

In the last years of the 1960s, when this country was going through great self-questioning, I was as usual absent-mindedly out of step. It was getting more and more clear to me what I was in life. I was a relic.

And the son of another relic. And the grandson of yet a third relic.

This clear-headedness came over me in a most unexpected place—graduate school.

I was, just then, at the University of Washington, working toward a doctorate in history, and noticing more and more that I seemed to have come out of some sort of time warp, ~~but I never noticed that~~

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from what I had left in Montana not all that many years ago and into what was going on around me in the Puget Sound area, and in this nation. In my Montana upbringing, I had worked in a lambing shed, picked rock, driven a power buckrake, driven a grain truck, summer fallowed, herded sheep, trailed sheep, cussed sheep--even had dug a well and whitewashed ~~ed~~ a barn--and now I didn't seem to be finding other people who had done any of that.

Then during one of those winters of discontent in graduate school, my father and my grandmother--my mother's mother--came to Seattle to live with Carol and me, for the sake of my father's health, in our losing struggle against his emphysema. Now, in almost all instances, I had done only enough of each of those Montana ranch jobs to convince me I didn't want to do it every day the rest of my life. But here were a pair of people who had gone on doing those tasks, and many, many more, until they simply couldn't, any longer.



So the sight of them--Bessie Ringer, ranch cook, Montanan since her early twenties when she stepped off a train in Three Forks with two infant children and a jobless husband; and Charlie Doig, ranch hand and rancher, born on a homestead in the Big Belt mountains south of Helena--the daily sight of those two in our Seattle living room, with a shopping center out the window below and the University of Washington high-rise dorms on the hill across, very much made me aware of the relic-hood of the three of us. In the strictest dictionary definition: relic--"an object whose original cultural environment has disappeared."

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So tonight, here with those of you who are friends of books and of libraries, I'll try to sketch out for you how a book got built from those musings on relic-hood. Some parts of the process are clear enough from notes and letters and diary entries made along the way as I tried to carpenter an idea into being a book, but genesis is never easily gotten hold of--as you'll see, there seems not to have been a beginning of This House of Sky, but beginnings.

One of these, it may even have been the first, occurred in the summer of 1968 when I thought I was researching a magazine article. My wife Carol and I were visiting in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, hanging around with my father and grandmother for a couple of weeks, and I had in mind at the time to write



a magazine piece about Taylor Gordon, the black singer from that little town of White Sulphur, who'd enjoyed a heyday of concert and radio singing in New York in the 1920's--until the Depression hit, and Taylor landed back in Montana herding sheep.

P. 7 follows →

Spay 7  
OLA

across town to

When I called Taylor Gordon, after lunch on a day of early July in 1968,  
to see whether I could tape record an interview with him, <sup>Taylor</sup> ~~he~~ told me ~~no, no, no, no,~~  
he was impossibly busy that day--but if I wanted to come by tomorrow, he'd see  
whether he could work me in.

That left an open afternoon ahead, with me sitting around my father's  
and grandmother's house, with a shiny new tape recorder and reels of tape.  
And so the voices of House of Sky began there.

~~/(Dad's interview: 3 min.)~~



To humor me and my new machine, my father began storytelling--of his  
misadventures with horses, and of killing a bear by the light of the <sup>Montana</sup> moon---  
and my grandmother in turn began by recalling an exasperation with Charlie Doig  
of a full forty years before, when she and my mother had planned a birthday  
party <sup>for him</sup> and he didn't show up because he'd been hospitalized by a bronc.

The next day, <sup>Carol and</sup> I ~~did~~ manage to talk with Taylor Gordon, for most of an  
afternoon, but ironically, ~~the article I wrote about him still has not seen the light of day.~~  
nothing much ever came of my notion of writing about

<sup>him</sup>  
Taylor. So out of that pair of July afternoons of 1968 in White Sulphur, the  
<sup>unexpected</sup> ~~real~~ gain proved to be the session with my father, which was the one and last  
chance to catch his voice and some of his storying onto tape. By autumn he no longer  
had the breath for such matters, and in <sup>fact was in the first of many</sup> ~~less than three years~~, he was dead.  
hospitalizations between then and his death in early 1971.

Over those next few years I discovered that, even with a doctorate on my wall, I was hopelessly a writer, of some sort, rather than a professor--and that I wanted to write something about my father, and a way of Western life that seemed to be passing with him.

Voices kept helpfully arriving to my tape recorder during this time. My grandmother in particular would often meet one of my questions with, "Well, I don't just know about that, you better go ask so-and-so." And I would. So-and-so once would be Pete McCabe of my father's favorite saloon, the wondrous Stockman Bar; another time, Clifford Shearer, who had worked on ranches with my father since they were both homestead kids in that part of Montana. Three or four times a year, another voice of so-and so into the tape recorder.

