

Waiting for Cousteau

--Jean Walkinshaw's story of KCTS station mgr, scuba buff, triggng himself out in scuba suit, flippers etc. to greet JacQues Cousteau @ public TV fund-raiser: and Cousteau didn't show. (But lo, no Cousteau. He didn't show.)

--Plimpton bopping PW photog

--Larry Speakes sitting ignored @ Anaheim ABA while people came flocking to see Stegner.

-my bookstore tales:

--"Does your wife teach under her own name?" "Sure." "What is is?" "Carol Doig."

--B'ham: inscription to Jackpine Judy and Ponderosa Pete?

example: (of terrifying questions from wannabe writers)

John Emlen letter, in Writers' Letters '90 file:

"how can the dream and mystic aspects of time be handled for best effect?"

alternative title for ch. on signings etc.: That Moving Finger

--Espy: my '78 diary entry on signing next to him, when he'd say: "Mary. Mary.
Is that M-A-R-Y?"

fan letter, Nov. '94, from Depoe Bay man:

"I have exposed myself to your others works of fiction..."

Writers on Writing, compiled by Jon Winocur

p. 13--"Never make excuses, never let them see you bleed, and never get separated from your baggage."--

Wesley Price

what're you gonna call it,
adds to Phoenix speech: cracks from friends, such as oh, ~~you're reorienting~~ the
old man and the sheep?

- Geoff Woff article

An English professor, in all innocence (at WWU, Bellingham), asked if I write for people like him (i.e., in his profession) or the general public. I hadn't realized the choice needed to be made. Did Dickens, Conrad?

A Small Remainder Problem

HENRY DAVID THOREAU had a large library but its range was limited. Perhaps his method of amassing so many volumes has certain drawbacks: He acquired most of them in one day when a book dealer returned 706 of the 1,000 copies of "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" that Thoreau had paid to have printed after he was unable to find a publisher.

That incident is explained in H. Jack Lang's "Letters in American History" (Harmony Books), a collection that also includes Teddy Roosevelt's explanation for refusing to accept the Nobel Prize money and a letter from Mark Twain to Walt Whitman on the latter's 70th birthday.

The experience with the bookseller might have been devastating to the average writer's psyche, but it does not seem to have fazed Thoreau. In his journal entry for Oct. 30, 1853, he explained: "Of the remaining 290 and odd, 75 were given away, the rest sold. I have now a library of nearly 900 volumes, over 700 of which I wrote myself. Is it not well that the author should behold the fruits of his labor? My works are piled up on one side of my chamber half as high as my head, my *opera omnia*. This is authorship; these are the work of my brain." ■

NY TRR, Nov. 7, '82

art?

While I was signing books at Frederick & Nelson one afternoon last fall... standing around trying to look sophisticated enough to maybe own more than the one suit I had on...

a man and woman came up the escalator, saw me, saw the sign announcing me and my book, and the woman yelled, "There he is! That's him!"

It was all I could do not to break and run, but it turned out, of course, that the lady was from Los Angeles, that she had seen the review of my book in the LA Times,

had been telling her husband they had to buy it, and that she had no idea I lived in
of all places.

~~Seattle~~ Of course, it turned out too that after some minutes of enthusing over me,
~~ever having bought~~

she went off without ~~buying~~ a book. So much for the rewards of celebrityhood ➡

as a writer.

Pause

The last of this story that I owe to you booksellers, who provide the magical shuffle of the cards that bring writer's words and reader's eyes together ~~in~~ ^{this way,} the last of it happened that night, in the homeward plane, when the jolt of recognition ~~hit~~ found me. I realized what I had been trying to read from the woman's features since the moment she appeared in the book-buyers' line--who else had worn a hat at that precise ^{ancestral} perfect angle, who else had those ~~promontory~~ cheekbones.

My father!

###

1/2 step

(Well, we'll see what happens this fall, with this book. Thanks for inviting me.)

Thank heavens for those of you in bookstores, / or I'd probably be spending my fall at rest areas along I-5 and I-90, trying to sell Ride with Me, Mariah Montana out of the back of a Winnebago.

