

A Conversation with Carol Doig and Lois Welsh – Ivan Doig Symposium Presentation

September 14, 2017

Mary Murphy: Hi everyone. Welcome to the first afternoon of the Ivan Doig Symposium. My name is Mary Murphy. I'm a professor in the Department of History and Philosophy, and I'm also the co-director of the Center for Western Lands and Peoples, which is the main sponsor for this symposium. So this particular session has no rehearsal, it has no papers. It is going to be as loose and free as the creation of Montana literature in the 1970s. So for those of you who know Carol Doig and Lois Welsh, you're in for a treat. I can tell you that I can't wait to hear what's coming next.

Lois Welsh: Neither can we.

Mary Murphy: So let me keep my introductions brief. Ivan Doig and James Welsh became key voices in Montana literature in the 1970s. Welsh's first novel, *Winter in the Blood*, appeared in 1974. Doig's memoir, *This House of Sky*, in 1978. Both men were prolific artists. Welsh as a poet and novelist. Doig as a memoirist and novelist. And both earned many literary honors. Whether you grew up in Montana, or like me, came to Montana in the late 1970s, their's were the books that we read and continue to read to know this place. Carol and Lois each had their own careers in addition to being active supporters of their husbands' literary work. Carol Muller met Ivan Doig while on the summer staff of a journalism institute at Northwestern University, and they married in 1965. When Carol and Ivan moved to Seattle, Carol became a member of the faculty at Shoreline Community College, where she taught for 30 years. Now retired, she sees to the family business, recently overseeing the paperback publication of *Last Bus to Wisdom* and a reprint of *Hard Earth*, the companion book to *This House of Sky*. And of course, we're all here today because she donated the Ivan Doig Archive to Montana State University.

Carol Doig: They made me do it, and I didn't make a mistake. It was a wonderful proposal, and they've done what they said they'd do.

Mary Murphy: You bet. So, this year, Carol's been engaged in organizing the symposium and producing the film that will debut tomorrow, so I hope you'll be there tomorrow morning for that. Lois Monk married James Welsh in 1968, and actively supported his literary career in this country and abroad until his death in 2003. Lois taught English at the University of Montana - Missoula for over three decades, writing scholarly and nonfiction articles, directing the Creative Writing Program, and chairing the English Department. As Jim's literary executor, she works with editors and scholars on new editions of his work, and she is writing a memoir of their life together, which Carol has a good name for.

Carol Doig: Well it's Lois's name.

Lois Welsh: Oh, the jimoir.

Mary Murphy: The jimoir. So, please welcome Carol Doig and Lois Welsh.

Lois Welsh: We haven't laid eyes on each other for what, two years?

Carol Doig: I think that's right. I mean until right now.

Lois Welsh: Until right there. She was sitting right there. So, hi Carol.

Carol Doig: Hi again, and this was my idea. Can you hear me alright? Ok. At the launch of the archive last year, this time. I got the idea that I'd like Lois to come over this year, and my invitation to her was "Come on over to Bozeman, and we'll tell lies about our husbands." And there's been many an inning since then, but here she is, and I'm so happy because, one reason I thought to do this was because I don't think everything can be contained in an archive. Now, if you want to read about the Welshs and the Doigs, certainly go to the diaries. And Ivan will have written down about the parties, at least. But, I thought, well, let's try to tell a little bit about how we became friends, and what's your memory of that?

Lois Welsh: Well, can I say just first, if you can't hear me, I just want to say I had a stroke last October, and my mouth isn't fully, you know, it's hard for me to talk a bit, so if you can't hear me way up there, wave at me, and I'll articulate more clearly, ok?

Carol Doig: ok.

Lois Welsh: My memory of meeting you all was at the, probably the most crowded literary party I've ever been at, which was at the "Who Owns the West" conference, and Ivan, that would be in 1979. Ivan had published the House of Sky in '78. Jim had published Winter in the Blood in '74, and so they were both launched on their careers, but there were other luminaries, like Ken Kesey, Philip Levine, Marge Piercy. There was this huge party at Bill Kittredge's house, which has a kind of small living room, and we were, I remember just being packed in there. When - there was a couple pinched up against the fireplace, I remember. And there was a row of people between us, but this old guy put out his hand to Jim, and says "Hi. I'm Bud Guthrie." And that's how we met them. It was the same with you all, at that conference. It was so crowded, that if you wanted a drink you sort of had to get into this parade that inched into the kitchen. So it was kind of auspicious literary beginning, but it turned out that she was supporting him. I was supporting Jim, and in that period, there were less than 5% of American women were actually the sole support of the household. And so we felt an instant kinship from that. And then it turns out both of us had decided we didn't want any kids. You know, there was just one thing after another that sort of put us as sort of an automatic pairing, right from the start when we met.