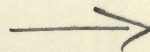


Then in mid-1971, Carol and I began writing a journalism textbook together, and to keep straight our writing schedule and the dealings with our publisher, I maintained a journal of our collaboration on that book. That journal worked out pretty well, I thought, and so I started another one as I mulled what was then known in our household as "the Montana book."

Over the next several months I wrote in that notebook occasional details of the Montana past as they could be dug from mind. There's a notation on May seventh about the gutwagon which was used to bring ewes and their fresh-born lambs to the lambing shed--certainly the first time I'd thought of that in twelve or fifteen years. And another note, on my father's manner of cussing, that rapid hyphenated style of <sup>Scottish</sup> exasperation that made "goddamn-it-all-to-hell-anyway" into one hundred-proof expressive word. My father's haying crews, and sheep shearers, and gumboot irrigators--presented themselves out of memory. So did sheep herders and their moods, that delicate moment when you come to tend camp and find out whether you're going to have an abruptly resigned sheepherder and two thousand fleecy animals to deal with.



There were not a lot of these diary paragraphs, a couple of dozen during that year, but they did seem to sidle in from memory, readily enough, when I could find time to coax them.



That autumn, of 1972, came a big bonus. <sup>Carol</sup> My wife had a sabbatical from her professor<sup>ship at Shoreline Community College</sup>ing, and we went over to live in Britain for most of <sup>a</sup> the year. I deliberately <sup>recessed all my</sup> ~~did no~~ magazine writing, <sup>for that year, and</sup> ~~but~~ instead began to work on a play. I didn't get past an act or so of it, because it was set on a Montana ranch and I was baffled as to how to squeeze the necessary Montana landscape into any theatre I had ever seen. But I did notice from working on that script, a surprise to myself-- I seemed to be able to handle dialogue. . . the Montanans I was tapping out onto paper, a few blocks from London's Hyde Park, were sounding pretty much as I thought they ought to sound.

So, there in a London basement apartment, one more <sup>piece of carpentry toward a book.</sup> ~~entry in the proving-up.~~



May 14  
OLA  
?

Montana

In mid-January of 1974, I at last set to work on the book day-by-day. It wasn't yet This House of Sky, in title or any other semblance. I mostly ~~called the small pile of manuscript "the Montana book."~~ I was able to put in about half my writing time on it <sup>for a while,</sup> the other half on magazine pieces and another textbook, and the progress seems to have been rather messy and underfed until the middle of April <sup>of 1974,</sup> when there is this diary note:

"Work began to shape up last Friday when I began telling stories from the taped interview with Dad in '68. Harshness of the <sup>1919</sup> ~~19~~ and ~~20~~ winter, for instance. Listening to <sup>that</sup> tape..made ideas flow. <sup>"</sup> ~~I hope the May taping trip to Montana will have same effect."~~ →

I've told in <sup>This</sup> House of Sky the growing closeness with my grandmother, Bessie Ringer, during those years. In October of that same year, 1974, she died at the age of 81, and in the aftermath of her death, as I tried to sort through life once again, it came to me that what I thought should be a book about my father needed to be a book about her as well. She had talked a couple of times for the sake of my tape recorder, in her house in White Sulphur or ours in Seattle, just for my sake. So her remembered voice added itself strongly now to the book I was attempting.



My book attempt, though, stayed stubbornly mostly attempt for the next year or so. Endless rewriting and fussing and starting over, amid my other work of trying to earn some semblance of a living as a magazine writer. In mid-January of 1975, after I'd spent half a day reworking the lead of the manuscript and thought I'd managed to improve a couple of sentences there--this diary entry: "It would be magnificent to do the entire book with this slow care, writing it all as highly charged as poetry--but will I ever find the time?"

And another diary note, this one from mid-July of 1975, seven full years after that afternoon of my father's voice storytelling in White Sulphur Springs:

~~Even with those exemplars of inspiration, however, my book attempt~~

~~and it~~ stayed stubbornly mostly attempt for the next year or so.

Endless rewriting and fussing and starting over, amid my other work, of trying to earn some semblance of a living as a magazine writer. A diary

~~note from mid-July of 1975, seven full years after that afternoon of my~~

~~father's voice storytelling in White Sulphur:~~ "I began to look back at the

Montana book, and saw how poor some of it is. The raw material is good,

and there can be more, but my writing so far doesn't click. Size of the

job scares me, I suppose."

That probably was the low point in this record of how a book happens--  
that afternoon of desperate gut-fear that it might not happen at all.



But the next morning, I made myself go through the manuscript again, and the morning after that, and soon I thought the words were perking up a bit. Then, something did click, and as I think ~~slaps~~ happens with a lot of these clicks of life, I wasn't entirely aware of hearing it at the time.