As it is, you give the book / and me / a roof over our heads, and a floor under our sales figures. This becomes the season when we writers write in what we've already written, and do booksignings for your customers, our readers. Predictably quirky things happen. Somewhere along the line in the dozens of booksignings, a shirt-tail relative or somebody ~~we~~ we went to grade school with, or a local writer who ~~had~~ ^{has} adopted the bookstore as a refuge from white space, will show up and do their utmost to shield us from the paying customers. Or, perfectly respectable-looking people will look us in the eye and ask for extra-planetary inscriptions--

in the Montana book tour I just did, a former cafe owner wanted his signed to what he said was his honorary Indian name--which was Many Eggs--and a woman caused me to wonder if I've made a breakthrough to readership among poodles--she wanted hers signed to "Taffy Iddles."

The longer I'm around it, the more the book business seems a wonder, in all its parts.
In my timeslot here tonight, ^{simply} I want to give back to you--as booksellers, as the people
into whose daily lives ~~come~~ our books and our obstreperous ^{come ricocheting--} readers, a story you
rewarded me with, at one of those ~~major events~~ called booksignings.

curious

"She's familiar," I thought to myself as soon as I saw her, standing in the line of book-buyers waiting to tell my pen their names. She was fifty-ish, and stylish in a tailored gray suit, and wearing a matching gray felt hat. Really wearing that hat, the brim riding down to the right in that perfect manner Ingrid Bergman wore hers to the airfield and destiny at the finale of "Casablanca."

The occasion was the Oregon Historical Society's annual Christmas book festivity, with seventy-seven authors on hand all Sunday afternoon to sign our wares. The kind of event that some writers, although never Tess nor Jim nor Barry nor I, refer to as a "cattle call" signing. The Oregon Historical Society was doing things up wonderfully, with a wassail bowl and the Gentle Winds Consort wafting Christmas carols, and the book public, Portland chapter, thronging through, swapping us their questions and comments for our inscriptions.

Nigger
rocker
deep

"I certainly did like that 'Big Sky' books of yours," somebody was saying.

"Well, actually A.B. Guthrie Jr. wrote 'The Big Sky,'" I was trying to fend and sign books and simultaneously sneak glances at the woman there in line, trying to read that face. It was square-cut but handsome, and I managed to single out the main familiarity in it--the prominent, broad cheekbones that built a rugged proportion, corners of endurance, into the look of her. But who~~s~~ who did she look like?

"That character, Jick, in this book," somebody was saying, "is he really you?"

"Well, not really. It's fiction," I kept signing, kept wondering about her.

This was a reversed role, for me to be pursuing someone else's resemblance instead of one seeking me out. Then, as now, I had just been to Montana, and there in the country where I grew up, at bookstore after bookstore, relatives and old-timers had informed me how much I now resemble my great-uncle, D.L.. Doig.

look up

I see so myself, whenever I spread the family photos. Strange, how we can be portions of persons from other times--D.L.'s long life ended the summer I was born, 1939. I'd much rather be mirrored in the snapshot poses of my good-looking father, with his stockman Stetson cocked down just so for rodeo day. But no, huh uh--shaggy avuncular old D.L. is my pattern. My beard imitates his, and I'd equal his tubbiness if I ate ^{half of} what I want to. And... D.L. and I ^{mood} maybe have the same askance gaze at life, which ~~which~~ perhaps ~~explains~~ explains why I've ended up as a writer and D.L. ended up pretty far along toward his goal of catching every trout in the Missouri River.

quick "I know I've seen you before," I said as soon as the woman of the hat reached me, in the book line. "Where did we meet?"

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She shook her head twice. I was still intent on her face, those unmistakable cheekbones, but her attention was fixed on the books beside me.

"This book. . ." She reached past my shiny new novel of the time--English Creek--and put her hand on the display copy of "This House of Sky," my memoir of Montana and my family. "Your father in here," she said--"he was so much like mine." ^{I . . .} I can't begin to tell you. The way his life never. . ."

I nodded and waited. I hear this from time to time. That first book of mine was largely the story of my father's struggle against hard luck--sickness, horseback mishaps, the Depression, Montana weather, the early death of my mother. "Why was his life so closely stalked this way?" I had written in the pages beneath this woman's hand.

"And how was it that he lasted as he did? The costs that this father of mine paid in all the surviving he had to do, I know enough about. But about why life had to dangle him such terms, not nearly enough."

