be the quickest book of the three, because I had the voices in my head. Even though it's set in 1939, much of that time in Montana was quite similar to what I remember well from the late 1940's; much of Montana small-town life was frozen into place by the Depression and World War II: horses were still being used in haying, for instance. Then came buckling down to imagining the homesteaders, in *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, ferreting out a lot of the history on my own. For all three books (the last in the trilogy was *Ride with me, Mariah Montana*), I ran ~~small~~ ^{small-town} classified ads in Montana newspapers asking for people who had raked hay with horses or who had done laundry for hay crews or something of that sort, to tell me about it.

that filled out your family's story beyond This House of Sky
A lot of your last book, Heart Earth, had to be from your imagination.

A lot of that memoir is pedestals of fact from which I imagine, or fill out the scene around a phrase in my mother's letters, or one of my dad's stories, or an incident in an Arizona newspaper of the time. It always does have these pivots of fact: we were where I say we were at the time, German prisoners of war did escape the night I say they escaped, and when we were spooked by 'em, that became one of my dad's favorite stories. We remember certain things from childhood, but to have any dialogue from your parents, say, you've got to refashion it, re-imagine it there on the page. That's what the great autobiographical works like Kate Simon's *Bronx Primitive*, and one of my real all-time favorite books, James Herndon's *Sorrowless Times*, do.

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So, you always look at settings while you're writing?

Very much so. One of these [notebooks] is settings ^{for *Bucking the Sun*} Carol's slides of Fort Peck, Montana and the small towns around it and the Missouri River--for 600 miles, actually.

(Laughter.)

Do you do the research before the books or simultaneously?

It's always a three-ring act. To me, a book is a circus rather than a one-trick pony, and so I do as much research as I can beforehand, but I don't postpone the writing forever for the sake of the research. I end up doing some research to fill in things after I have a lot of the draft done. ^{And I faced really a lot of it in *Bucking the Sun*.} I'm facing that right now in the current novel. It involves the building of the biggest earthen dam in the world during the Depression, so one of my characters is a diver. You wouldn't necessarily expect, in essence, a deep-sea diver on the Missouri River, but indeed a large part of the daily work there was that this guy had to go under the river and work on the footings of the trestles and the railroad bridges. So, ^{I had} ~~I've got~~ to have a rapture-of-the-deep set of research. ^{learned} ~~I'm just now starting to face that~~ ^{I know} what the diving suit is down to the last detail; ^I ~~I've~~ put on ^{that} ~~the~~ diving suit, mentally, time after time. That's the kind of thing you come up against as you keep pushing your characters to the edge of their own spots in life.

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NANCY BUNGE
6091 Brook Haven #36
East Lansing, Michigan 48823

(517) 333-4131

October 31, 1995

Dear Ivan,

Here's a clean copy of the interview.

Thanks again for all your work and help.

Best wishes,

Nancy

Ivan Doig Interview

NB: It must have taken a lot of courage to put aside magazine free-lancing and trust through the long process of writing THIS HOUSE OF SKY.

ID: Carol had more faith than I. I was never consecutively convinced that there was a living in it as well as a life. It turns out that indeed there is. I'm now published by Simon and Schuster, and one book has had movie rights sold, and on and on. But it took fifteen years or so. And there was no guarantee, ever.

NB: Did you enjoy journalism?

ID: Sure did. I worked at it for many years and I did it as a professional: that's all I did in life. At that time, I liked the relatively quick turnaround of the words. I'd do a two-thousand-word magazine piece and see it in print in months rather than three years as [with] a book. In newspaper journalism, though, the turnaround was almost too quick. You do the day's work and then the next day, the slate is absolutely fresh again and you wonder, "Is this adding up to anything?" I finally began feeling that way about magazine pieces, too. So, the longer

work rhythms of books attracted me.

NB: As an academic, it amazes me you didn't start teaching after getting your PhD.

ID: Well, I looked at a professorship at Indiana and turned away from it.

NB: That's great.

ID: I guess it is, but career choices are often inadvertently brave. Graduate school cured me of wanting to teach. I didn't want to put up with the committee work and the other things people I admired on faculties were putting up with. Carol was already beginning to put up with them in her community college teaching job. She's told me ever since that one teacher in the family is probably enough. Even during graduate school, I found myself free-lancing magazine articles, began writing poetry as a PhD candidate in History. These signs tell a person something. So, as long as we were happy with the section of the country we lived in and as long as it made me happy to keep plowing along as a magazine writer and then a fledgling book writer, we thought it was fine.

NB: Didn't you begin THIS HOUSE OF SKY as a play when you and

your wife spent her sabbatical year in England?

ID: I had in the back of my mind some sort of book about the homestead generation of my parents. My dad was born on a homestead, and my mother grew up on the next thing to one. As early as 1968, certainly a solid four years ahead of sitting down a few blocks from Hyde Park (laughter) and beginning a play about a Montana haying crew, I had begun tape recording people in Montana, starting with my dad and my grandmother. And I pecked away at that. I went back to Montana several times while my grandmother was still alive and I accumulated material without entirely realizing it was going to be THIS HOUSE OF SKY. So, I suppose the material was in slow germination. Then the increasing preposterousness of the economics of being a free lance helped turn me to working on the book more fully. And ever since we've been in Seattle, I've had the safety net of my wife's job. A working spouse is not a bad idea for a professional writer of any kind. I do mention too in the forward of THIS HOUSE OF SKY and should underline a bit, the presence of a friend--still our oldest friend, Ann Nelson--who was acting as agent for me at the time; that got a third mind working on the book process besides the two in this household.