Carol Doig: And it's very interesting. It's always been interesting to me, and I've never really explored this with you. But, Jim, we explored some of it in conversation, as to why Ivan and Jim were so similar. And then one big reason, they were in contrast, but they wrote part of their work, at least, from the same country. And they both came of age, if you will, at about the same time when there was this great upwelling of creative writing in Montana. And, so what I remember is we would sit around and start asking each other questions because then the parties and everything else moved to Lois and Jim's because they have a lovely old farmhouse, can we call it?

Lois Welsh: We can.

Carol Doig: Ok, a lovely old farmhouse in Missoula, along Rattlesnake Creek. And we were of such an affinity that I would finish a school year, we'd be half-packed by then. We'd get in the car and we'd go to Missoula to the Welshs.

Lois Welsh: Ivan would say, "We're coming. Call the Usual Suspects."

Carol Doig: Cap - Usual. Cap S on Suspects.

Lois Welsh: Which meant about six writers, right?

Carol Doig: Well, yeah, it was. Was almost always Bill Kittredge, Alex Smith, and...

Lois Welsh: Dian Bryan.

Carol Doig: Right...

Lois Welsh: And Bill Bevis actually, doesn't count as sort of a Montana writer, but he was...

Carol Doig: He was a professor.

Mary Murphy: He wrote about Montana writers.

Lois Welsh: Right. He was the one who wrote the book on Montana writers, and so we'd all get together.

Carol Doig: And it was at, I think this one was at your house. Where we had one of these big parties, and as usual we'd all head for the kitchen, and our glasses of whatever we wanted. Well I went for the bottle of Scotch. Someone else went for it at the same time, and that's how I met Norman McClain. And some of you have heard me, I think, tell this little story before, that we said a few sentences to each other. And then he told me, you know, our first meeting. I can't remember the context, that he still wrote notes to his wife, who had died some years previously because she was the only one who would understand. And I took an instant liking to Norman McClain. I know he was considered brusque, which he could be.

Lois Welsh: Well like when I met him at a signing, his first signing in Missoula. You know, he didn't know who I was or anything. I asked him to sign the book to Jim because, after all, Jim and I love fishing. I said something to that effect. And I remember the tone of voice in which he said "Well isn't that nice." We did not become friends.

Carol Doig: So there was, there was...what about writing about the same country? You know, Ivan, this is the east front of the Rockies, and we have four of the movers and shakers of Dupuyer here tonight, so wave to the folks.

Lois Welsh: Jim's parents and grandparents are buried in the Dupuyer graveyard. Go look for some Welshs.

Carol Doig: Well I'll be darned. There's more comparisons than I thought even. So, what other commonalities did we have? They were writing the same area, but I was never an English prof, really.

Lois Welsh: Not quite. You taught writing all the same.

Carol Doig: That's true. We always talked writing, but Ivan, coming at it from a poor kid who grew up...

Lois Welsh: Off the rez.

Carol Doig: Off the rez.

Lois Welsh: Jim coming at it from a poor kid growing up ON the rez.

Carol Doig: More than one rez.

Lois Welsh: More than one, but I mean, "On the rez" stands duty for all of them.

Carol Doig: And they both wrote about that area. That was Ivan's Two Medicine country, and Jim came at it from the Blackfeet point of view. And I've always...I've never been able to answer the question to myself about how that affected their writing. I mean, Ivan plainly was so glad that Jim was writing what he did, and Ivan could go off in some other direction, because it sometimes took a good deal of indirection to get the folks on the rez to appreciate what a writer would do, especially if the writer were not Blackfeet, and I think Jim had no problem with that because he started out there.

Lois Welsh: I'm not sure everybody on the rez actually appreciated his writing. There's that. You know, I've heard some - nobody's ever told me, but I've always heard rumblings that there's some people quibble with him, but mainly I only hear the accolades.

Carol Doig: And it was. I'm trying to remember from the big book you all worked on. The Bible of Montana literature.

Mary Murphy: The Last Best Place.

Carol Doig: The Last Best Place, yes. And you were on the committee that did that.

Lois Welsh: No I wasn't. Jim was.

Carol Doig: You weren't. Oh, you just hung out like I did.