Late in 1975--after I'd again worked off and on on the book for a number of months--I decided that one way to simplify life would be to stop dealing with a couple of dozen different magazine editors each year, as I had been doing now for almost six years. *I say this at considerable risk to an audience with as many editors*  
~~The virtues of Bill Lang and Bob Burke and other friends~~  
*in it as this one, but* ~~here tonight notwithstanding,~~ *To a writer,* coping constantly with *such* an array of editors is a process I've best heard described as ~~being~~ like being nibbled to death by ducks.

And so I thought I would get someone else to suffer the nibbling--handle the query letters and the nagging for late payments. I would get <sup>myself</sup> an agent.

~~Carol~~ and I have a long-time friend in Seattle whom we have kidded, over the years, about being so exasperatingly efficient. The type who has her Christmas shopping done by <sup>sach</sup> ~~the~~ Fourth of July, for instance. ~~Her name is Ann Nelson, and~~ Our friend <sup>herself,</sup> ~~she~~ had been a magazine editor before she stepped up in life by marrying our lawyer--and at this time she had one small child and was about half<sup>f</sup>way through her term of pregnancy on her second. When I asked her to take on agenting for me, she said yes, anything to get her mind off all this motherhood. So we got up some letterhead stationary and business cards, and <sup>when the ink was dry,</sup> ~~presto,~~ I had an agent and ~~she~~ had <sup>client</sup> ~~a writer.~~



SKY 20  
10  
02A

It proved a bit baffling to magazine editors to hear from a literary agent in Seattle--or anywhere else west of Rockefeller Center--but they were reasonably polite about it, and <sup>my friend</sup> Ann proved to be <sup>quite a</sup> gifted agent. She soon had me writing, among other <sup>assignments,</sup> ~~things,~~ travel articles for the Sunday New York Times. In the space of about a year, I did five such pieces, I <sup>think</sup> ~~think~~ all but one of them the lead article of the Sunday travel section, and with the intelligent editing I was receiving from the ~~the~~ Times, I believe those <sup>travel</sup> ~~pieces~~ were <sup>my</sup> ~~the~~ best work among a couple of hundred magazine <sup>articles</sup> ~~pieces~~ I had done since becoming a <sup>full-time</sup> ~~a~~ free lance.

But while travel writing can be an honest enough pasttime, getting known as a travel writer made me a bit uneasy. You may remember ~~that~~ <sup>the</sup> passage in The Education of Henry Adams, where Adams ponders the roaming around Europe he had done <sup>as a young man,</sup> while supposedly studying civil law at the University of Berlin. If his father asked <sup>Henry</sup> Adams, at the end of it all, what he had achieved for the time and money put into him, Adams thought the only possible answer would be: "Sir, I am/a tourist."

Not wanting to spend my time as a kind of typewriting tourist--and also feeling worn down by the magazine life, which as I got better and better at it seemed to pay worse and worse--~~any of you on a faculty may~~ <sup>in education</sup> ~~recognize the trend--~~



my friend the agent  
I told ~~Ann Nelson~~ I would do some more rewriting on the Montana manuscript,  
and if she wanted to <sup>handle</sup> ~~agent~~ it, we'd begin sending off the first hundred pages  
or so to publishers. She said, sure.

~~Some of the best work~~ During that year--1976--my work on the manuscript seemed  
to me to be going better. One diary entry: "Some of last week's work about the  
Stockman Bar...has things in it I didn't know I could do." <sup>cut</sup> ~~[Which I guess shouldn't~~  
~~have surprised me. Anyone who's ever been in one knows that a small-town Montana~~  
~~bar is one of the West's deepest~~ founts of inspiration.

my friend the agent  
So, just after Thanksgiving of 1976, ~~Ann~~ sent off the manuscript sample to  
the first publishing houses. We used a highly scientific method to determine  
whom to send to. I went to the library, took down a copy of Literary Marketplace,

looked over the rosters of the major publishers, and chose the name of a senior editor from each. <sup>My friend the agent</sup> ~~Ann~~ wrote a cover letter, ~~transcribed~~, photocopied the manuscript sample, and mailed it out into the world ~~in~~ to six editors at a time.

Over the next few months, our first batches of submissions brought us back two standard rejection slips ~~[from Houghton Mifflin, and from Nash]~~ and a growing series of semi-baffled, sometimes rather wistful, letters from editors. Among them:



Strong  
OLA

from Simon & Schuster:

- 1 "Doig's experiences and his feel for the time and place are wonderful-- here and there a line about a mountain or a remembered phrase quoted from his father would strike the perfect chord. But... I don't think it would be a successful trade book in its present shape..."

from St. Martin's Press:

~~Another:~~ "You do write beautifully--and what marvelous recall you have for childhood perceptions. Unfortunately, much as I do like your work, I find that what you have here is not at all commercial."

from Holt, Rinehart and Winston:

~~And still another:~~ "Although Ivan Doig writes intelligently and well, I don't think his memoirs are going to add up to a publishable trade book."