The play attempt ended up with nothing at all to do with THIS HOUSE OF SKY. Bits of it did find their way into my second novel, ENGLISH CREEK; the name of the central character, Jick,

and some of the bunkhouse material originated in that play.

NB: Why a play? Did you think a play would be more profitable than a novel?

ID: No. None of this was keyed to any estimates of profits, because they are so unpredictable. If you're a magazine free-lance, you're accustomed to doing things and seeing if there's going to be any profit. I'd just always been interested in drama. This spring I got in the mail a picture of me as a teenage boy in the community play in Dupuyer, Montana, forty years ago exactly. They were short of males, so I was in two of those--not quite melodramas, but the next thing to it--as well as my high school play. Then when I went to Northwestern, I had the good fortune of living in Latham House, a big, old house meant to be a dorm, full of theatre majors. There was this highly theatrical flow through the house: Richard Benjamin, who married Paula Ragusa (Paula Prentiss), went on to star in GOODBYE, COLUMBUS and ultimately to direct movies. Ron Hogate, he's still doing some Broadway and Off-Broadway parts--"Lend me a Tenor" was the last I knew of him. A teacher named Alvina Kraus was the god for all these theatre people and she ran evening rehearsals at the School of Speech. I would often tag along to sit in on rehearsals of Benjamin in "Awake and Sing," for instance, or my best friend in Latham House, Tom Holden, in "Fiorello" and so on.

I've always liked theatre craft, and Carol's sabbatical in London I saw as a chance to try my hand at it. Didn't take very long for me to see that my subject material, (laughter) Montana's immense landscapes and people's lives against those, were better rendered in something else I'd been tinkering with: poetry put into prose.

NB: In the forward to THIS HOUSE OF SKY, you mention looking at your journal and realizing that the book began to move when you started focusing on your father's voice. Have you always kept a journal?

ID: I can't tell you exactly when the journal started, but sometime in the late 60's or early 70's. I'd long kept various kinds of notebooks, and on the trip to Great Britain, I began keeping a diary as well. That's long been my habit--not dailiness of grace but at least weekliness of grace in getting words, ideas, down into a journal.

NB: Is it about writing or is it about everything?

ID: The diary is probably mainly about writing since that's mostly what I do. It has other material in it, though, jumbled in. But the other journals I keep, there are separate categories. There's one here [indicates a shelf] called

"Phrasing," another called "Comparison and Description," "Anecdotes," "Technique," "Lingo," and "Ideas." Into them go turns of phrase that pop into my head, or ideas, or good stories I hear.

NB: Do you sit down once a week and grab the right notebook, or...

ID: No, it's oftener than once a week. I always carry a pocket notebook, so these are often the typed transcription of that. The stuff grows and grows out of that. Behind me here you see the file cards which are the iceberg of the book I'm on now, a novel called BUCKING THE SUN. These are research cards, but many of them, too, are turns of phrase, or possible snatches of dialogue. One thing I'm doing in this book--sometimes I wonder if it's worth all the damned effort, but--there's a lot of description of how people speak at the moment.

NB: How do you find out something like that?

ID: Well, I watch people. As you just now looked at me, a little crimp came between your eyebrows. That's how I find it. One of my characters is already doing what you just did; I won't swipe it from you (laughter) but I need a lot of ammunition of that kind in a book. So I swipe some from how people behave, and

I make up some. This is the storehouse of that material.

But, back to your earlier question, there are generations of notebooks on my dad. When I began accumulating the material for THIS HOUSE OF SKY, I would sit down and type what I could remember of details and circumstances onto lined notebook binder paper, because sometimes I'd handwrite instead. Into that would go, perhaps, turns of phrase my dad and my grandmother had used. Details of lambing, what some of the technical phrases were: where we put the ewe and her new lamb was called a "jug," a little thing like a jail cell and so the the lingo came from that mock jailing of them. Or the wonderful phrase the "gut wagon," (laughter) which was the maternity wagon for the sheep.

Ultimately, I found file cards easier for me to handle. A NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW piece about Anne Tyler mentioned that she was using file cards for small details she was going to sort into her manuscript. "Cobb wears knee socks when she dusts the house," I think was Tyler's example. I thought, "Well, hell, I can do that. I've been to graduate school." File cards turn out to be a pretty good idea for someone of my habit patterns and so there are now tens of thousands of them around here through the soon-to-be eight books.

You were asking about my journal habits. I don't know where I got the stamina, but on my first book of fiction, THE SEA RUNNERS, I managed to keep an almost day-by-day journal of what I was doing in the writing. I'll show you a couple of those

entries:

"10 March '81--the month's name is apt so far; the past 7 writing days, I've marched on schedule, averaging 5 pp/day as intended. Most of it is choppy, written by the graf (paragraph), sometimes just a sentence lifted from the file cards; it's the effort to get a critical mass accumulated, so I can get the revising and adding-to underway.