Lois Welsh: Oh right. That's another commonality. It was nice actually living the life of a writer's wife, has a certain number of kind of perks to it. Like, the committee for the humanities was funding the Last Best Place editing, and there were like a dozen of them, I think, on that board. And they would do their work and meet periodically at these fancy resorts, 'cause they weren't getting paid to do it. They were getting paid expenses, so they made sure that every few months there were some really nice expenses. And, I at least, would go and meet with them. Did you come to any of those?

Carol Doig: I was at the one in Helena, but that was not a fancy resort. That was one of the standard Helena hotels. They let us down that time.

Lois Welsh: But anyhow. One of the perks was getting to hear these discussions of what would be included and wouldn't be included in the book. You know, everybody going at it, and I didn't have to participate. There are nice times to not be a professor, and this was a sort of busman's holiday of the best sort.

Carol Doig: What I was thinking back to, wasn't there quite a discussion/negotiation about which of the first peoples, writers, and tribes would be covered? I'm not sure. I didn't see the end of that, but I know the book came out, so somebody must of made some decisions.

Lois Welsh: Well it was mainly Jim who got to make those decisions.

Carol Doig: Well, ok. Ivan always said one reason he didn't live in Montana was because, Jim for example, spent was it eight years on the parole board?

Lois Welsh: 10.

Carol Doig: 10. You had to be a good citizen, and Ivan would of had to do that, had we lived here. And he'd rather put his head down and just write, so we give Jim the good citizenship award, besides doing this wonderful writing.

Lois Welsh: Well he didn't actually volunteer for the parole board. He didn't get it because of being a meritorious citizen. He got it because the dean of the law school said, "Jim," and she was teaching Indian Law, she said "Jim, we need an Indian on the parole board. 30% of the inmates are Indian." And Jim was saying, "But I'm a writer. I have work to do, blah blah." She said, "It's alright if you don't want to do it. There's probably for sure a rancher in Eastern Montana who would be happy to do it." Which was the most persuasive thing she could have said, of course. And you know, he did write that one book about an inmate, the Indian lawyer, which he was happy his lawyer friends happened to be ok with. But I would remember every month in the week before the parole board meetings, he would get this giant notebook, like this thick, in regular notebook size, but this thick, with the life, you know, all the stuff about each of the inmates that was coming up for parole, and every time, he would say "They shouldn't have a novelist on the parole board" because every one of those could be a novel. The stories were so amazing. So, it was a kind of good thing that had very little to do with citizenship, as he told me once: "It isn't that we're better than they are. They crossed a line that we haven't yet."

Carol Doig: Now, Jim started out as a poet, *Riding the Earthboy* 40, was that his first published book?

Lois Welsh: And only, a book of poems.

Carol Doig: Only book of poems. That's what I want to ask you. What got him to abandon poetry and take up these wonderful books that he wound up writing?

Lois Welsh: I think two things. And one of them was, growing up Indian, storytelling is a, you know, just a way of life. I think it isn't only for Indians, since I've noticed that, like Kittredge could only talk in anything, he had to use stories to tell, whatever point he's making. I think it's a

common love we all have, of telling stories. But Jim just felt that poems were too constrictive. He said he wanted a broader canvas, and he did try once. I saw, a couple of maybe 40-50 lines he wrote when he was taking Milton course. He loved Paradise Lost, and he decided to give it a shot. And there were 40-50 lines that he wrote before he realized this was going to be a lot of work. But you know, he really did want that larger canvas, so I think it was inevitable that he would turn to prose, but if you notice how little Winter in the Blood is...

Carol Doig: It was his next book, wasn't it?

Lois Welsh: Right, and how short the chapters. It was like he knew how to do this small scope right, so he had a whole lot of little chapters. The chapters gradually got longer in this novel.

Carol Doig: Well, it may have been shorter than some of his others books, but do I recall correctly it was the lead review in the New York Times Book Review?

Lois Welsh: That's how you get launched on a literary career, from nowhere to somewhere, just Pfft. One day, on November 18th, no it was November 17th. His birthday was the 18th. The 17th of November, his, the review came out on the front page, the review of Winter in the Blood came out on the front page of the New York Times Book Review, and that's a launching. It's not this way, it's this way. The telephone starts ringing. The sales go...try it sometime.

Carol Doig: Ok, and then, he wrote a lot of other books, but what I remember, Ivan thought the masterpiece was Fool's Crow.

Lois Welsh: That's just because it was set near Dupuyer.

