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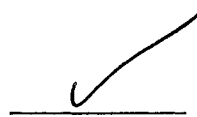
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THE DAN CUSHMAN READER

by

Brent D. McCann

B.A., The University of Montana, 1995

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana

2001

Approved by:


Chairperson


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ABSTRACT

McCann, Brent D., M.A., May 2001

Journalism

The Dan Cushman Reader

Director: Carol Van Valkenburg *CV*

This thesis examines the life and career of Montana author Dan Cushman.

Primary research sources were personal interviews with Dan Cushman, now 91, and Cushman's writing, which spans a period of more than seventy years.

Cushman is known best for his novel Stay Away, Joe, which saw national attention in the early 1950s and went on to be a Broadway production and a movie starring Elvis Presley. He wrote many other novels as well, including The Silver Mountain, which won the Spur Award for best historical novel of 1958, and The Grand and the Glorious, which made a top-ten list for 1963.

Cushman's career began when he was a teenage correspondent in Big Sandy, Montana, during the 1920s for the Great Falls Tribune. Later he worked as an adman and pulp fiction writer before becoming a novelist. He included much of his life's experiences in his novels. Much of Cushman's best work is comedy. By the 1970s Cushman's markets dried up and he then made a living by reviewing books. Lately his pulp writing has been republished as books.

Cushman believes writers should focus on the complexity of people. He also doesn't proclaim to deliver any answers with his work. But he says when writing he always strove for "truth in the larger sense" and that any success he attained as a writer is "due to a genuine pleasure, or at least interest, in the foibles of people."

Although he saw most of his success early in his career, Cushman always remained devoted to the craft and never regretted becoming a writer. In 1996 Cushman received an award from Gov. Marc Racicot for his contribution to the state's humanities. He received another local award for his writing in 1998.

Still, whether or not his writing will stand the test of time is not clear. Some people now see Stay Away, Joe as an unfair portrayal of Indians.

With this thesis I hope to clear up any misconceptions about Cushman and provide insight into his better books. This thesis concludes that as Cushman faces the sunset of his career, having written more than thirty books and received numerous awards, he doesn't know what his legacy will be.

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INTRODUCTION

ROCKY BOY'S INDIAN RESERVATION

Almost fifty years ago a novel by Montana writer Dan Cushman came to this small Montana Indian reservation in the northcentral part of the state, and many readers found in it realism they had never seen before in print.

One couple boxed up Stay Away, Joe and sent it to their son overseas. John Sunchild was an airborne ranger at the time, involved in the Korean conflict.

"I enjoyed it," Sunchild said, describing the book's portrayal of the Rocky Boy's Reservation as "accurate."

Dan Cushman is the author of more than 30 books, but his most celebrated—and most controversial—is Stay Away, Joe. This book was first published in 1953 and was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection for April of that year. Later, it was the basis for the 1958 Broadway adaptation Whoop-Up, as well as the 1968 movie Stay Away, Joe, starring Elvis Presley.

Regardless of its past popularity, today some writers criticize it as being inaccurate and unfair to Indians.

That's not, however, an assessment shared by Indians who see a familiarity, if not a reality, in what's depicted in the book.

Sunchild, 70, is the chief executive officer of the National Tribal Development Organization, headquartered at Rocky Boy. Not long ago he was tribal chairman of the Chippewa Cree, the tribe that calls Rocky Boy home.

"There's a lot of history in that book," Sunchild said.

It illustrates how different the reservation was back then, he said. The government played a more paternalistic role in those days than it does now, he said, just as it does in the book. It was common for Indians to receive a herd of cattle like the family does in the story, he said.

Sunchild also said the characters in the story are very similar to people he once knew, but they are long gone. He said he respects the book's realism and the author's style.

"He is a devil-may-care guy," Sunchild said. "He said things other people wouldn't."¹

Sybal Sangrey, about twenty years younger than Sunchild, remembers how her parents and other older folks were taken aback by how real the story was.

"My mother didn't like the book because it was too close to reality," Sangrey said.

The book shows a time gone by, she said, a time when Indians were coming to terms with the reservation lifestyle. In the reservation's early days, she said, many Indians couldn't grasp what ownership meant. It was a foreign idea to them, especially land ownership. She described those days as "a transition in poverty."

But Sangrey, who works for the Tribal Health Board, is fond of the book. She likes its sense of humor and sense of community.