"Today during the (daily mid-morning) walk it occurred to me to add the couple of proverbial bits--'Paper is the schoolman's forest,' etc.--to the Rosenberg (governor of Russian America--Alaska--in the 1850's) scene, and to say something here about the effort I'm making to put a proverbial sound into this ms. (manuscript). The aim is to tap into the interest proverbs hold for us; they're nuggets of idea and language, and we all respond to their gleam. Thus, the proverbial tang of M's (the character Melander's) dialogue; and I'm considering whether to put biblical flavor into W's (the character Wennberg's) monologues. Have ransacked a number of books of seamen's slang and the like, to pattern M's talk on. Also, I trust that my proverbs aren't diluted too much by the fact a number of them, I've made up."

...

"3 Dec. '81, 9:30 a.m.--This morning, and for the most part the days of this week, at last are the point at which the ms. begins to knit itself together. With no intention at all of it, I spent Monday and most of Tuesday on the Makah whaling scene,

which has become one of the longer and stronger of the book, I think. At once this morning I set to reworking the ShiShi scene, and in not much more than an hour had refashioned the 3 pp. of K (the character Karlsson) at the seastacks into 4 pp., including a couple of new interior monologue grafs. Then went to Edmonds for coffee break, and while driving 3 new bits for the ms. came to me:

--B. (the character Braaf) suggesting milk cow etc. to W's notion of wintering where they are;

--the men as chilled as if cold water had been poured into their bones;

--for the Vancouver I. (Island) section, the line "Three times it snowed, swarm of white from out of the gray."

NB: Those journal entries remind me a bit of the intuitive process you followed when setting up THIS HOUSE OF SKY. Did you follow the same procedure for your later books or were you more organized?

ID: (Laughter.) Well, let me try to parse through book to book and we'll see whether it adds up to organized or not. My next book was WINTER BROTHERS. Max Shulman once wrote in a humor column that I read in college in the DAILY NORTHWESTERN, "God never told nobody to be stupid," so that's a watchword around here. I knew when THIS HOUSE OF SKY had been accepted, enthused

over and nominated for a National Book Award, that was the time to get on right away with the next book idea--time not to be stupid, right? I had wanted to do something with the diaries of James Swan. My friend who'd been acting as an agent was 1000% pregnant then and had to drop out of the picture, so off I went to New York. Over lunch in New York City, I told my then-editor what I had in mind, and got no static. It's one of the few points in a career when you can go in and say, "I want to write about elephants" and they'll say, "OK." Out of that came in some ways my oddest book: in essence, a diary of a diary. WINTER BROTHERS has always been difficult to explain, and it's always been difficult for cataloguers. Do you call it biography? No, it's partly autobiography, it's partly history, it's partly something else. But the book is still in print, still sells a few thousand a year--it's ended up making quite a little money for the publisher and been done on public television out here.

NB: Did you grope your way towards that or did you understand what you wanted to do?

ID: I understood what I wanted to do, and I understood that I wanted to do it in one winter and day by day. So, I was back there negotiating a book contract with not a hell of a long time to do all that research and all that writing, almost simultaneously and then spend another year or so polishing it up.

All that was a logistical nightmare: to know enough about Swan's diaries, as well as be at certain places during the winter in real time and coincide with his experiences at the same points of the season. But I came out of that winter with the material to do the book, did I ever.

In looking up a sociologist's reference on Swan, lucky for me the sociologist was off a few issues of an old newspaper in his citation and in one of those wrong issues, I saw [the story that became] THE SEA RUNNERS. Right away I ran a photocopy of that 10 or 11-inch newspaper story. Couldn't find enough about it to do it as nonfiction, and so, being kind of a flat-footed Scotch Calvinist, I thought: "Let's see, what are the other possibilities? Well, fiction." Indeed, that became my first fiction ever. I'd never even tried a short story, but I had been a professional writer of various kinds for quite a while, so I thought, "Well, why not?" And my next four books were fiction.

I want to keep emphasizing that all this writing career of mine has behind it the best guessing eye of a person who set out to be a professional journalist from the spring of his senior year in high school. I went off to Journalism School at Northwestern and I went on the job track from there as quick as I could. I've always been aware of career hurdles. You write a first book that's well accepted, well, you've got to do a good sophomore book of some kind then, don't you? It didn't bother me, from that point of view, that WINTER BROTHERS was kind of

strange--so much the better. And that book did fine. Then, OK, you want to write fiction--well, now you've got to write a good first novel, if you're going to keep the career going, in terms of how the book's going to sell, of trying to build it up into a living as well as a life. And everything clicked through those first three books: the first two nonfiction, and then THE SEA RUNNERS.