(ent)

And then, after the "buts" and "unfortunatelys" and "althoughs,"

sky 25  
OLA

*Brute*  
~~And then~~ the lucky thirteenth letter:

"I have read Ivan Doig's manuscript sample and like it. It is an unusual kind of book, and I need a little more time to give you a final decision about whether we can publish it. I'll get back to you soon, but I wanted you to know it is under serious consideration."

Signed, "Carol Hill, senior editor, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich."

(March 24,  
1977)

That was the 24th of March, 1977. It had taken about four months--  
vastly less than I thought it would--and <sup>This</sup> House of Sky had ~~found~~ <sup>lucked onto</sup> its  
perfect editor.

~~My friend the agent~~  
~~Ann Nelson~~ did some dickering with Carol Hill--levered the advance up  
from \$3500 to a whopping \$4500--~~and then~~ → and we had <sup>book</sup> a contract.



May 26  
OLA

cut  
On the afternoon of the twenty-fourth of May, while Ann's <sup>then-</sup>year-old daughter crooned around ~~under~~ <sup>on the contracts</sup> at our feet, we typed in ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> few last ~~contract~~ points we had dickered out of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and ~~then we~~ signed. ~~We next~~ <sup>neighborhood</sup> And ~~then we~~ went into Ann's backyard, in the Laurelhurst ~~section~~ <sup>neighborhood</sup> of Seattle, and, I suppose to <sup>the</sup> intense suspicion of her neighbors, popped a bottle of champagne and whooped congratulations at each other.

→ All that remained, of course, was to write the last three-fourths of the book, in the next six months. <sup>at least</sup> I knew what was needed first: a summer in Montana, to revisit the scenes of the book and to talk with more of the people who had known my family.

slow & sure

27  
OLA

It was an enormous summer, those middle months of 1977--as complicated and astonishing time as I can imagine. A kind of stopless ricochet through the past, to places and people of twenty and thirty years before.

In White Sulphur Springs, the one place Carol and I could find to rent was a set of rooms in the old John Ringling family mansion. A castle of prosperity it had been to me when I was a schoolboy in White Sulphur and the Ringlings still were circus kings, and now the two of us rattled around in the place with plumbers and painters and carpenters who were trying to cobble it back together as an apartment house.

In the <sup>village</sup> ~~town~~ of Ringling still stood the <sup>shacky little</sup> ~~house~~ my grandmother and I shared when I was eleven and twelve years old. In the Tierney Basis ~~still~~ stood the



almost a century before.

log house built by my father's father on ~~the~~ homestead ~~of his~~; ~~the~~ ~~building~~ ~~proving-up~~ ~~projects~~ papers of the Doigs were beginning to get seriously mixed.

One evening I tried a long shot, a ~~phone~~ call from the phone booth in front of the hospital in White Sulphur Springs--I saw a lot of that phone booth that summer, it usually had in it either a tumbleweed or a few empty Olympia beer cans--a phone call to the rancher who had inherited the ranch near ~~Headlow~~ <sup>Boysman</sup> where my parents were herding sheep, the summer my mother died there--1945. Does that herding cabin back in the Bridger <sup>Mountains</sup> still exist? I asked.

"It does," said Horace Morgan. "I'm going in there first thing in the morning to salt cattle. If you can get here, you can go in with me."

We got there.

Spz 29  
OCA

There were two constancies in that whirl of summer. Carol, taking photos to back up my notecard descriptions of places, and me perpetually going out apartment, of the ~~house~~, tape recorder in hand and notebooks in pocket, like a door-to-door salesman. And the voices from the past began to be a kind of <sup>summer</sup> chorus: Tony Hunolt, who had been choreboy at the <sup>big</sup> Dogie ranch and now, in the last year of his life, was swamping out the <sup>local</sup> grocery store; Harold Chadwick, garageman of Dupuyer, with his memory of the Metis (~~may have~~ <sup>fugitive</sup> emigre, Toussaint Salois, sitting by a campfire in ~~his~~ a buffalo coat; Kathryn Donovan, my mother's ~~school~~ teacher at ~~Moss Agate~~ the one-room Moss Agate school; these and fifteen or so others.



30  
OLA

I don't know any way to adequately describe, or even account for, what happened next. Carol and I were back in Seattle by about the first of August, and on the ninth of December, the hundred thousand word manuscript of <sup>THE</sup> House of Sky was finished.

During those blurred writing months, my diary entries went into near-collapse--a fairly accurate representation of my condition at the time, actually--but I do remember thinking that ~~my~~ my editor, Carol Hill, was never going to go for all the detail I had crammed into the manuscript, and I had better set my mind to be ready to cut ten or fifteen thousand words after she got a look at it.

Away to New York went the 410 typed pages, and then, about six weeks later, on the 19th of January of 1978, as I was stepping onto the jogging track at my wife's college, Carol drove up to the gate, told me Carol Hill had called from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and I'd better get home and call her right back.