"It's got a lot of truth in it," Sangrey said.²

¹John Sunchild, Stay Away, Joe reader, interview by author, 3 May 2001, by phone from Rocky Boy, Mont.

²Sybil Sangrey, Stay Away, Joe reader, interview by author, 4 May 2001, by phone from Rocky Boy, Mont.

Sangrey's husband, John Colliflower, is a cattle rancher and is convinced that the author must have lived among the people he wrote about.

"He had to be right in there living with them, partying with them and drinking with them because it's all true," he said. He sounded a little melancholy when he thought about the earlier days and said, "I got to see some of it."

The characters are real, Colliflower said, but you won't find their types around the reservation anymore.

"It was a different kind of people back in them days," he said. "It's a good little piece of history."

Colliflower, a Gros Ventre, was a kid living on the neighboring Fort Belknap Indian Reservation when he first read the book. He said everybody there liked it and he remembered how a copy of it would go from one house to another.

"They passed it all over," he said. "One family got done with it and they'd pass it on to another."³

John Mitchell Jr., a student at Rocky Boy's Stone Child College, has read the book six or seven times. He has many friends who also like to reread the story from time to time. Mitchell said while the book has good humor, the alcoholism and "handout disease" evident in the book is still "very real" on the reservation. He also said the book contains a paradox about Indians that is hard for some people to understand.

"It shows how Indians tend to lose things through no fault of their own and at the same time through fault of their own," he said.

Mitchell, who is 38 and "mostly Cree, a little bit Chippewa," remembers how while growing up, he and his friends would categorize the people around them by the characters in the book.

³John Colliflower, Stay Away, Joe reader, interview by author, 5 May 2001, by phone from Rocky Boy, Mont.

“We’d say, ‘That guy’s Callahan,’ or ‘There goes Mami,’ or ‘There goes Billie Joe Littlewhore,’” Mitchell said, laughing at the memory.⁴

Robert Belcourt, 51, another Chippewa Cree tribal member who is the natural resource director for the tribe, described the book as “good Indian humor.”

“Pretty damn funny,” Belcourt said, “I had to take time out just to laugh.”⁵

Stay Away, Joe tells the story of an Indian family dealing with an unexpected gift from the U.S. government. The gift, 19 heifers and a young bull, comes to the family thanks to the daughter, Mary, who lives in the local town of Big Springs and works at the bank. Through her connections, Mary persuades a congressman to give her family the herd as an experiment that could prove to be a viable way to jumpstart incomes of certain poverty-stricken families on the reservation.

Louis Champlain, Mary’s father, is the recipient of the small herd. He is a Cree Indian, “halfway,” a métis originally from Canada. He lives on a small ranch, cow-less before the gift, with his second wife, Annie, who is Mary’s mother and a Gros Ventre, two young sons and his grandfather, whom he calls Grandpere—a 105-year-old full-blooded Cree.

Louis has a third son, also named Joe, from a previous marriage to an Assiniboinnee woman. Joe is a World War II and Korean War vet who earned a Purple Heart. When the story begins, Joe hasn’t been home since he left for Korea. All that is known about him is that he is on his way home via the rodeo circuit, enjoying many successes riding broncs and bulldogging steers.

⁴John Mitchell Jr., Stay Away, Joe reader, interview by author, 3 May 2001, by phone from Rocky Boy, Mont.

⁵Robert Belcourt, Stay Away, Joe reader, interview by author, 30 April 2001, by phone from Rocky Boy, Mont.

Not long after the arrival of the small herd, surplus from the local agricultural experiment station, the Champlain family's friends and neighbors arrive. They've come to celebrate Louis's good fortune, which Louis feels is only right. Soon a party is under way. A few days into the celebration, Joe arrives. This is a big moment in Louis's life, having a son come home, not only from war, but also a rodeo success. In turn, the celebration cranks up a few notches.

In the spirit of the moment, Louis agrees to butcher one heifer so that his friends may eat well, as he believes they should on such an occasion. Louis gets caught up in the festivities and not until a few days later does he realize one of his friends decided eating the bull would be better.

As fast as the government put him into the ranching business, the celebration put him out of it. But he does not worry. He believes his son Joe can rectify the situation, be it through his rodeo winnings or connections.