Carol Doig: That may be part of it. But then I believe I remember, these were in the days when the Los Angeles Book Prize was a big, big deal. And Jim won it for Fool's Crow, and should have. So that was another help along the way, I think.

Lois Welsh: Oh yeah, I mean, but it's like, you know, you look at Ivan's book prizes too. Every one of those just help your rep along the way.

Carol Doig: It's like throwing a stone in the water, and you know, you get these circles, these concentric circles, and with every book, you get another one.

Mary Murphy: Can I interrupt here, and ask then, after Jim won the prize, and then when Ivan's book was nominated for the National Book Award. How did that make them feel about launching their next project? Was there a little level of, I have to be better, even better next time, or was it just a kind of confirmation of what I'm doing seems to work, and I'm going to keep working on that.

Lois Welsh: Your second book is cursed.

Carol Doig: After the first one does well.

Lois Welsh: Right.

Carol Doig: That could happen, but Ivan never really did react that way. He just took each book as they came. One of the things I liked about his work was that, when he was through with a

book, and when he might go back and look a book over after some years, he would say "Well, I've done the best I could at the time, and I'm satisfied with it." And Jim would...well I don't know. How did he react after *Winter in the Blood* came, and...into your kind of success...

Lois Welsh: Well it was such a complicated time. I mean, this Indian kid from nowhere, suddenly being just on the. I mean it's not a price, it's just it only happens to one first novel every ten years. But, it was, I mean, of course it was enormously gratifying, but it's also pretty scary, in the sense that, all of a sudden you're supposed to be somebody, more of a celebrity than you really got up in the morning before you brushed your teeth, and saw that review. I think also it meant that there were expectations, especially because there had been almost no novels by Indians since Darcy McNickel, in the, what was it, the 20s? that he published those novels. And they were out of print in '74. Jim hadn't read him yet, because they weren't in print, but I mean nobody did it, and suddenly they're saying "Oh, you can speak English..." Their expectations suddenly, that he felt a little, awkward having to live up to, and he tried. And he went on reading tours, I think 92 days out of that next year, he was out on reading tours around the country, so he was living his fame. But at the same time, he knew that whatever the next book was, editors, book reviewers, gonna say, "really not as good as the first one." It doesn't matter what you write, they will say that, 'cause it's not the same as...the first one. And so I think that would be very professional to say "that's as good as I can do..." But I think Jim didn't know he was that professional writer yet, whereas Ivan had had some training in being a professional writer beforehand.

Carol Doig: Yes, but it's maybe a little known secret, or maybe people do know about it, but his major in college was broadcast. He wanted to be the next Walter Cronkite.

Lois Welsh: I don't think I knew that. Which explains why he was so good at interviewing.

Carol Doig: That may be. Yeah, and his speaking voice from that, I'm sure, but he had, quote/unquote a Western voice. I think that was involved in that too.

Lois Welsh: He couldn't not.

Carol Doig: In fact, he read, Norman McClain was too old, so Ivan read for the taped version of *A River Runs Through It*, and Ivan was delighted to do that, because at that point it was taking him 2-3 years to write a novel. And here was a project he could do in one week. And it became a best seller as an audio book, and put a new roof on our house, which really needed it.

Lois Welsh: It did, that house really needed a...I was thinking about the house they lived in when we first met them because we stayed with them, I think the first time Jim taught at the University of Washington, we stayed with you before he moved into the place he was staying in. So we thought of him in his study writing under these cedar trees, in the dark and mossy shadow of that hill that you know live on top of.

Carol Doig: There was that. We literally moved up in the world.

Lois Welsh: You really did.

Mary Murphy: Well I wondered if Jim and Ivan ever read each other's work in draft?

Carol Doig: No

Mary Murphy: No

Lois Welsh: I hardly read his work in draft. I was going to ask about this, 'cause I'd never known what your tendencies were, because I know people like Richard and Kristina Ford read to each other from what Richard'd written every night. And Jim would no more have done that than he would have climbed a telephone pole. Absolutely no way he would have read "Here darling, this is what I wrote today. How does it sound?" Absolutely out of his realm? How did you deal with the drafts?

