RYAN LEWIS
MUSIC BIZ REvolutionary
POP CULTURE ICON

SPECIAL WASHINGTON STATE EDITION

Washington Futures:
A 21st Century Model for our
State’s Future Prosperity
Montana Mindscape
by Julie Garner
Photos by Anil Kapahi

Ivan Doig's tales of the West have made him one of America's top authors.
Describes himself as "a historian PhD. With a mind like a magpie." It is worth keeping in mind considering Doig's twelve works of fiction and two memoirs the black-mailed magpie is found in every corner of the forest, is said by some to represent that part of ourselves that "collects brightish thoughts"; they also have one of the most developed vocabularies in the animal world.

As a novelist and memoirist, Doig's "brightish thoughts" form a body of work that renders the Montana of days gone by, rooted in historical fact and parceled with thoughtful insight into stories that are as informative as they are pleasurable to read. His novel, Sweet Thunder, is a case in point. The book follows a newspaper writer who travels to Montana for a story that can compete with one that was written by the journalist who had actually held Butte in its corporate vice in the 1920s. (BP now owns the company, which stopped mining in 1983.) The story is a good source of information about this town, but the plot has never been told to American readers.Sweet Thunder is a pleasure to read, but it cannot be done without taking time to savor the understated melody of prose.

Doig, 19, was born in 1939 in White Sulphur Springs, Mont., but grew to manhood farther north along the Rocky Mountain Front, where the eastern slopes of the Rockies meet the plains. Having lived and worked on ranches until he left for Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., Doig writes how he knows the Montana he knows in his blood. Of the writers now living and publishing in Montana moved there from somewhere else. Tom McQuade, for example, was born in Michigan; Tim Cahill is from Nashville and William Kittredge is an Oregon native. By contrast, Doig headed sheep on the Blackfoot Reservation in Montana as a teenager.

"What's singular about him is that he grew up on a ranch and he's filled with the well-worn, nearly inhuman kind of voice you see very rarely, I was told by some to represent that part of ourselves that "collect brightish thoughts"; they also have one of the most developed vocabularies in the animal world.

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The theme line of the sidewalk outside is also set not as the prospect of making money and survival but as an attempt to make music and have fun with the idea of preserving our collective memory so that new stories continue to come into life, says Doig. In "Sweet Thunder," the novel has been the keynote speaker at two fundraising events for UW Libraries. He even penned a piece for the UW Libraries newsletter, Library Directions. It is to be reckoned with when he was working as the director of the Mississippi Valley Historical Society or when he was a professor at the University of Wisconsin in Madison for three years.

"Ivan Doig's "Sweet Thunder" is a rare book. That's certainly true of his books. No one else can capture the essence of Montana as well as Doig. He has such a vivid and imaginative rendering of the West of Ivan Doig. — Julie Garver is a Columnist staff writer.
Hi: I don't have Paul's home phone but I do have his cell which I think, him being a youngster of 40, he mostly uses. It's 206.850.3369. My home/cell is 360.348.0377 and I am happy to chat with you any time. I am currently reading Donna Tartt's new book, The Goldfinch, which everyone and their dog loves. I think it is good but it is essentially a children's book. When I finish wading through it I am going on a literature of the PNW bender until the first of the year. Of course that will involve some Ivan Doig books and also A River Runs Through it which I never read. Julie Garner
Staff writer
Columns/Viewpoint
UW Alumni Association
206.685.9221
jgarn@uw.edu
<applewebdata://27FC19F7-113A-4710-A765-2448C59E2617/jgarn@uw.edu>

On 11/7/13 9:16 AM, "carol doig" <cddoig@comcast.net> wrote:

Hi, Julie--Where is Alexander Graham Bell when we need him? OK, the phone number follies from my end, and if you could directly email me Paul's and for that matter your home number if you share it out, we'll be up to scratch.

mine: (206)342-6658

In any case, I am happy the article and excerpt are pulling together. Can you have the Columns office mail me half a dozen copies of the illustrious issue?