Next, I'd long had in mind to try to write about the homestead period. I took my dad out of that and wrote about his life separately in THIS HOUSE OF SKY, but I still thought the homestead period in the West was a big tasty kettle of history. I wanted the writing to be about Montana, where I still had the murmurings in the inner ear from people I'd grown up around. I also knew that the story of a quarter of a million people coming to Montana to homestead, mostly in the decade pivoting on World War I, exists back in the National Archives in their individual paperwork. Scholars haven't much gotten to it. And I was aware of Montana's centennial coming at the end of the 1980's and I got to thinking, "Well, there's a lot of history there to be used. What if I do a set of books, a centennial trilogy?"

With the homestead book idea as the gangplank to all this, I plunged into the generation after the homesteaders, and wrote ENGLISH CREEK first. I knew it was going to be the quickest book of the three, because I had the voices in my head. Even though it's set in 1939, much of that time in Montana was quite similar

to what I remember well from the late 1940's; much of Montana small-town life was frozen into place by the Depression and World War II: horses were still being used in haying, for instance. Then came buckling down to imagining the homesteaders, in *DANCING AT THE RASCAL FAIR*, ferreting out a lot of the history on my own. For all three books (the last in the trilogy was *RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA*), I ran small classified ads in Montana newspapers asking for people who had raked hay with horses or who had done laundry for hay crews or something of that sort, to tell me about it.

NB: A lot of your last book, *HEART EARTH*, had to be from your imagination.

ID: A lot of that memoir is pedestals of fact from which I imagine, or fill out the scene around a phrase in my mother's letters, or one of my dad's stories, or an incident in an Arizona newspaper of the time. It always does have these pivots of fact: we were where I say we were at the time, German prisoners of war did escape the night I say they escaped, and when we were spooked by 'em, that became one of my dad's favorite stories. We remember certain things from childhood, but to have any dialogue from your parents, say, you've got to refashion it, re-imagine it there on the page. That's what the great autobiographical works like Kate Simon's *BRONX PRIMITIVE*, and one of my real all-time

favorite books, James Herndon's SORROWLESS TIMES, do.

And in HEART EARTH, I also went back to Arizona and to Montana again. Part of the process is always going and taking a look at what I'm writing about.

NB: So, you always look at settings while you're writing?

ID: Very much so. One of these [notebooks] is settings: Carol's slides of Fort Peck, Montana and the small towns around it and the Missouri River--for 600 miles, actually. (Laughter.)

NB: You've said that memory and imagination use the same brain pathways and you talk about how when writing HEART EARTH, imagining things would bring back memories.

ID: Yes! Right. The best I can see, they're part of the same process. If they weren't, there wouldn't be any question about anybody's memory. We would have these precise video clouds in our heads. As we know, memory is questionable. One of the things that has interested me as a writer is to go back and try to pin it down by whatever other methods I can find. Test it out.

It's significant how people do change things when they remember. The journalistic side of me has a different attitude, but as a fiction writer, the people I'm talking with--dam workers

or homesteaders or hayhands--what they think they remember is at least as important to me as what they actually experienced, or what they choose to tell me. If they want to fudge or exaggerate or hide something, well, that's a tender spot--there's something there.

NB: Do you do the research before the books or simultaneously?

ID: It's always a three-ring act. To me, a book is a circus rather than a one-trick pony, and so I do as much research as I can beforehand, but I don't postpone the writing forever for the sake of the research. I end up doing some research to fill in things after I have a lot of the draft done. I'm facing that right now in the current novel. It involves the building of the biggest earthen dam in the world during the Depression, so one of my characters is a diver. You wouldn't necessarily expect, in essence, a deep-sea diver on the Missouri River, but indeed a large part of the daily work there was that this guy had to go under the river and work on the footings of the trestles and the railroad bridges. So, I've got to have a rapture-of-the-deep set of research. I'm just now starting to face that. I know what the diving suit is down to the last detail; I've put on the diving suit, mentally, time after time. That's the kind of thing you come up against as you keep pushing your characters to the edge of their own spots in life.

NB: Some fiction writers talk about their characters taking over.

ID: Mine do when they start getting onto the file cards, actually. Some of it is with my help, of course. It turned out I wanted to have somebody talk a certain way, so...Beth McCaskill in ENGLISH CREEK talks with those capital letters partly because I wanted some character to do that. (The narrator Jick McCaskill in ENGLISH CREEK remarks of his mother, Beth: "... (M)y mother forever tried to tell the other three of us. That the past is a taker, not a giver. It was a warning she felt she had to put out, in that particular tone of voice with punctuation all through it, fairly often in our family. When we could start hearing her commas and capital letters we knew the topic had become Facing Facts, Not Going Around with Our Heads Stuck in Yesterday.") By the time I thought of that characteristic, she was the logical candidate. So, you give her that characteristic, by God. And that begins to do a lot of personality shaping for the character, and changes how certain things happen. Putting a few capital letters on a character's viewpoint has quite a ripple consequence.

In SEA RUNNERS, as I worked through that book, it kept having a 19th century flavor in the language. I figured, "Well, then, somebody ought to know something about the Bible, in this

book." I already had the other three main characters created, so Wennberg, the fourth one to show up--the least likely to be familiar with the Bible--I thought, "Well, Hell, let him be the least likely," because I like to work on complicated characters.