Although Joe has no means to buy his father another bull, he agrees to solve the problem. His efforts are not focused, however. He's more interested in horses, women and his emerald-green Buick. And so with Joe's half-hearted attempts to put his father back in business, the novel unfolds.

At the time of the book's release, reviewers for The New York Times Book Review and the New York Herald Tribune Book Review described it as "ingenious," "real" and "alive."⁶

By the time it had been reprinted numerous times, its fan club included Indian activists and scholars of Western writing. They recommended the book to anyone who wanted a better understanding of Indians and reservations because

⁶Caroline Bancroft, Review of Stay Away, Joe, by Dan Cushman, In The New York Times Book Review (29 March 1953): 5; Rose Feld, Review of Stay Away, Joe, by Dan Cushman, In New York Herald Tribune (5 April 1953): 6.

they said it showed that writing about Indians had finally moved beyond the romantic myth.

In 1969, Sioux Indian Vine Deloria Jr. said in his book Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto that Dan's book, "the favorite of Indian people, gives a humorous but accurate idea of the problems caused by the intersection of two ways of life."⁷

In 1975, when it was more than twenty years old, Jay Gurian, author of Western American Writing: Tradition and Promise, described it as "the finest rendition of Indian world view so far published."⁸

Although Stay Away, Joe is Dan Cushman's most noteworthy claim to fame, it is just a small part of a long life and literary career. This Montana author, a white man going on 92, has made a career in writing that spans more than seventy years. His latest novel, and likely his last, Blood on the Saddle, was published when he was almost 90. It made no splash.

Dan began writing stories almost as soon as he learned to write. He's written for newspapers—both news and advertising—magazine articles, pulp fiction, fiction and nonfiction. He's written about the Northwest, the West and the Midwest. He's written books, reviewed books and published books.

Dan lives in Great Falls, Montana. He's been a widower for more than twenty years and resides in the home he moved into almost fifty years ago when he and his wife were still raising their four children, one daughter and three sons. He shares the large, two-story brick home with his two younger sons.

⁷ Vine Deloria Jr., Custer Died for You Sins: An Indian Manifesto (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 23.

⁸ Jay Gurian, Western American Writing: Tradition and Promise (Deland, Fla.: Everett/Edwards, 1975) 137.

Dan—once a robust, ruddy-faced man known for daily walks ranging five or six miles—is pale with sagging skin and little hair. For many years now, he has spent his days slouched in a non-reclinable blue chair steadily consuming magazines including The New Yorker, The New York Magazine, and Vanity Fair. Despite his reading of current issues, Dan’s mind largely is in the past.

Sometimes his knee bounces as if it’s unsatisfied with being confined to a cushioned chair. His feet are equally fitful and years of their shuffling have worn a bare spot the size of a steering wheel in the Persian-style rug that meets his chair. In contrast, his arms dangle wearily from the end of the chair’s armrest. His hands appear tired. After all they’ve written millions of words.

There is little indication that he’s an author with more than thirty books to his name. In fact, he says he doesn’t own a copy of some of his best books.

The room is filled with just enough amateur pottery, such as the unique light hanging from the ceiling just beyond him and the miscellaneous objects scattered around, it is apparent that at one time Dan had a hobby. Two interests interface across the room in a ceramic teepee about six inches tall with a sign at its door that reads STAY AWAY, JOE.⁹

Often the books lying here and there around the room are his complimentary soft-covers, recently published reprints of his earlier work. A stack of books tucked away in the corner is more of Dan’s work. They are self-published, among them later editions of Stay Away, Joe, and he’d be more than happy to sell you one and autograph it, of course.

“I wrote quite a few books other than Stay Away, Joe,” he may tell you as he signs his name. “A lot of people don’t realize that.”¹⁰

⁹This teepee is one of many Dan made to promote his book Stay Away, Joe. He placed the teepees near copies of the book in order to catch people’s attention.

¹⁰Dan Cushman, author, interview by author, 19 October 1997, Great Falls, Mont.

Of his thirty-some books, roughly ten can be classified as serious literary efforts. The other twenty or so are formula books, either adventure stories or westerns. Lately some of his pulp work from the 1940s and 1950s is being republished in book form.