And again, great appreciation for your professionalism and hard work on this.

Best,
Ivan

On Nov 7, 2013, at 8:56 AM, Julie Garner wrote:

Hi, Paul: Ivan would like to know if you got the hi res pic from his publisher. I think you did because I did yesterday. Also, he tried to call you but he says your phone number isn't anywhere. Could you please add it to your directory listing? So, please send us your phone number!!!

Julie Garner
Hi, Julie--Where is Alexander Graham Bell when we need him? OK, the phone number fumbles from my end, and if you could directly email me Paul's and for that matter your home number if you share it out, we'll be up to scratch.

mine: (206)542-6658

(206)685-9221

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Julie Garner
Staff writer
Columns/Viewpoint
UW Alumni Association
206.685.9221
jgarn@uw.edu
Julie, hi. Missed you with a phone message this morn with a couple of questions, but time's a-wastin', so I figure I'd better blaze ahead and just get the excerpt stuff to you and let you sort it out. So:

I've just now notified my editor's assistant, the peerless Lily Rudd, to send you a pdf of the material from pp. 243-45 of the book, the text starting near the top of 243 at "Sandison stayed stirrup to stirrup" and ending in the 2nd full graf of 245 at "saddle for all I was worth." It's around 450 words and I think leaves 'em hanging, as you wisely advised.

Here is the 50-word intro to go with that:

Thrust into the annual Miners Day parade as "Mounted Correspondent" of Butte's plucky union newspaper, the Thunder, Morrie Morgan is about to score a scoop, thanks to Sam Sandison, legendary vigilante turned city librarian, and his ex-cowhands turned Rough Riders. Here Morrie is readying to be photographed for his moment of front-page fame:

Call me if there any questions, OK? Otherwise, thanks!

--Ivan

On Nov 3, 2013, at 8:35 PM, Julie Garner wrote:

Thanks, Ivan. We have about 500 words. Not much but something to make the reader want more! Then they can buy the book. Julie

From: carol doig [cdoig@comcast.net]
Sent: Friday, November 01, 2013 3:53 PM
To: Julie Garner
Subject: Re: an excerpt?

An excerpt sounds good to me, Julie, but I'll have to check with my editor on Monday. Back to you then.

Best,

Ivan

On Nov 1, 2013, at 11:13 AM, Julie Garner wrote:

Hi, Ivan: Hope all is well with you. We are laying out the magazine as we speak and find that we have 500 words more we could use re: The Ivan Doig story. How would you feel about selecting 500 words from Sweet Thunder, a portion that would pique interest in reading more of the book. Would you be willing to select a passage? Best regards,

Julie Garner
Staff writer
Columns/Viewpoint
UW Alumni Association
206.685.9221
jgarn@uw.edu
Hi, Lily. Here we go on the excerpt expedition. The material is from pp. 243-245 of Sweet Thunder, the text starting near the top of 243 at "Sandison stayed stirrup to stirrup" and ending in the 2nd full graf of 245 at "saddle for all I wa worth."
Please send the pdf of it to: jgarn@uw.edu

That should handle it. Thanks.

Best, Ivan
Got your good message, Ivan. It's fine for you to give UWash an OK to use 500 words—up to 750 free is generally OK. Once you know what piece you want, let us know and we'll get it to them in Word or pdf.

Rebecca Saletan
Editorial Director
Riverhead Books
Penguin USA
375 Hudson Street, 4th floor
New York, NY 10014-3658
t 212 366 2908
f 212 366 2922
www.penguin.com
Hi, Julie—Appreciated the chance to look this over. Nice piece! I've tinkered only with a few nuances and maybe a couple of repetitions. Since I had to do this on Carol's iMac instead of my Word-friendly old computer, the best way I could think of to indicate changes was to put 'em in brackets. I hope that works. Call (206-542-6658) if anything is unclear—I won’t be checking email much today with Jon and the photos coming at 2.