There is a diary entry of what happened next, and it begins: "Mark this day with a white stone." Carol Hill in her first few sentences about the manuscript <sup>had</sup> said over the telephone to me: "spectacular. . . beautiful. . . elegant. . . wonderful" and "beautiful" ~~a second time~~ again.

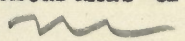
Never one to believe too much in bonanzas, I asked her, well, didn't she find <sup>fault</sup> ~~anything wrong~~ with the <sup>manuscript</sup> ~~book~~? She said, Oh, someone there in the publishing house said it had an awful lot of horses in it, but she didn't think so.

And then from Carol Hill <sup>her</sup> ~~the~~ best words of all, the ones I really needed to hear: "And we'll publish it this fall."



May 32  
GCA 17

In the next couple of weeks, Carol Hill got back to me about the <sup>line</sup> editing she wanted done on the manuscript. She asked me to rewrite a total of three pages; to move all the material about sheep--specifically, the sequence I have of counting sheep--into one place in the book; to reconsider one word; to cut a couple of sentences at one spot, and a paragraph at another. And that was the total editing she wanted done, on the manuscript I had thought might have to be <sup>doctored</sup> ~~pruned~~ by many thousands of words.



book

There was one detail left: we now had a book-length manuscript, with no title. Carol Hill and I put in a couple of days on the telephone trying out desperate ideas on each other, and at last I said to her, how about In This House of Sky. Carol said in return, how about House of Sky. We compromised between my five words and her three, and there stood This House of Sky.

Now, though, what we didn't have was anyplace in the book where that title phrase occurred. And so, somehow--to christen this book where I had sometimes rewritten sentences sventy-five times, where I had spent weeks on a paragraph or two--I now sat down and in about an hour and a half wrote the title section just as it now stands in the book, this way:



This

So, House of Sky's progress was going along like a dream, but in the publishing world, the governing god is not Morpheus, but Murphy, ~~with his~~ What could go wrong did go wrong when on ~~famous law that anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.~~ The night of March 31st, a couple of months after House of Sky seemed so smoothly on its way, I heard that there had been wholesale firings <sup>that day</sup> at the publishing house, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. The editor-in-chief had been sacked, and several other editors and <sup>top</sup> executives were said to be gone ~~with her.~~ <sup>as well</sup>

~~Apprehension doesn't come close to describing my mood the next morning~~  
~~— and House of Sky —~~  
~~as I dialled to see whether Carol Hill had survived the purge. Her voice~~  
~~came over the line, and said yes, she had survived--and somewhat more than that.~~  
~~She was the new editor-in-chief.~~

33A follows →

Apprehension doesn't come close to describing my mood the next morning  
as I dialed to see whether Carol Hill--and <sup>TAM</sup> House of Sky--had survived the  
purge. <sup>But</sup> Her voice came over the line, and said yes, she had survived, work  
was going along as ever in the publishing house, <sup>TAM</sup> House of Sky was progressing  
through the production <sup>process</sup> ~~process~~, and that <sup>really</sup> I shouldn't worry about any of it--  
because she was the new editor-in-chief.



There followed a period of nothing-to-do-but-wait, until the book's end-of-September publication date. But then, around noon on the sixth of September, still three weeks to go to publication date, I came back to the house after an errand to the drugstore to find a message on my phone machine, from a friend who said he'd seen the review of This House of Sky in the current issue of Time.

What review? I said to myself.

The review in Time, the machine repeated when I replayed the message.

By evening I had seen that review, and it was a writer's dream. No snide asides, no news magazine cutesiness--just long, miraculous patches of pure quotation from This House of Sky.

p. 37 follows

By the end of the year I'd gone to work on the writing of my next book, Winter Brothers, and ~~announcing my nomination~~ one morning the phone rang again, this time Archie Satterfield of the Post-Intelligencer book page, asking me how things were going. Then after a bit Archie said: "Oh...congratulations on your nomination."

"Nomination?" I say,

"Good grief, Doig," says Satterfield. "Don't you know This House of Sky has been nominated for the National Book Award?"



(Smy 37  
OLA

The next week, a review in the Los Angeles Times. Praise again, and the great bookman the reviewer, Robert Kirsch, called my father an American hero.

Four days later, the Chicago Tribune. Praise yet again. ~~Robert Gish~~ Tim said House of Sky "has all the poetry and lyricism, all the 'blood being' of a mustang running on open range."

This was starting to be fun.

It got to be more fun when Tim House of Sky arrived into the bookstores and began to sell a thousand, then fifteen hundred copies a week. The reviews continued to flabbergast me. Of 32 reviewers of national stature, 30 praised the book, and by the first of 1979, 15,0003 copies of the book had been sold.

As it turned out, the mountains of Nepal were thought to be more exotic than the mountains of Montana--a dubious viewpoint on the part of the East Coast judges, I'm sure all of us here tonight on this western shore can agree--and ~~Pater~~<sup>E</sup>er Matthiessen's fine narrative of his trek across the Himalaya, *The Snow Leopard*, won the award.

