

244 12th Street East  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
March 10, 1981

Dear Ivan:

Seems like an awfully long time since I heard from you last and guess maybe it is, but time seems to go awfully fast these days.

We seem to keep busy with one thing and another and at Christmas time we spent ten days in Billings with our daughter and her family. That is about the extent of our traveling since we drove to Billings last summer in June and then went on to Bozeman where I attended my 50th college class reunion. It was very nice, especially seeing all the grads who were there, 47 out of 161, and most of them I hadn't seen since graduation. Many of them were engineers so they scatter to the four corners of the world, and they did. My wife also enjoyed and even knew a few of them.

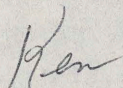
This spring we had the flu, first my wife and then I caught it but kept on working. It settled in my lower back and after two trips to the Dr. finally got it licked. My brother who lives in Helena, spent six weeks in the hospitals there with it but seems to be fine now.

I am writing mainly to tell you how much I enjoyed your new book, Winter Brothers. We received it as a present and it is some time since I finished reading it. There were certainly a lot of hardy souls in those days. I enjoyed the notes on the inside of the cover and did not have much trouble figuring them out. I have heard a number of very good comments on your book from friends of mine and also enjoyed it.

Since that one has been published I suppose you are taking it easy for a little while or are you already started working on a new one? After reading Winter Brothers I would say that you are very much of an outdoors man from all your experiences in the area of the book and from others you mention as the Bob Marshall Wilderness. You have one ahead of me there, I have never been there, thought of it many times but just don't get there and probably won't. It occurs to me that your wife, Carol, we have a daughter Carol, is also of the outdoors and is a big help to you. Are you still doing research for another book? I haven't been able to come up with anything on my Mother's journey to this country, all the people I could contact are gone and those left don't seem to be of any help.

Must stop for this time and remember if you ever come this way we will be anxious to meet you and it is always nice to hear from you.

Best regards,



Kenneth Christison

Do you ever hear from your uncle Claude at Big Timber, Mt?



16 March '81

Dear Ken--

Good to hear from you, and thanks for the good words about Winter Brothers. It's not a book I expected Montanans to much care for, but a lot of them have.

Excuse the card--I'm about to go to Oregon, and wanted to be in touch before leaving. Carol and I will be in Mont. a while this summer; we have a lot of ground to cover on the east side of the mountains, but if we make it to Kalispell, we'll call. I do have a book underway, but it's set along this coast from Sitka to Astoria. Have been to Alaska a couple of times for it, and in Juneau have met up with Connie Stewart, who I believe is Les Christison's daughter. You are a far-flung tribe.

till later, all the best.



244 12th Street East  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
Sept. 16, 1979

Dear Ivan:

You will not doubt think I have forgotten to answer your last letter; no I have not but I know you have been busy writing from reports that I get and knew you needed all your time for your writing. I trust you are doing well in getting out your book that you have been working on.

This has been a busy summer for us with some of our family here for the largest part of the summer until the past few weeks. At the same time it was the very hot weather and dry as could be--we are lucky to have air conditioning in our house which only a few people here have.

When my grandsons were here this summer from California one of them wanted the names of my grandmothers and grandfathers who all lived in Scotland and of course I could not give him those names. I do not ever remember my Dad telling me his father's name nor his mother's first name. I wrote to a lady in Scotland who lives where my father came from and who wrote me at one time telling me about my cousin I had corresponded with these many years. She went to the museum there and found the names I wanted and said if I wanted more she could get that information for me, I suppose she meant my great-grandfather and my great-grandmother.

On my mothers side I do not know their first names and only the last name of my grandfather which was Watt, and that happens to be my middle name. I have written a letter to a cousin of my who now lives in London but thought she might have this information somewhere. I am still waiting to hear from her. So far I have been unsuccessful in getting the name of the ship on which my Mother came to America but am still trying. I can remember her saying that her father told her to get up on deck, especially the first day or two, even if she had to crawl up the stairs. She said she did not have to do that, was able to get around and after the first day or so had no trouble whatever. The lady who came with her and shared the same stateroom never got out of bed she was so seasick all the way across.

We did get up to Glacier Park once this summer, hot and dry down here but at the top of Logan Pass, so foggy one could not see the peaks around but everything green and flowers were beautiful. Near Avalanche we saw a cow moose and her calf in the water with cars lined on both sides of the highway and people watching them.

I am going to check the Book Store here, Karl Ann Coughlin sold it to some of our friends, and see if they have Art Watson's books.

Best regards to you and your wife,

*Ken Christensen*



3 Oct. '79

Dear Ken--

Thanks for responding. Don't go to a lot of trouble digging for me about your family's journey to America. If there are details about the voyage over, I'd like to hear them, is all. I now have from the Scottish National Library some very useful material about when the first Doig--I guess it was Jeannie Doig Campbell--left Scotland in May of 1888.