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“What’s singular about him is that he grew up on a ranch and he’s very well educated. The history doctorate you can see in a lot of his books. He is also singular because he has the poetic gift for language. He’s got this poetry; maybe you call it love, which comes through his writing. His book *English Creek* is a masterpiece,” says Nick O’Connell, ’85, ’96, author of *On Sacred Ground: The Spirit of Place in Pacific Northwest Literature*.

While he writes about Montana, Doig lives in [a typical evergreen] Seattle [suburb] and has done so since he received his doctorate in history from the UW. He and his wife Carol had been living in the Chicago area. He was an editor for *Rotarian* magazine and she worked for a similar magazine put out by the Methodist publishing house. “We had been in Evanston [seven or eight years with college and all,] got married there and [delete: lived there seven or eight years;] we found ourselves driving 800 miles round trip on the weekends to see little fir trees in Wisconsin,” he recalls. Doig applied to the history programs at University of California Santa Barbara and the UW. “The UW came through with a teaching assistantship worth $1,900 a year. We had never been to Seattle but we accepted sight unseen. We thought ‘what the hell, we’re going to do this.’”

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After earning his degree, Indiana University [in Bloomington] offered him a teaching position. “[delete: I was offered] [The best new] journalism job in the country [that year], the big tuna. The salary was good. I would have had research money. I turned it down to be a freelance writer. I was a flat-footed, fact-driven journalist and it took me awhile to realize I could make things up [and write novels],” he says. In fact, his first book, *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind*, was a finalist for the National Book Award in the nonfiction category called Contemporary Thought. (A memoir based on life with his father and grandmother, it) has sold more than a quarter million copies.

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Julie, hi—Just wanted to say thanks for the spiffy interview. Also, it's occurred to me I didn't think to connect the poetry-in-the-prose engendered during my UW grad school as I'd intended. Feel free to skip this if you don't see it as pertinent, but my point was that out of that beginning, I've written either snatches of poetry or song lyrics—sometimes both—in all my novels. Examples from the first one to the last:

--In The Sea Runners, an indentured seven-year Swede in a plot to escape servitude to the Russians in New Archangel (now Sitka) lulls a gate guard by drunkenly singing a snatch of ballad of my making:
   The fruit of the heart-tree,
   Do not eat,
   For sorrow grows there,
   Black as peat.

--In Sweet Thunder, when Morrie thinks of the prodigious Butte librarian Samuel Sandison, this dab of verse from "the poet Cheyne"—really me:
   Greater than his age was he,
   Story and legend his legacy.

Don't know if this will help, but there it is, a bit belatedly. Looking forward to the piece.

Best,
Ivan
OK, Julie, looking forward to it. Something nobody has asked me about in interviews is my time at the UW, '66-'69 getting the PhD, if that's pertinent. In any case, we ought to be able to find something fresh.

Best,
Ivan

On Sep 23, 2013, at 1:21 PM, Julie Garner wrote:

Hi, Ivan: Sure looking forward to Wednesday afternoon chat re: Columns. See you at 3 pm. My editor, Jon Marmor, will be contacting you about a photo. I won't have the photographer with me. Best regards,
Julie Garner
Staff writer
Columns/Viewpoint
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206.685.9221
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Hello, Dr. Doig: Please allow me to introduce myself. I'm the staff writer for Columns magazine, the main magazine of the University of Washington. The magazine is sent quarterly to 230,000 people, some UW alums, some friends and others. We would like to do a major feature about you and your work. I am reading Sweet Thunder at present, my second foray into your book list. I read Bucking the Sun a few years ago and enjoyed it very much. I live in Snohomish and my closest friend there turned 90 in May. She has read all of your books and loves them because they recall her to her childhood in Idaho. She was quite jealous and also excited when I shared with her that I hoped to do a story for Columns.

I have read a number of interviews that you have given so I promise not to ask questions that you have answered before and I will try not to be a tiresome interviewer. Would it be possible for us to chat some time in the next couple of weeks? Thanks very much for considering it. Best regards,

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