Carol Doig: Well, I would wait. I would try to be patient. So I would keep my mouth shut, but I would wait for Ivan to do something that he thought I ought to read. It might have been a scene of a chapter, or part of a chapter, or a whole one, but I waited until he gave it to me. At which point I devoured it, and he would always want my feedback. So my joke through the years has been that I'd read it and I'd say, "That's nice dear, keep going." And then when he was satisfied, his beloved editor Becky Saletan would get the manuscript, and she's the...[interruption?] after Ivan would let it go, because I think by the time he said, "Becky, the manuscript" it could go straight into print. I don't know, another person who saw a lot of his work was David Laskin, who's on the aisle about halfway up here, but I think he just never quit. As a matter of fact, you'll see in the film tomorrow, how David helped Ivan, two days before he died, he was still editing.

David Laskin: He didn't need help. I was there, but he was still working.

Carol Doig: So we got folks here who have worked with Ivan a lot.

Mary Murphy: Well I think that, I mean, my impression is that many writers do form very close relationships and love to have an editor whom they trust. So did Jim ever have that relationship over, say more than one book, or a particular experience with an editor?

Lois Welsh: I think, not really. You know, I read his stuff, and it turns up that he was, there was a time when I would say "wouldn't this word be better?" and he would explain to me why I was wrong.

Carol Doig: The English prof.

Lois Welsh: So I learned not to do that. I would sometimes ask him why he used that word, but I no longer argued with whether he should or not. The only thing I was slightly better at was punctuation. And not all that much better. He wasn't given to semi-colons, and neither was I. What he did find out, is he'd leave, I remember he brought me a chunk from Fool's Crow once, which is, after all, looking at the white world from the Indian point of view. And he brought me a chunk he wanted to read to see what I envisioned, and what he had written, it was an Indian kid looking at a white man's school house, and trying to describe it when you've never seen a square building before, all of that. He wanted to be sure how I understood it, to see if he'd done it well, but later on, when I would read things and like it, he was grateful, but never terribly impressed because, I mean, what he said "She always like what I write." So I wasn't the kind of editor he needed.

Carol Doig: Now didn't he, on one of his earlier book, and I can't remember which book it was, but he and the editor disagreed on how the book would end. And that ended Jim's relationship with that editor.

Lois Welsh: Well now you're getting, sort of, down and dirty.

Carol Doig: I don't have to hear the whole story, but I just thought it was interesting.

Mary Murphy: I thought that was the point of this panel?

Lois Welsh: Well then here we go. No, the ending of Fool's Crow, Jim didn't change it. You know, when his agent and editor didn't like the first draft of Heart Song, he rewrote the whole book, but when, at the end of Fool's Crow, his then-editor didn't like the ending of it. You know, after the Marias Massacre, and you've wiped out all but say 40, no, you've wiped out 43 people in this massacre, and burned the village, and they're all dying of smallpox anyhow. And you know, that's like the third-to-the-last scene. When, in the end, it ends on a slightly optimistic note, his editor said he wanted him to kill off Fool's Crow, his hero, and Jim would have none of it, and neither would his agent, luckily. Who said something profane, and then just said, "we'll put it out at auction." And, that's how he got his new editor.

Carol Doig: Right, whom he was with...

Lois Welsh: The rest of his life.

Mary Murphy: I wanted to ask one more question, and then I think we can open it up to the audience.

Carol Doig: Let's do that. Let's have a conversation.

Mary Murphy: You mentioned, and we talked about, there was just this amazing flowering of Montana literature in the 1970s, much of it coming out of the the Missoula area, and Livingston, and you know, Ivan then moving to Seattle

Lois Welsh: And a lot people in the East not understanding that people in Livingston weren't next door to the people in Missoula...ran back and forth for dinner.

Mary Murphy: Maybe talk a little about how that community worked...well, I'm just going to say that.

Lois Welsh: In ten words or less...I think, for one thing, there was a new creative writing program at UM, and Richard Hugo the poet was really the nexus of that program. And there have, always but of course, been Montana writers, and there had been conferences at UM and stuff. So writing was a respected profession already, and then Richard Hugo kind of gave it great personal elan, and he was a very powerful and funny character. So people came to the program, and it's just like it kind of burgeoned from there. You know, Hugo went and gave readings; Kittredge went and gave readings; Krumly went around; Jimmy Lee Burke went around. Jim never taught there, but...we became, I think, a kind of nexus for writers, so that if you wanted to be a writer, you had to hang out with us.

Carol Doig: Questions?

Mary Murphy: Yes, So let's open it up to questions.