My father's was not a singular story in the high, dry West, and at his funeral twenty years ago I could look around the chapel and see several similar lives, not quite yet ended.

Now I was in her scrutiny. "I never heard of you until I saw this book in a store. I bought it because my maiden name was Doig."

Aha. I should have known. Familiar was due to its natural antecedent, family. D.L. fathered nine Doigs, my grandfather another six, and by now we are a ~~populace~~ ^{census} of our own in Montana and elsewhere in the Northwest. I simply needed to find where this woman fitted into the cousinage.

wonder

Huh-uh. "I was born in Massachusetts," she told me, "and spent almost all of my life there until now."

"What, no Montana relatives at all?"

~~untrue~~ "No, none," Her hand and attention were on This House of Sky again. "Our fathers... their lives were so . . . I wish I could make you know, how much of my father I saw in yours," she insisted.

~~plain~~ "Yeah, well, that's interesting, but . . ." I still was stymied by our continental gap of kinship. Then I happened to think of the one other place in the world besides Montana where the Doig name crops up. "Do you know where your family originally came from? Was it Scotland?"

"Yes. A town called Brechin."

Pause

I almost fell over in astonishment. Months before, I'd gone to Scotland to begin the trilogy's novel about the Scottish emigrants who homesteaded in Montana late in the last century--Dancing at the Rascal Fair. Wanting to base the story somewhere in the linen-weaving area around Dundee where my own family originated--D.L. Doig and my grandfather both were tailors there before they came over ~~to become~~ ^{and promoted themselves into being} Montana ranchers--

I went from town to town through that ~~part~~ ^{little} of Scotland, trying to find a place for the McCaskill family line--Angus, of Dancing at the Rascal Fair, and through him Mack and Jick in English Creek, and now Mariah--to spring from. The actual home site of the Doigs, Panbride, was too tiny; Kerriemoor seemed too dour; Forfar seemed too big; Arbroath too this, Munross too that--no candidate town seemed right, until Carol and I drove into one I had never heard of: Brechin.

~~Brechin
in my heart~~

Brechin captivated me at once with its steep High Street wending down to its river, its Celtic round tower beside its medieval cathedral, its general appearance of having been chiseled complete from Scotland's stone earth rather than built. Since that day and my immediate decision to imagine the life of the McCaskills from Brechin, --which I renamed Nethermuir in the novels-- I knew ~~who~~^{had lived} from old census registers who lived along the river street near the huge linen mill in the 1880's, knew their ages and birthplaces and occupations, knew every church tower. from Carol's photos of the town how clock faces preside over it from ~~the cathedral~~ tower, the municipal building, and every church.

"From Brechin!" I tried to convey my astonishment to the woman of the hat, point out to her that somewhere there in the Scottish past we were surely related, tell her about my Brechin-born book-to-be. She smiled politely enough, but This House of Sky, in which my father somehow twinned hers, was the only book of mine that intrigued her.

*draw
breath*

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Our conversation kept crisscrossing until we recognized that we both were baffled about where our coincidences led. The bookbuyers in line behind her deserved their turn. I had a plane to catch as soon as the afternoon of bookmanship was over. A last time I tried to evoke Brechin for her. Again from her, "I wish ~~I~~ could make you know, how much of my father. . . I saw in yours."

quiet The wind consort blew a merry Christmas gust our way. She and I took a final look at each other to store away, shook hands, and she went.

Through the rest of the afternoon I thought of what it had taken to cause our two lives to cross. Our same rare name, our other coincidences. Montana /and Massachusetts /do not count: time is the true community. A weaver's town, it must be, like Brechin. Where people with faces like ours work our genetic threads on the loom called history. D.L. Doig a century ago decides to refashion the family pattern, leaves Scotland for the American West, and now I write of that fabric of emigration and homesteading and trying to make a life on the land. The Doig grandfather of the lady of the hat rejects Brechin, chooses the texture of Boston, and she one day sees in a bookstore a book with my name on it. Small wonder that as the album photos try to tell us, we are not so much ourselves but piecework of those before us.

Bookstore trail has improved since Mayakovsky had to carry his own glass
thru the Crimea as protection against cholera...