I think, now, that my sufficient award was ~~that~~ *This House of Sky* happened. This sketching kind of recounting I've done, of course, can't begin to get a hold of all the elements of luck and good fortune that, across about ten years, helped make the book happen. But I can at least give a final few minutes of accounting, of what's happened with the book, and with the other builders of it besides me, since *This House of Sky* came into print in 1978.



--My friend the agent retired from agenting when her children got of school age. And she has stayed retired, I think secretly liking to preserve her record, of undoubtedly being the only agent who has agented just one book, and that one a National Book Award nominee.

--Carol Hill resigned as editor-in-chief of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich about the time I was finishing up Winter Brothers, and resumed her own writing career. Her latest novel is a splendid piece of imagination called The Eleven Million Mile-High Dancer, which I often see in Penguin paperback racks next to my own novels.

--I parted company with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich not long after her, over their reluctance to see me turn to writing fiction.

-and-a-half

over

--My wife, Carol, has endured my writing of five more books, and has taken photos of the West from Alaska to Arizona, in pursuit of our research for those books. She <sup>has been</sup> even able to enjoy the illusion, now and then, that at last I'm able to support her.

--As for the book itself, This House of Sky sold an eventual twenty thousand copies in hardback, and has sold another 85,000 in paperback, and, to my pleased astonishment, has been selling more copies every year. <sup>(reprint)</sup> The book just keeps ricocheting along in its what's-gonna-happen-next kind of history. It's now used in many western literature courses and regional history courses, and when the National Endowment for the Humanities financed a library discussion program in thirty states, focusing on books about family, This House of Sky was the lead-off book in the program. Some years ago a British publisher did a This House of Sky edition of a thousand copies, sold 155 of them, and forthwith pulped the rest. On the other hand the book was snapped up in Germany and



translated into a career as Das Haus des Himmels. And sometime back, word came that This House of Sky had been read, and rejected, by the Brazilian publishing house, Emece. The message from Brazil said, "The editor thinks you are a 'marvelous and natural writer' but fears that the book is a little too American, since it is so very much concerned with the peculiarities of the territory of New England."

Thanks for coming out tonight.

Spy 1  
Huntlin  
Soc

In the last years of the 1960s, when this country was going through great self-questioning, I was as usual absent-mindedly out of step. It was getting more and more clear to me what I was in life. I was a relic.

In fact, a relic in the very strictest dictionary definition:

~~"Something that has survived the passage of time"~~...an object whose original cultural environment has disappeared."

This clear-headedness came over me in a most unexpected place:  
graduate school.



Now, in almost all instances, I had done only enough of each of those ranch jobs to convince me I damn well didn't want to do it every day the rest of my life. But the large point was that I had done <sup>them,</sup> had felt their patterns into my muscles and bones <sup>and memory.</sup> And the larger point beyond that was that I had <sup>, not much noticed in the America of the time,</sup> grown up among men and women <sup>simply</sup> who did these tasks every day, and were going to continue doing them until they couldn't, any longer.

My father and grandmother, in White Sulphur Springs, were such a man, and such a woman. It was in these years that my father's health, his doomed struggle against emphysema, brought me time and again back to Montana, and each time to reminders and memories of how he had lived as a ranchman.

~~That scene, of my father storytelling, and my wife admiring his  
bronc-sprung collarbone, and my grandmother recalling an exasperation with  
Charlie Doig <sup>a full</sup> of forty years before, and me looking around at the three of  
them in that living room in affection and astonishment--that scene still flames  
in my mind, and surely it cast warmth which eventually helped to shape House  
of Sky.~~

→ The next day, I did manage to talk with Taylor Gordon, for most of an  
afternoon, but ironically, nothing <sup>much</sup> ever came of my notion of writing about <sup>Taylor</sup> him.  
So out of that pair of July afternoons of 1968 in White Sulphur, the real gain  
proved to be the session with my father, which was the one and last chance to  
<sup>catch</sup> get his voice and some of his storying onto tape. / By autumn, he no longer had  
the breath for such matters, and in <sup>less than three</sup> ~~a little over two~~ years, he was dead.



Over those next few years, I discovered I was hopelessly a writer, of some sort, rather than a professor, and I had it in mind to try to write, somehow, ~~of the way of~~ <sup>about</sup> my father, <sup>and</sup> <sup>Western</sup> of the way of life that seemed to be passing with him, <sup>that was,</sup> and making of me, a second-generation relic.

The voices of the tape recorder kept ~~talking~~ <sup>arriving</sup> during this time. My grandmother in particular, would often reply, well, I don't just know about that, ~~that~~ you better go ask so-and-so. And I would. So-and-so once was <sup>Pete</sup> ~~that~~ McCabe of the <sup>in White Sulphur,</sup> Stockman Bar, another time Clifford Shearer, who had worked on ranches with <sup>homestead kids in the Sixteen country.</sup> my father since they were both teenagers. Three <sup>or</sup> ~~of~~ four times a year, another voice of so-and-so.