Lois Welsh: Can I say something about Ivan before we do this? I have to tell you about the clothespin because it's the most remarkable writing tool I've ever known of, and Jim certainly was way messier than Ivan, even though fairly tidy, the two of them were given to crisp shirts. Like Carol, they liked really well...nice crisp shirts (sorry 'bout that). But at any rate, Jim was fairly tidy in his study, except for when he threw books that called Indians savages, threw them across the room and never touched them again. But basically quite tidy, and he typed way better than I did. But he couldn't beat Ivan at tidiness. The two of them in their study had two tables at an L-shape, two typewriters at an L-shaped table, and Ivan had a clothespin glued beside the typewriter, glued down to hold notes, and this was a guy that always carried a little 3x5 notebook in his pocket. And you could just see that at a certain point, there he was with his notes right there.

Carol Doig: He was that tidy, and I've said before that he always had that notebook, except I banned it from his pajamas.

Mary Murphy: But is the clothespin in the archive?

Lois Welsh: There are all of them in the archive.

Rebecca Saletan?: It's still on the desk.

Carol Doig: It's still on the desk?

Rebecca Saletan?: And he had a hook that he put elastic bands on...it's still there.

Carol Doig: Early in his career, it was actually an old picture frame (I think), and he carved out for the scissors, the shape of a scissors, and for each item that he wanted to keep tidy, he had a place for them. You know, a round circle for the old glue bottle, and so on and so forth. Yes, people did seem to be amused at that, and usually startled at it. I could add that to the archive, but you never want to offer something to an archivist 'cause they always take it. But anyway, it's still on his desk.

Mary Murphy: Great. Well let's open it up for questions.

Audience member: Does the writer give 100% attention to that single book, or is the writer also, sort of in the background, thinking about the next book, or the next theme that he or she may...

Carol Doig: That's a good question, and I could hear, but do you wanna just rephrase?

Mary Murphy: Sure. So the question was, in the cases I think of Jim and Ivan, when they were working on a book, did they focus exclusively on that one project, or were they thinking ahead to other projects, or taking on other projects?

Carol Doig: Ivan always said you have to be in love with the current one. And when he got going on a book, that was it, but meanwhile, there were things that would come up. And he

always had a notebook, and he always had the next idea. Betty Mayfield up here, the one who did the archive work for him towards the end of his life, and what did he tell you Betty?

Betty Mayfield: He had enough ideas to write until he was 150.

Carol Doig: He could write until he was 150. I believe he could have. He did everything he could. He got through 16 of them.

Lois Welsh: Well Jim, I'd like to answer that myself in two ways. And one is, when he's writing a book, is he attending 100% to it? The answer is 98% they're on autopilot when they're writing, and you get the other 2% of attention. But also, I asked Jim once how he avoided, you know some people get depressed when they finish a book, and I said how did you avoid this post-partum blues syndrome, and he too, he always had another book in mind, so that he didn't go this way. I think, my current theory about Jim is that he wrote Fool's Crow because he realized that his character, Jim LONE, killed himself for lack of a book like that. You know, he didn't know his own people's history, and that's what he really needed to get his life together. I don't know quite where those two strands came together, but yes, I think there always, other things always come in the door.

Carol Doig: Ivan had the next book ready to go, that is he had letters to Becky and to his literary agent already written. He had, let's see, a rough (I think) of the opening, and another one of the closing, and a little bit in between. His researcher Marcella Walter down here, he already had her working. Now, can you...

Marcella Walter: Hunting for the right radio that would fit in a sheep wagon.

Carol Doig: Ivan had a particular radio in mind that would fit in a sheep wagon. This is the kind of question that Marcella, for some reason she liked these questions. And it took you a while to come up with that, didn't it?

Marcella Walter: We exchanged images for quite a while before Ivan found the right one, or settled on the one that he remembered his grandma turning on.

Carol Doig: So he had done thinking, and he had done the proposal, and that has to be the great unwritten novel by Ivan Doig. But there it was, ready to go.

Audience member: How did Ivan utilize the photography that you took? The photographs?

Carol Doig: Well, the photography ok? His town of GROVON is made up of the creamery in Choteau, the bank somewhere along the highline, the town up there. You could probably tell me what town it was. Is known affectionately as the lass with her ass in a glass, and here's this neon coming out of...where is that? It's where?

Mary Murphy: Chinook

Carol Doig: Chinook. Ok. And so on. So he went around, and he picked out buildings, and what he did was to construct a town. That became the creation. That was fun. Some of the rest of what he wanted was more dubious, as far as I was concerned. I once photographed railroad tracks, a gravel pile. In any scene where he would say "shoot around on this," so he wanted. You know,

these were the old days where you didn't have gadgets that would pan for you, so I would take a series of pictures.