The current book is going pretty well; I have about two more months of hard work on it before handing in the manuscript. One thing I'm looking forward to in Jan. or Feb. is the paperback of HOUSE OF SKY; your bookstore friends might be interested. It'll be a Harvest ~~edition~~ edition from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

While I'm writing, maybe I should say this, too: I'm starting to put together a trip to Montana and Wyoming for next spring. It'll be scheduled around a speech I'm to make to the Montana Library Association in Great Falls on May 10, and possibly a speech in Sheridan a week later. I wouldn't mind scheduling some other appearances--I guess I'd rather do readings than any more speeches, though--while I'm in Montana. Would there be any prospects at the community college or any place else in Kalispell, do you think? I'll try make a swing into town in any case, but it's easier if I can pay my way a little. If you happen to know whoever schedules speakers at the college, I'd be glad to have his name, and make the offer, at least.

Have traded a letter or two recently with another Sixteener, Florence Roberson Coslet of Glasgow. Between your help and hers and Art Watson's, I've gathered some good material on Petzold.

Hope to see you in the spring.



14 May '79

Dear Kenneth--

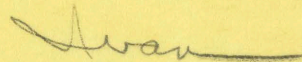
The information on Petzold is terrific. I had no idea you were going to the extent of trouble you did, but thanks immensely. I hope that not so many years from now you'll have the pleasure of seeing some of that information in a novel about the Montanans of our first generation.

My wife and I are just back from Scotland and Missoula, in that order. Missoula was last week, a conference at the university where I read from the manuscript of the book I'm working on now. A.B. Guthrie and Norman Maclean were there too, so I couldn't resist going, although the schedule was so tight I never got out of the city limits of Missoula.

Scotland, and London for a couple of weeks, was a different proposition. I went over to see about selling the British rights for House of Sky--a far from certain prospect--and to gather information about the area my family, and I suppose yours(?), came from. The Doigs are from north of Dundee, right around the coastal town of Carnoustie, where there's a famous golf course. I'd like to start the Montana novel with the people leaving Scotland, so I walked the country and spent some time researching in the National Library in Edinburgh. The first Doig--Jeannie, who was married to Donald Campbell--seems to have left Glasgow on the Carthaginian, bound for Montreal in mid-May of 1888. I note from your letter that your mother came over about the same way. Do you have any details from her about that journey--anything about what it was like on shipboard, or at the customs port of entry, for instance? If you do, and ever have the convenience to help me any more than you already have, I'll be delighted to have them.

We certainly will see you whenever we next get to Kalispell. My guess is that it might be next spring. Quite a number of Montana libraries asked me to show up for Library Week this year, and I had to turn them all down because of my writing schedule. I may see if they're interested next year, and if I make a circuit I'd definitely try to include Kalispell.

Again, thanks and best wishes.



p.s. Art Watson has written and self-published a couple of books of his own about the Meagher County country. The one I have is called Devil Man With a Gun.



244 12th Street East  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
May 11, 1979

Dear Ivan:

It has been quite some time since I heard from you--but I have been trying to get a little information and only received it yesterday in the mail. It was very nice of you to write me and I did know Keith Ford, went to school with him as he was a year or two behind me and also knew Petzold.

When I was a kid and would go to Ringling with my Dad and brother we would eat in Mike Ryan's restaurant and it was there I first saw Petzold but for the life of me could not remember what happened to him. Wrote several letters and the last one to Mrs. Gerald Edwards, thought I knew her, but it was Mrs. Alfred Edwards that I knew. Anyhow she was good enough to do some searching regarding Petzold. She says she remembered you as a very small boy with flaming red hair and who was quite shy. She and her husband both read House of Sky and enjoyed it very much.

Petzold's first name was Herman, and not Louie. Her husband knew of him and he had his hands blown off when he was quite young. Later she contacted a pioneer citizen of White Sulphur and he gave her the following information--this man was Arthur Watson, and his name sounds awfully familiar to me, a cattle buyer who used to come to our ranch.

In part she says, Mr. Watson knew Herman Petzold quite well so she is sure the following information is authentic. He tied his own shoes with his teeth and stubs. He drove and harnessed a four horse team and went around Meagher county buying hides. He wrote a beautiful hand--Spencerian. He shot a rifle and shotgun with a ring he put his stub in for a trigger. Mr. Watson said the only thing he could not do was cut his meat at the table and he would ask the person sitting next to him to cut it for him. He was proud of his accomplishments but refused an offer to go into the circus and be exhibited as a freak. Mr. Watson asked him one day how he managed to unbutton his fly on his trousers and he showed him. No problem.

I have been thinking--when my father who was Jim Christison--you have undoubtedly heard your father speak of him--was in partnership with W.J. Jackson in the sheep business on Battle Creek an employee of theirs was called Old Louie and I am quite sure as I think back that his last name was Petzold. Whether they were related or not I do not know. Even after we moved to our ranch south of Ringling Old Louie used to come out and visit us and W. J. Jackson had one of the first Model T Fords in the country and would drive out once a summer to spend a night with us.

Our neighbors at our ranch were the Dave Winters, Will Winters and Donald Campbells. Mrs. Dave Winters and Mrs. Campbell were sisters of Dave Doig who lived in Tierney Basin and Mrs. Will Winters came to this country on the same ship that brought my Mother over from Scotland but all these neighbors were Scotch.