Readers seem to like my characters, even though I'm not sure I've ever been entirely satisfied with a character. I've always wished there was a way to show a little more on the page. So, I'm conscious that I want them to be surprising. I think I'm getting more of that in this novel (BUCKING THE SUN) I'm working on now. There's a series of surprises through the plot, but some of the characters do startling things, too. Anyway, yes, the characters do take on some life of their own; they certainly take on some qualities I hadn't necessarily intended. Stanley Meixell took over more of ENGLISH CREEK than I ever planned, because as I got to writing his voice and how he looked and the way he could slope into any scene ... all of a sudden, dialogue would begin going on around him. His Missourian-Montanan way of talking gave me a way to get a lot of lingo in. I was trying to write a poetry of the vernacular into the entire trilogy, so Stanley was often the bard of that.

NB: Is writing fun?

ID: Well,...

NB: What's the most fun?

ID: Editing my own stuff. The drafting is difficult and the research can be awfully hard. But I suppose that's another kind of fun when you spend one of those grab-everything days--mine are often research raids where I go back to a place, almost always with Carol, and pillage in as much stuff as I can in a short time. To come back from say, Fort Peck, Montana, which is the setting of this book, and know that we went in there and in one day found everything that a diver wore in the 1930's, and photos of this and that about the dam, well, yeah, that's fun.

NB: When I interviewed Wallace Stegner, he said that he didn't write blurbs for his students' books because he didn't have time to read them. But he wrote you blurbs. I understand he was adamant that things be accurate.

ID: We didn't know each other very well; we only had a couple of times together. But, yes, I think there was a mutual accuracy-admiration society. He seemed genuinely to like ENGLISH CREEK and THIS HOUSE OF SKY for that reason. And I think on Stegner's COLLECTED STORIES, the only blurb is mine. I swallowed pretty hard when that book showed up because I'm not a short story writer. I don't even much like the format. And so, I did a blurb that in essence says: "This collected work of Stegner's

shows a gifted writer moving from apprenticeship work to being a master of prose." The book came out and there was a little longer than usual flap-copy biography of Stegner, so I ran my eye down to see what they'd added, which was that Stegner had won all these prizes for short stories early in his career, that I hadn't known at all. Here he had things in BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES and O.HENRY PRIZE STORIES, year after year. But, apparently, he had liked this blurb attitude of mine: "By God, learn how to drive the nail straight." (Laughter.)

NB: It sounds like your wife Carol is definitely involved with settings. And you've said she's good with plot.

ID: Carol is involved all along, although she doesn't necessarily see the book at its very beginning. She always knows what I'm writing about because there's got to be some explanation of where my next three years are going. "Well, I'm going in the study now for three years, Carol, and...." So I sometimes will talk out characters with her and so on, but she has to take an immense amount on faith at that point, too. When I think a piece of writing is good enough that I want some comment on it, then she'll read it for me. Other friends will read chunks of the manuscript before it hits print, too, often before it hits my editor in New York. And parts with research questions to them, I will try to find people who know everything about the field to

read for me. The forest fire scene in ENGLISH CREEK, four forest rangers of four different generations read that for me, and each one had a different angle on it.

It goes back to the Stegner kind of thing, and I would emphasize I didn't swipe it from Stegner (laughter). I get it from my background in journalism, but both of us get it from our background and the way we made our lives, too. We reached where we are by doing things right, by getting things accurate, by sticking with certain things and telling other things to go to hell. Getting it as right as it can be got. That's what I need from Carol, too. I'm always glad when she likes my book, but, again from a professional writer's point of view, what's really valuable to me is when she says a verb doesn't work, or that I've screwed up an adverb.

Then come the "fixes": this is a term I've been fond of since free-lance days. Probably the acme of my free-lancing was writing travel pieces for the NEW YORK TIMES. I did half a dozen there in one year and so I was, I think, their second most productive writer. Barely made any money, but I got some of the best editing in the universe. An editor there would call and say, "It's a nice piece, it's a nice piece, nice piece, nice piece...just needs a few fixes." (Laughter.) And then, I'd redo it by about 35% and, indeed, the piece would be much better. Those fixes are the kind of thing I still want. How does a forest fire behave when you're setting a backfire? Carol

wouldn't let me go see for myself (laughter), so I had to ask the damn forest rangers. And the Russian lingo in MARIAH MONTANA, my college Russian is pretty rusty, so a University of Washington professor fixed up my phonetic Russian. And there are going to be engineers to be talked to on this dam book.

NB: Elizabeth Simpson's book about you suggests you like fiction to be moral.

ID: I don't like fiction that only plays games on the page. Beckett plays a lot of games, and yet is there a more moral writer than Samuel Beckett who ever breathed? So, it's a difficult line for me to draw. Why I don't give a God damn about Donald Barthleme's work and yet think Russell Hoban's tricky book RIDDLEY WALKER, is high art, I can't entirely spell out for you, except that to me there's not the breath of real life in, say, the fancypants attitude of Barthleme's work. Metafiction I guess is what I'm writing off. Minimalism, too. On the other hand, I deeply admire experiments pushing the edges in fictional technique. But I think you ought to be able to see in a writer's work something of that writer, whether it's his guts or his brains. Hemingway, it was sometimes his muscles, but so what? They were good muscles.