When writing, Dan says, he always strove for “truth in the larger sense,” and believed that it’s the writer’s obligation to recognize the complexity of people. But he also says he provided no answers with his work. Any success he attained as a writer, he once said, “is due to a genuine pleasure, or at least interest, in the foibles of people.”¹¹

Among Dan’s successes was selling his book Timberjack to Hollywood and seeing it made into a movie in western Montana in 1954; receiving a Spur Award from the Western Writers of America for writing The Silver Mountain, the best Western historical novel of 1957; and the National Association of Independent Schools placing his book The Grand and the Glorious in its top ten list for pre-college readers in 1963.

Despite certain success, whether Dan will be remembered in the years to come seems to depend on how long people continue to know about Stay Away, Joe.

In Dan’s own words, spoken nonchalantly: “That’s the only thing I’ll be remembered for, if anything.”¹²

But this book’s destiny is unclear. Around Rocky Boy, fans of the book say the younger generation isn’t reading it.

¹¹Great Falls Tribune, 6 May 1968, 8; Montana Committee for the Humanities Awards, Great Falls, MT 1996: Joe McDonald, Toni Hagener, Dan Cushman [videocassette provided to author by the Montana Committee for the Humanities]; S.V. Keenan, “WLB Biography: Dan Cushman.” Wilson Library Bulletin (April 1960), 619.

¹²Montana Committee for the Humanities Awards, 1996, videocassette.

“They’re reading cosmopolitan literature by native writers,” said Mitchell, the student at Stone Child.¹³

Even if the younger people were reading it, they probably couldn’t appreciate its realism.

“My kids have never missed a meal and have all gone to school,” Sangrey said. “Young people can’t relate to the poverty (in it).”¹⁴

“The younger generation don’t understand it,” agreed her husband, Colliflower.¹⁵

The book has another strike against it. Regardless of the fact that Rocky Boy’s Reservation, the book’s setting, is home to some of Dan’s most outspoken fans, some people believe the book inaccurate, untrue and an insult to Indians.

This is nothing new. Some reviewer from the East felt the same way when the book came out. What is new is that the critics of late reside in Montana.

Montana author and poet James Welch, originally from the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, sees no truth in the book and believes it makes Indians appear “stupid.”¹⁶ Welch qualifies as one of the “cosmopolitan native writers,” Mitchell mentioned. Because Welch is a successful author and high-profile Indian with an influence on the state’s literature scene, his criticism does not bode well for Dan.

Perhaps because some people find Stay Away, Joe offensive, it holds no special place in college curriculums around Montana. Even teachers at Stone Child College at Rocky Boy do not include the book in any of their courses. The

¹³Mitchell, interview by author, 3 May 2001.

¹⁴Sangrey, interview by author, 4 May 2001.

¹⁵Colliflower, interview by author, 5 May 2001.

¹⁶James Welch, Blackfeet novelist and poet, interview by author, 1 June 1998, Missoula, Mont., tape recording.

only evidence I found of Cushman's work being read in any class in Montana is at the University of Great Falls.

Jo-Ann Swanson is an associate professor at the university. An English instructor, she finds fascinating the core of authors who resided in or near Great Falls during the 1940s and 1950s, including Dan. She's possibly the only instructor in Montana who examines Dan's writing to any extent with her classes. But she more often uses an excerpt from his memoir, Plenty of Room and Air than she does Stay Away, Joe.

Swanson has interviewed Dan numerous times for stories she's written for the local newspaper, the Great Falls Tribune. When speaking of Dan, Swanson said, "We often think books are forever, but that's not always the case."¹⁷

Dan isn't agonizing over whether he will be remembered. He has said that he's been "more than adequately recognized" in Montana for his work,¹⁸ and says he's satisfied that he simply made a career out of writing.

"I tried not to be a one-book author, but..." Dan said, raising his face with a look that seemed to say, "I guess it was not meant to be."¹⁹

This thesis examines Dan's life and career. The thesis concludes even though he has written more than thirty books and received numerous awards, it's not clear what his legacy will be.

¹⁷Jo-Ann Swanson, associate professor at University of Great Falls, interview by author, 24 March 1999, Great Falls, Mont.

¹⁸Great Falls Tribune, 17 April 1998, 7A.

¹⁹Cushman, interview by author, 19 October 1997.

CHAPTER I

A NEW TOWN FOR EVERY YEAR

The true art of memory is the art of attention.