Lois Welsh: We had film. We had film!

Carol Doig: And film. Real film. Yeah, there are a lot of slides, some hundreds of slides.

Lois Welsh: Jim was not a historian, and in one way in which they were so entirely different, it used to shock me when we would go do a research trip, and he never took notes. I mean, it just...but he had this extraordinary visual memory for one thing. For another thing, you may have noticed that the Blackfeet and other Montana Indians didn't leave a lot of buildings around to be photographed for later use. But I remember once, when we were going to check out a lawyer's office in Polson. A friend of his was a lawyer in Polson, and we didn't know where the office was. We drove around Polson, which doesn't take a minute, but we looked very carefully here and there and there, and he decided it was up there. I said we could go to the service station and look up his office. "No," he said. "I'd rather imagine it." So it wasn't that it had a real potted plant on a file case in the doorway. It's that it might have, and that was good enough for him.

Mary Murphy: I think I saw a hand, yes?

Audience Member: Both of them, can you describe how their reading habits were when they were writing? Did they stay away from reading other people's work? How did they work that out?

Lois Welsh: Why don't you start with that?

Carol Doig: Ivan would not read anything that he thought was similar to what he was writing. I think for very good reason. He didn't want to take that into his imagination, and then somehow or other it would come out and it would seem improper. He was a voracious reader of other kinds of books. He liked the Eastern European writers, the South African writers, the Australian writers, so he sort of read around the world.

Lois Welsh: Well Jim was the same way in terms of reading people he admired. When he was writing, absolutely not touch them, for the very same reason. You know, if it becomes kind of part of the way your mind is working. As one of my students said once, I can't remember how we came to this, but after class she told me one day, "Well you know, when I read a book, I tend to think like that, so I write like that writer." And, there was a moment, an awkward moment afterwards, which the next thing she said, like "When I read Shakespeare," and then she stopped. Good luck honey. When Marilynne Robinson was writing her dissertation on Shakespeare, she wrote Housekeeping, and you can see the effect on the rhetoric. Anyhow.

Mary Murphy: So when did they read other Montana writers?

Lois Welsh: When they weren't actively writing their books.

Carol Doig: Which, in Ivan's case was overnight.

Mary Murphy: I was going to say, that's not a lot of reading time there. Other questions or comments?

Audience Member: I don't know if this is true. I always thought it was such a great story, so I hope it is true.

Lois Welsh: I can't hear.

Carol Doig: Can you hear?

Mary Murphy: Yeah.

Audience Member: (continuing) ...editors who worked with Jim over the years said at one time, when he would want to put something down he would start with the idea in his mind and he would just write it, and it wouldn't take a lot of revising. He would just write it out, and then it was done. Nowadays, we start on our computers, and we write and we backtrack, and we change things as much as we do. So is that true? Is that the way he wrote? He would kind of have it all in his mind?

Lois Welsh: Did you say you'd read that once, someplace, about Jim?

Audience Member: Bill Lane said that to me one time.

Lois Welsh: Ok. I thought it sounded like it was already a statement, basically, out of Jim's mouth, writing. And it's true. I mean, I was...it had been 46 years since I'd read *This House of Sky*, before this summer when I read it again.

Carol Doig: No kidding.

Lois Welsh: It had Ivan's introduction to it. In it, he talks about how he'd revised it and revised it. Before he'd sent it off, wrote, rewrote, until there was not a word that he wouldn't have gone to the mat to defend. I was thinking, Jim...Ivan was way more interested in language per se, than Jim was. Ivan collected odd expressions. You know, if you said something weird, he would write it down. And Jim really...he wasn't that interested in language per se. He did tend to write out a draft and revise it a little bit and was done.

Carol Doig: Yes. They were very very different that way. *House of Sky*, being the first book, partly for that reason. Ivan said the beginning of it, the first chapter or so, that he must have revised more than 50 times. I think, he still did a lot of revision, but nowhere near that. He said, it never got easier. It was still hard work, but it was hard work that he loved doing. Whereas, Jim would sort of store up what he was writing again, and then it would come out more...

Lois Welsh: I think it's that he really...you know, Hugo was into...Hugo's philosophy was that poetry was more about music than language. And so, I think Jim really learned the singing of language, and I think it kind of welled up in him that way, rather than accrue on the page as something that needed adjusting this way.

Carol Doig: Yeah

Mary Murphy: Patty

Patty Limerick: I'm wondering about their relationship to their fans, and the spectrum of their fans. I, for some reason, just started to think, it might be that there's an overlap of Louie L'Amour fans. I don't know if I'll finish that sentence...