NB: There also seems a moral impetus for some of your work. I

read that indignation over Spiro Agnew's book contract helped motivate you to write THIS HOUSE OF SKY. You also seem concerned about the environment.

ID: Back when I was beginning seriously to work on THIS HOUSE OF SKY, Watergate came into the open. Let's remember, it's not simply the example of Agnew; almost any co-conspirator, indicted or otherwise, got a book contract or a television miniseries out of one of the biggest cases of public corruption in our history. Agnew's was a fiction contract; there was no reason in the world for him to get that. Spiro T. Agnew writing a novel! Now there's a spur to a professional writer to show the SOBs how it's really done, to get on with my family's story that I'd been telling myself I intended to tell. And I told it. What the bastards do in public life indeed is part of my writing motivation.

Environmental concerns are major with me, too. Much of my free-lance life here locally, much of the writing was for a regional magazine called PACIFIC SEARCH where we were trying to cover environmental issues.

I've thought of myself as a grown-up since about the time I was six, and so I think things count in life. What politicians do, counts. What corporations do, counts. What I do, counts--I and my family tree of writers like Stegner and Maria Sandoz, Hamlin Garland, people who came out of the outback of this

country.

NB: Are there other issues that motivate you? You write about Native Americans a bit.

ID: I do some, and I've thought about whether there's a way for me to do more. But I'm not convinced there is, because I can't get inside the life. I don't have the bloodline for it, which has made me set aside an idea for a piece of fiction that in almost every other respect I would like to do. I like the plot, I like many of its story elements, but it would take two Native American viewpoints from two separate tribes, two separate cosmologies. And with as much being written by wonderful Native American writers--Louise Erdrich, Jim Welch, Scott Momaday, and now Sherman Alexie and on and on, that's no longer a part of literature that's lacking. About the best I can do is along the lines I tried in RASCAL FAIR and WINTER BROTHERS: to say, "This is a sympathetic white guy angle, but it's got to be a white guy angle." I'm a bit buttressed in that by my friends and allies in the New West history movement. People as smart as Bill Cronon at Wisconsin and Richard White out here at the University of Washington, a couple of the co-leaders of this revisioning of the history of the American West, both have told me separately that they feel that on Native American issues their imagination can go so far, but beyond that it is a Native American deal. Blood

tells.

NB: There are lots of strong women in your books.

ID: Well, good, good.

NB: Is that conscious or not?

ID: It's both conscious and subconscious, I think. I grew up around strong women. My grandmother sure was. My mother was frail physically, but her letters indicate she had a mind of her own, too. During high school, I had the wonderful luck of boarding out with Gertie Chadwick, whose story I tell a bit in THIS HOUSE OF SKY. Gertie was marvelous, marvelous: ran that damn small-town cafe 364 1/2 days a year, closed it only on Christmas afternoon after she'd fed the bachelor geezers who didn't have any other place to eat Christmas dinner; raised a family; and she'd gone through a large part of that marriage with an alcoholic husband, helped him square himself away and so on. Yeah, Gertie was a terrific woman to spend part of my growing up years around. And my wife Carol, I think, will not mind my telling the world that she has definite opinions and definite edges. For that matter, my editor on THIS HOUSE OF SKY was [an] unparalleled and exotic woman, a novelist now in her own right, Carol Hill. In terms of the things Carol Hill thinks up for her

novels, and the electric quality which would come down the phone line from her to me about THIS HOUSE OF SKY...again, very strong. My literary agent, similarly... my current editor at Simon and Schuster.... So, sure, I like women; I like strong women.

NB: The beginning of THIS HOUSE OF SKY suggested to me the whole book was somehow about your mother's death, but maybe I misread it. You say your mother stopped breathing and then:
"Remembering begins out of that new silence."

ID: That refers back to all of this having occurred on my sixth birthday. My dad would often talk about this macabre coincidence of her death having happened on the same day she had given birth of me six years later. Someone just meeting the two of us would ask him, "Where's your wife?" Here he'd be, this ranch hand with me at his side, and part of Dad's explanation always was: "His mother died on his sixth birthday."

Again, I looked at that coincidence with a professional eye. It seemed to me a strong way to open the book. Out of that coincidence, my life changed. Out of it came that I was at least half-raised by my grandmother, and I very early had this bouncing, often solitary and almost always independent life.

NB: When you say, "Writing is a living as well as a life," what's particularly interesting about that life, as opposed to,

say, a teaching life?

ID: Well, the chance to be creatively lonesome. And I'm semi-serious about that. The chance to sit around alone and make the language dance is what's behind all of this.

NB: Is that why you like editing best?

ID: I'm probably a more natural editor than I am a first-drafter, so, yes, the farther along I am in work on a manuscript, the happier I am. An entrancement with language and a curiosity and a kind of a lust to see what can be done with it, I suppose, must ultimately be behind all this. The free-lance life, the book-writing life is a chance to do it on your own high wire rather than somebody else's high wire. You don't know how those other buggers put up the high wire. (Laughter.) One of the books I've liked and thought most deeply through is Anthony Storr's SOLITUDE. He writes about the work being the companion, and that registers with me. I'm from a line of people where that was always partly true, often pretty fully true of their lives.