~~Then another beginning, toward House of Sky.~~ In 1971, my wife <sup>Carol</sup> and I  
 wrote a journalism textbook together, and to keep straight our ~~work~~ <sup>writing</sup> schedule  
 and the dealings with our publisher, I maintained a diary of our work on that  
 book. That diary worked out pretty well, and evidently it persuaded me to try  
 another one, as I thought about what I was then calling  
 "the Montana book."



~~(from archival box, folder "Sky raw material")~~

A notebook page dated,

The twenty-ninth of January, 1972: "Start of a sometime diary, towards the book of where I came from."

Over the next several months I wrote in that notebook <sup>occasional</sup> details of the past as they ~~could be dug from~~ ~~came to~~ mind. There's a notation on May seventh about the gutwagon which was used to bring ewes and their new-born lambs to the lambing shed--certainly the first time I'd thought of that in twelve or fifteen years. And another note, on my father's style of swearing--that "damn-it-all-too-hell-anyway" was very nearly one word to him, a rapid sort of hyphenated style <sup>of exasperation.</sup> Names and descriptions of hired men--my father's haying crews, and sheepherders whose camps we had tended--presented themselves out of memory.

examples

5/12

That autumn, of 1972, came a <sup>big</sup> bonus. My wife had a sabbatical from  
her college teaching job, and we went ~~to~~ <sup>over</sup> live in Britain for most of the year.  
I deliberately did no magazine work, but instead began to write a play. I  
didn't get very far with it, because it was set on a Montana ranch and I was  
baffled as to how to squeeze the necessary Montana landscape into <sup>any</sup> ~~a~~ theatre <sup>I had ever</sup> ~~seen,~~ <sup>seen.</sup>  
But I noticed from <sup>working at the play,</sup> ~~it~~ a surprise to myself, ~~that~~ I seemed to be able to handle  
dialogue...that the Montanans I was tapping out onto paper, a few blocks from London's  
Hyde Park, were sounding pretty much as I thought they ought to sound.  
✓ So, ~~there~~ in a London basement apartment,  
X One more beginning.



(17)

- after I'd worked 9/ and on on . Mont. Book

Late in 1975, I decided that I had had enough of dealing with a couple  
of dozen different magazine editors each year, as I had been doing for almost six years.  
That process ~~was~~ <sup>is</sup> best described  
as being nibbled to death by ducks, and so I thought I would get someone else  
to confront the ducks for awhile, handle the query letters and the nagging  
for late payments. I would get ~~an~~ agent.

My wife and I have a long-time friend whom we have kidded, over the years,  
about being so exasperatingly efficient. The type who has her Christmas shopping  
done by <sup>every</sup> ~~the~~ Fourth of July, <sup>for instance.</sup> ~~Her name is Ann Nelson,~~ <sup>Beer friend</sup> and she had been a magazine  
editor, and at this time she had one small child and was about halfway through  
her term of pregnancy on her second. She said yes, anything to get her mind off  
all this motherhood. So we got up some letterhead stationary, and business cards,  
and ~~Ann~~ <sup>she</sup> became my agent.

May 20  
8

I told Ann Nelson I would do some more rewriting on the Montana manuscript, and if she wanted to agent it, we'd begin sending off the first hundred pages or so to publishers. She said, sure.

~~During that year--1976--my work on the manuscript seemed to me to be going better. One diary entry: "Some of last week's work about the Stockman Bar seemed to me very good; some things in it I didn't know I could do."~~

So, just after Thanksgiving of 1976, Ann sent off the manuscript sample to the first half dozen or so publishing houses. We ~~had~~ used a highly scientific method to determine whom to send to. I went to the library, took down a copy of Literary Marketplace, looked over the rosters of the major publishers, and chose the name of a senior editor from each.



Spag 21  
9

Over the next few months, we got back two standard rejection slips--  
from Houghton Mifflin, and <sup>from</sup> Nash--and a growing series of semi-baffled,  
sometimes rather wistful, letters from editors. Among them:

from the phone booth in front of the hospital (28) <sup>Shu</sup>  
in White Sulphur - I saw a lot of that phone  
booth that summer, it usually had in it either  
a tumbleweed or a few empty Olympia beer cans -

One evening I tried a long shot, a phone call to the rancher who had a phone call

inherited the ranch near Maudlow where my parents were herding sheep, the

- 1945.

summer my mother died, Does that herding cabin <sup>back</sup> in the Bridgers still exist?

I asked.

"It does," said Horace Morgan. "I'm going in there <sup>first thing</sup> in the morning  
to salt cattle. If you can git here, you can go with me."

We got there.