Lois Welsh: With Ivan or with Jim?

Patty Limerick: With both, really. Who their fans were? What their relationship with their fans were? Were some fans irritating? Were some fans out shlubbing things, and in fact were in the books? I'd just be very curious about what was going on with their fans, and if they had fans, did they have fans in New Jersey? Is there a geographic spread?

Mary Murphy: As someone with a lot of family in New Jersey, I just wanna...people read books in New Jersey...

Lois Welsh: She means people that are far away.

Carol Doig: Marketing. Becky, where did his books sell?

Becky Mayfield: They sold in a surprisingly wide range across the United States. We'll talk about this a little bit tomorrow. For example, Northshire Bookstore in Vermont, which is in Manchester Vermont, people would come from miles away when there was a new Ivan Doig book out, and this was true up until the end of his life, to be able to buy that. DC, he had a big following in the DC area. If you look on sales records, and see kind of where things are selling, it was surprisingly wide-spread. He was not only a Western writer, and I know that one of the things that really irritated him was when people typed him as "just," you know "JUST" a Western writer.

Carol Doig: Oh yes it did.

Lois Welsh: Right, just an Indian writer.

Carol Doig: Right! I will say, the Country Bookshelf, which is a great favorite of ours. I think the Country Bookshelf, over the years, sold more of Ivan's books than any other place.

Lois Welsh: I have to say, one of my favorite views of Ivan, 'cause sometimes they did signings, actually, I think sort of parallel to one another. I remember once seeing Ivan prepare for a signing by putting bandages on his hands.

Carol Doig: Band-aids. On his signing finger.

Lois Welsh: Because he got so sore signing so many books because it just went around the block.

Carol Doig: We always loved to see that.

Mary Murphy: But Lois, what about Jim's fans?

Lois Welsh: I remember a Blackfeet lady. Actually, it wasn't. No, it was a French-Canadian lady, said to him, why didn't he write in Blackfeet? And he said, "First of all, I don't know the language, but secondly, I want more than 3000 readers."

Carol Doig: An interesting thing about where Jim was read, he was greatly published in France and Germany.

Lois Welsh: He was a celebrity in France, and I'm saying that, not out of arrogance, but a startle, because, I mean he was famous enough in this country. I don't know that his biggest sales were at the Country Bookshelf. He sold well, but in France, there was a conference at San Millau, where apparently the day that they would announce Jim Welsh was coming to the next May conference, the phones would ring off the hook. And I hadn't realized it, but they just mobbed him. They idolized him. It was just...he was startled. He wasn't sure that this was that much fun. It has to do, I think, with the French's curious relationship to Indians, and to their idea of Indians. As opposed to real ones, because a certain number of them would come up to Jim and say, "You don't look like a real Indian." What does a "real Indian" look like? We all know that's a fraught question, but anyhow. I don't know that he had...I don't think he had the breadth of fan club that Ivan did, you know from New Jersey to Vermont...

Mary Murphy: Can we take one more question please? Does somebody have their hand up?

Audience member: Because it often takes time for a writer to get to the point of publication, I'm just curious, did either of you...are their unpublished manuscripts that were not good enough before This House of Sky or before Winter in the Blood?

Carol Doig: No. There's nothing in the drawer. Ivan always finished what he started. You'll find...he said, there's no reason you can't be a clerk and a writer. At one point, there's something in the archive on a big yellow slip about books he intended to write. This is from a long time ago, and he got to write some of them and not others. But he had how long they might be, how much advance he might get, and a little bit about each idea. So there he was, he was working on one book, but he was certainly thinking ahead, although I didn't have the sense that he was doing that all the time. I think he was doing more than I knew about.

Lois Welsh: You remind me. One of my favorite things I discovered in Wallace Steven's Opus Posthumous was a list of unwritten poems, their titles. Jim actually has a novel that he wrote for a class that he took in 1964 in the novel. I read it, and you know I read it when I first knew him, and then, after he died, we looked at it, and it shouldn't be published. You know, there were interesting things about it, but...

Carol Doig: It wasn't ready.

Lois Welsh: No.

Mary Murphy: I think I can speak for all of you, in extending my thanks to Lois and to Carol, not only for sharing their memories about Jim and Ivan, but also for supporting their careers for all those many decades. And I might say, also for teaching thousands of students how to write over the course of your own careers, so let us not forget their contribution to literature as well. So please, let's thank Lois and Carol