NB: Really hard workers.

ID: Yeah, I am from a line of people who worked themselves to death, and from a part of the country where that was often the

case. I can recognize that way of life, and Stegner did too... Stegner ended up liking Vermont probably better than he liked the modern West. Part of it I guess was that Vermont is now more wildernesslike than almost any place in the American West. But, I also think Wally probably just liked Vermonsters, Yankees. (Laughter.) That's a guess, but I would about bet on it. (Laughter.)

NB: The idea that there aren't easy answers seems to run through your books.

ID: Right. I don't think there are easy answers--never have thought so, probably never will. This current novel (BUCKING THE SUN) has maybe my hardest illustration of that. I don't know that I really have anything to say beyond what Faulkner used to: "You've got to survive. You've got to hunker down and survive"-- I don't know if he ever used the word, "hunker," but...I hope people take various things from my books, but sometimes it's enough that they just savvy we're not alone in this business of life. I think it doesn't hurt that some of us are examples of not ending up in some trash bin of life just because things were tough.

Sad things do happen. Strange things happen. My writing contemporary Mary Clearman Blew (author of ALL BUT THE WALTZ and BALSAMROOT), who grew up in Montana, too, has had some tough

things in her life, and I'm pretty proud of the fact that Mary and I have ended up as two of the writers pointed to in our generation. It says something about human capacities that books, if they're worth a damn, have some moral quotient in them. That's probably why people read books. I'd be pretty surprised if Donald Barthleme's back list is selling like Stegner's. Or maybe even Doig's. (Laughter.) People read books for sustenance. Some of that is intellectual, but some of it is a sustenance of life. What does the book's language do; how does this writer fit the language to the story; what story is he telling; "Gosh, is it anything like my life's story?" Or, "This is the kind of story I've never heard before, but, God, isn't it interesting?"

So, there are all these possibilities that books bring. Computer guys are freaked out because they've discovered interactivity, which is what literature has [always] been. There are thousands of stories, millions of them. Writing is the way into this cave of endless echoes and endless wonders.

NANCY BUNGE
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October 13, 1995

Dear Ivan Doig,

Thanks so much for all your work on the interview. You certainly improved it! My only problem with your changing things is that it makes me feel guilty about taking your time and energy. But if you want to make more changes, go ahead. Otherwise, I'll worry that the interview is not exactly the way you want it.

I have a couple of questions. On page 8, line 10, I think there is a missing set of quotations marks after "forest"

On page 9, I changed the question coming after your journal entry in an attempt to make things flow better. If my alteration bothers you, be sure to let me know and I'll try again.

I'm sorry to be slow getting this back to you. Your corrected interview must have arrived in East Lansing about ten minutes after I left to watch the fall colors peak in Northern Wisconsin. I really didn't have the time; but I'm on sabbatical and couldn't resist the chance to watch some Wisconsin leaves turn.

Don't feel obliged to return the interview again. I'm just trying to enclose whatever equipment you may need.

Thanks again for all your work. And please do exactly what you want with the enclosed.

Best wishes,

20 Oct. '95

Nancy

Dear Nancy--

The returned interview caught me during a week when I was working tooth and nail on finishing up my novel, so it took a few days to get to it for you. This time around I've only fixed punctuation or spelling; otherwise I'm happy, and all good wishes to you with it.

hasty best regards,

NANCY BUNGE
6091 Brook Haven #36
East Lansing, Michigan 48823

(517) 333-4131

September 20, 1995

Dear Ivan Doig,

Sorry to get this interview to you a bit later than I'd hoped. I have no real explanation; I just used to be faster.

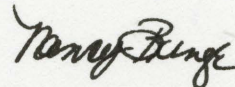
Enclosed please find a transcript of the interview, two copies of the edited version, and a permission form. At your convenience, please look over the edited version. If you can live with it, make whatever changes you want, sign a permission form, and return it to me. You'll note there's a footnote at the start signalling that the interview cannot appear in print until you approve it. If I don't hear from you in 30 days, I'll assume it's all right for me to circulate the interview as is; that way if someone wants to publish it, you can make whatever revisions you want at that point. If you dislike the interview, but think more editing could save it; I'd appreciate knowing what changes you'd like. But, finally, do exactly what seems best for you. I like the interview, but the decision is totally yours.

One problem: you refer to someone whose first name is Russell on page 19. I couldn't understand his last name nor could I turn up a similar name. And I couldn't think of a way to check the spelling of most of the names associated with Latham House on pages 4 and 5.

If I don't hear from you in a month, I'll assume it's all right to circulate this interview. If an editor shows interest, I'll contact you immediately.

I hope everything is going well for you. Thanks again for speaking with me.

Sincerely,



Nancy Bunge

26 Sept. '95

Dear Nancy Bunge--

As the NY Times travel editor used to say to me, I thought it just needed a few fixes....

My practice whenever I edit one of these taped interviews, Nancy, is to pencil in at a rapid pace, in effect holding a conversation with our conversation, to try give it some snap and spontaneity. At first glance this may look like a blizzard of emendations, but I think the pencil-worked version in essence is what I'd be like if I worked over my syntax while I talked.