So there was luck of that sort, and the constant generosity of the Montanans, always offering to loan us a pickup or to have us come by for supper, but also ~~a few~~ unforeseen hazards. A diary entry from July 18th, in White Sulphur:

"Long day of interviewing, and other research. Began at <sup>the</sup> courthouse, looking up Dad's tax assessments. Then to talk with Lena Holmes; after lunch (at the Truck Stop), to Ralph and Helen Jordan, and Ann Hubenthal, and Bob Lyng and finally Alfie Messmer. During all this I encountered the following dogs:

At the house next to the Holmeses, a seventy-pound mongrel which charged up to within an inch of my belt buckle and began barking; within the Holmes house, four toy poodles, which ~~the~~ thankfully were shut away promptly; and at Jordans, a white Great Pyrenees who was about as big as me, but fortunately was as scared of me as I was of it."



about six weeks later,  
Away to New York went the 410 typed pages, and then, on the 19th of  
January of 1978, as I was stepping onto the <sup>jogging</sup> track at my wife's college, ~~to~~  
~~Joe's father's~~ Carol drove up to the gate, told me Carol Hill had called  
from the publishing house and I'd better get home and call her <sup>right</sup> back.

There is a diary entry of what happened next, and it begins: "Mark this  
day with a white stone." Carol Hill in her first few sentences about the  
over the telephone to me  
manuscript said "spectacular...beautiful...elegant...wonderful" and "beautiful"  
the ones I really needed to hear:  
again. And then the best words of all "And we'll publish it in the fall."

HBJ

horses?

2 Const  
Judges

As it turned out, Nepal was thought to be more exotic than Montana--  
a dubious viewpoint on the part of the judges, I'm sure we can all agree--  
narrative of his trek through Nepal,  
and Peter Matthiessen's fine ~~book~~ <sup>↑</sup> The Snow Leopard won the award.

I think, now, that my sufficient award was that House of Sky happened.  
This sketching kind of a history I've done today, of course, can't begin to  
get a hold of the elements of luck and good fortune that <sup>, across about ten years,</sup> helped make the book  
happen. Nor do I know of any way to get a hold of them: I'd bottle them for  
every future book I ever <sup>intend to</sup> write, if I ~~did know.~~ <sup>↑</sup>



But I can give a minute or so of accounting, of what's happened with  
in the making of House of Sky, since the book came into print.  
the prime players ~~since House of Sky came into print.~~

--Ann Nelson has retired from agenting, until her children are older:  
I think, very likely the only agent who has agented just one book, and that  
one a National Book Award nominee.

-- Carol Hill resigned as editor, in March of this year, to resume her  
own writing career. I called her the other day, she's on her way to the  
Macdowell Colony to work on a novel.

--My wife, Carol, has endured my writing of yet another book, and is  
lobbying me to get us back to Montana this summer to begin work on another  
"Montana book."

~~As for~~ House of Sky, as of the first of this month, <sup>it</sup> has sold 17,500 copies <sup>those are</sup> in hardback, 10,800 in paperback. By today's blockbuster standards, ~~hardback~~ <sup>in financial return, they're somewhat less than modest,</sup> ~~thoroughly modest totals~~ The book, though, continues to be obstreperous ~~again~~ <sup>ricochet</sup> in its other ways, to ~~go~~ right along with its what-the-hell-is-gonna-happen-next kind of history. Not long ago, I received word that House of Sky had been read, and rejected, by the big Brazilian publishing house, Emece. The message said, "Their editor, Jorge Naveiro, thinks that you are a 'marvelous and natural writer' but fears that the book is a little too American, since it is very much concerned with the peculiarities of the territory of New England."

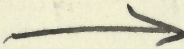
Gorman  
adm

cut? My thanks to you, as my fellow New Englanders, for listening.  
Thank you <sup>of W/HA</sup> for inviting me in spite of that.



--As for the book itself, House of Sky sold twenty thousand copies in hardback, and is now out of print in hard covers. In paperback, the total to date is 28,000 ~~copies~~ and it continues to sell at the rate of about 4500 a year.

By today's blockbuster standards, both of those are of course thoroughly modest totals--in financial return, I find them somewhat less than modest. The book, though, continues to ricochet along in its what's-gonna-happen-next kind of history. A British publisher did an edition of a thousand copies, sold 155 of them, and forthwith pulped the rest. Later this year, there is supposed to be a West German edition of This House of Sky, after a two year translation



process. And a while back, word came that House of Sky had been read, and rejected, by the big Brazilian publishing house, ~~Emece~~ Emece. The message <sup>from Brazil</sup> said, "Their editor, ~~thinks~~ Jorge Naveiro, thinks that you are a 'marvelous and natural writer' but fears that the book is a little too American, since it is <sup>so</sup> very much concerned with the peculiarities of the territory of New England." westerners Oregon Library Association  
 Thank you of the ~~WA~~ for inviting me in spite of that.