I hope the information above will be helpful to you. My wife and I would be very glad to have you and your wife stop and see us on your way to or from Glacier Park. Hope we can meet you this summer if gas permits.

*Kenneth Christison*



Feb. 16, '79

Dear Kenneth--

Thanks so much for troubling to write about House of Sky. I've heard from quite a number of former Ringling people--more, probably, than live there at the moment.

The only regret I have about the way my father brought me up is that he never made clear to me the lines of family and friendship in the Basin days. Somehow, it seemed to be assumed that I knew all that, but while I had heard the names--Christisons, Mitchells, others nearby such as the Brainerds--they've always remained to me a kind of scrambled genealogy. I'm astonished, for instance, to learn that your family lived south of Ringling, and that you went to high school there; "the Christisons" always mean "the Basin" to me, in my dad's remembered tellings.

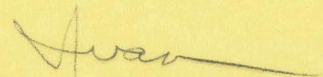
heard

Not so incidentally, I've also heard from a fellow named Eric Ford--I guess he went by the first name of Keith when younger--whose father was named Arch Ford, and who also went to school in Ringling, though probably before your time. He's been telling me about a Ringling bartender named Louie Petzold who didn't have any hands. Do you know anything of that story--such as what happened to the man's hands? I ask because I harbor the notion I may try a Montana novel some day, and a handless bartender would certainly be a character for the book.

Last fall, here in Seattle, I met a few of the people from Books West in your town--Karlann Coughlin among them. If you encounter her, please say hello for me; she was one of the earliest Montana booksellers to be enthused about House of Sky. As to the Valier English teacher Darrel Micken, he must have been after my time there--the name isn't familiar.

Perhaps my wife and I will see your wife and you sometime in Kalispell; we've been through occasionally on the way to or from Glacier.

all the best





February 4, 1979  
244 12th Street East  
Kalispell, MT 59901

Dear Ivan:

After reading your book "This House of Sky" I feel as though I know you personally. It was given to my wife and ~~me~~ for Christmas and I must say we have not enjoyed a book as much as this one for a long time.

Please let me introduce myself. I am Kenneth Christison, was born on a ranch on Battle Creek west of Ringling, knew your father, your mother and your grandmother; also your uncles named in the book and your aunt and your grandmother. The lady mentioned, Mrs. Christison, was my aunt and my family and I spent many times in Tierney basin at dances and Fourth of July picnics.

When I was small my family moved to a ranch ten miles south of Ringling. After finishing grade school I attended high school in Ringling for three years, went to Bozeman for my senior year and then attended college in Bozeman. For 43 years I was a high school business teacher, spending the first 12 years in Eureka and 31 years here in Kalispell. I am now retired but work part time in a local lumber yard.

As Bozeman was 60 miles from our ranch we always went to Ringling and if my father had legal business to do he went to White Sulphur Springs. At the time we knew everyone in and around Ringling and also knew a lot of people in White Sulphur. We also knew everyone in Sixteen and went to many dances there while I was growing up.

After mentioning your book to our three children they said they would like to read it sometime. So for each of their birthdays, one in February and two in March, they are each getting a copy of "This House of Sky".

My neighbor who gave us the book is an English teacher in the local Community College. She read your book, enjoyed it very much and told us how well written it was. At the time she gave it to us she did not know anything about my knowing the people you mention or the places in it.

While you were in high school at Valier, by any chance was Darrel Micken one of the English teachers there?

Congratulations on such a fine book, and my wife and I wish the best for you in your writing profession. I'm sure your wife, Carol, lends you a lot of encouragement and perhaps much help.

Sincerely yours,

*Kenneth W. Christison*  
Kenneth W. Christison



244 12th Street East  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
March 11, 1988

Dear Ivan:

It has been a long time since I have written you and I know you have been busy with getting our your new book. It was given to me for Christmas and it is now some time since I finished reading it.

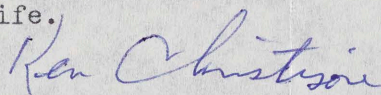
I certainly enjoyed it as much as I did English Creek mostly because of the setting and the subject. I really found it interesting to find out Rob Barclay and Angus McCaskill both came to this country from Brechin in Scotland. That name was very familiar to me as my father was born and grew up in Brechin and lived there until he came to this country in 1898. His brother came a few years later and is the one who was married to Marie who shot the bear in House of Sky. I corresponded for many years with my Grandmother, Aunt and cousin who all lived in Brechin in the house where my father was born.

I just recently loaned House of Sky to a friend in town to read and she enjoyed it very much. She is now reading English Creek.

We have had a very mild winter, even the snow in town is all gone and we are anxious for spring. With my arthritis fingers I have trouble striking the typewriter keys and quite often hit the wrong keys.

I have two cousins who live in Helena and one in Great Falls, they are Marie's children. I don't get to see them often as I don't drive any more and we don't go to Billings as often as we used to.

Suppose now you are busy gathering information for another book. Best regards to you and your wife.

  
Ken Christison