Since we never managed to get to sorting through my notebooks for good examples for you, I've added a couple, which I think could be inserted at the bottom of page 7. I thought they might give the interview some strong specifics, to help you place it with a publisher.

A last favor, if you will. After you punch in the changes, would you please send me a ~~clean~~ copy of the clean edited version? I don't intend any more changes, honest; I'd just like to have the material on hand as fodder for talks to classes etc. As Bill Stafford once told me, "Who better to plagiarize from than yourself?"

I appreciate the work you're putting into this project, which I know is considerable. All good luck with it.

regards,



NANCY BUNGE
6091 Brook Haven #36
East Lansing, Michigan 48823
(517) 333-4131

June 1, 1995

Dr. Ivan Doig
17021 Tenth Avenue NW
Seattle, Washington 98177

Dear Ivan Doig,

Thanks so much for the great interview. You said an amazing amount in an hour and a half--all of it interesting. I'm a bit sorry we didn't hover over your notebooks and notecards a little more and I thoroughly understand why you'd like to fill in some details before the interview goes into print. I'm teaching a condensed summer school course until the end of June, so I won't have a lot of free time for transcribing in the immediate future; but I expect to have your interview off the tape and edited by summer's end.

In the meantime, I hope your work continues to go well--and that you have time to enjoy a few breaks.

Thanks again,

Nancy Bunge

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**

April 1, 1995

Dr. Ivan Doig
17021 10th Avenue NW
Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Dr. Doig:

I'm doing a series of interviews with poets and novelists about their writing procedures and I'm writing to ask if you would speak with me. I will be in Seattle May 25th through 30th.

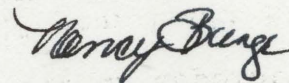
I expect no more than an hour and a half of your time. Research policies at Michigan State require that I get your approval of any version of your remarks I plan to use in print. I hope these interviews will constitute a book; I have one interview collection in print (FINDING THE WORDS: CONVERSATIONS WITH WRITERS WHO TEACH) and I'm writing a proposal for an interested agent. In any case, I will do my best to publish the interviews separately; my interviews have appeared in THE WASHINGTON POST, THE SAN FRANCISCO REVIEW OF BOOKS, and THE AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW. And I will certainly use your work and your remarks in my subsequent research.

If you are willing to speak with me, please let me know how and when to contact you for an appointment.

I will read and think about all your books before meeting with you. If you have any other suggestions for my preparation or if you would like me to read some works with particular care, please let me know.

Thanks for considering my request.

Sincerely,



Nancy Bunge
Professor



COLLEGE OF
ARTS & LETTERS
Department of American
Thought & Language

Michigan State University
229 Ernst Bessey Hall
East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1033

517/355-2400
FAX: 517/353-5250

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

April 1, 1995

10 April '95

Dr. Ivan Doig
17021 10th Avenue NW
Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Dr. Doig:

I'm doing a series of interviews with poets and novelists about their writing procedures and I'm writing to ask if you would speak with me. I will be in Seattle May 25th through 30th.

Dear Nancy Bunge--

I expect no more than an hour and a half of your time. I'd be glad to talk to you about my writing procedures etc.-- I so seldom get asked anything about the actual craft of writing. I could do it on May 30, 3-4:30 p.m.; any other time in your Seattle stint is pretty doubtful, because of my working schedule and the Memorial Day weekend.

I'm sending along some reviews and articles you might want to see; I would appreciate having the Eugene Register-Guard piece back. Beyond those, you'd probably want to see Earthlight, Wordfire: The Work of Ivan Doig, by Elizabeth Simpson (pub'd by U. of Idaho Press).

Feel free to call me for directions to our house, although the phone machine is usually on until about 2 p.m., Pacific time.

If you are willing to speak with me, please let me know how and when to contact you for an appointment. I will read and think about all your books before I write to you. If you have any other suggestions for my preparation or if you would like me to read some works with particular care, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Ivan Doig



DEPARTMENT OF ART & LETTERS
Michigan State University
329 East Bessie Hall
East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1033
517/355-2400
FAX: 517/353-2550

Sincerely,

Nancy Bunge

Nancy Bunge

Professor

April 1, 1995

NANCY BUNGE
6091 Brook Haven #36
East Lansing, Michigan 48823
(517) 333-4131

April 26, 1995

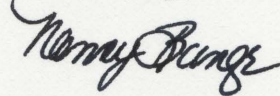
Dear Ivan Doig,

Everything seems set for the interview on the 30th. I've changed my return reservations and I've discovered I can rent an Escort for almost nothing. So, I'll put your directions to good use. In case you need to reach me, I'll be at the above number until the 25th. The evening of May 25th, I'll be at 206-728-7000. The 25th until the 30th, I'll be at 206-624-4844. The only change I can imagine is if my friend in Olympia talks me into staying at their house; so if you can't find me between the 25th and 30th at the above numbers, you might try 206-866-8120.

Thanks so much for the clippings. Enclosed please find the one you wanted back.

I'm enjoying your work. Thanks for agreeing to the interview.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy Bunge".

Nancy Bunge