—*Samuel Johnson.*¹

Dan was born June 9, 1909, in Marion, Michigan, and given the name Sumner Davis Cushman, after his father. Like his father, he was always called Dan. At the time of his birth, his mother Rose was 32 and Dan Sr., sometimes called Big Dan, was about 42. They already had two children, a daughter Fern, who was 10 at the time, and a son Beecher, who was 8.²

Though writing did not run in Cushman blood, the inclination to be different did. Dan recalled that his father was an original from his start in upper Michigan:

Pa was considered very unusual in those parts when he not only left the woods but went off to college. The college wasn't Yale, or the University of Ann Arbor; he went down to the Ferris Institute, now Ferris State, at Big Rapids. He hadn't been to high school, or Latin school as it was then referred to, but they allowed him to matriculate. He decided to study elocution. However, there didn't seem to be many openings in that line of work, so when he got out, after marrying Mama—she had been at Ferris, too, studying to be a teacher—he stirred himself and learned the barber trade. Then to add another arrow to his bow he went down to Indianapolis to art school.

¹I found the Samuel Johnson quotes that begin each chapter in Bergan Evans's Dictionary of Quotations (New York: Random House, 1969).

²Cushman, interview by author, 19 October 1997; Great Falls Tribune, 27 January 1978.

What he really studied was commercial art and sign painting. He said barbering and sign painting was a wonderful combination because no matter where you lit you could always set up a chair and scrape chins; and you could pay your way from coast to coast painting signs on windows, touching up barber poles, doing lightening portraiture and the like.³

Like Dan Sr., Rose had a unique, headstrong personality and she did not take the path set before her in Michigan.

“If ever there was a word misspelled in this world it wasn’t by her,” Dan said. “She got her education the hard way.”⁴

Rose left home when she was about 12 years old, Dan said, but still she somehow gained an education during her teenage years. Dan wasn’t sure of the details, such as where she lived or what schools she attended, but he suspects that her instructors were not long from England on a migration from Canada to the United States. This assumption is largely due to the words Rose used and the way she pronounced them.

The Cushmans had not yet settled down by the time Dan was born, and they wouldn’t stop moving for another decade. By this time Dan Sr. had become “a promoter,” Dan said.

His father had a knack for moving into a community with little money, build a business and then sell out. He packed up his family frequently to chase another opportunity. Dan said his father was a “genius in times of want,” but could “not stand prosperity.”⁵

Dan Sr.’s main business, it seems, was seeing new country. In fact, Dan’s first memory was of traveling. Unbelievable as it may seem, Dan said the memory came from when he was between 1 and 2 years old.

³Dan Cushman, Plenty of Room and Air (Great Falls, Mont, Stay Away, Joe Publishers), 42

⁴Dan Cushman, author, interview by author, 31 January 1998, Great Falls, Mont., tape recording.

⁵S.V. Keenan, “WLB Biography,” (April 1960), 619.

“I was just able to walk,” Dan said. “Now the reason I can remember is because we were in motion. We were crossing the Straits of Machinac and I remember the white sand.”

His family then lived for a time in Hill City, Minnesota, where he was baptized in a Catholic church.⁶ Soon after his baptism, the family moved to Montana, to the little town of Box Elder. That was the summer of 1910. Dan said that by the time they greeted their first Montana winter, they lived in quarters above the Bear Paw Saloon.⁷

Dan Sr. then filed on a claim four miles to the northeast. Dan celebrated his second birthday in the homestead shack where they lived that summer.⁸ When school started in the fall, the family moved back to town. While the shack remained the Cushman’s “official” home, according to Dan Sr., “There was nothing in the Homestead law saying you couldn’t just camp in town for awhile.”⁹

They never resided in their “official” home again, but Dan Sr. “proved up on the claim,” earning himself a piece of Montana.¹⁰

Their camp in town was a home on the southeastern edge of Box Elder. Dan’s father fenced about five acres, and collected an assortment of horses, cows, sheep and chickens.¹¹ By this time, Dan was mobile enough to put some distance between him and his mother. He remembered often seeking out his

⁶Dan Cushman, author, interview by author, 29 October 1997, Great Falls, Mont., tape recording.

⁷This building still stands in Box Elder just north of the town’s main railroad crossing, the first building on the right. It was a casino last time I went through the town.

⁸Ibid., 19 October 1997.

⁹Cushman, Plenty, 94.

¹⁰Follow the railroad four miles east of Box Elder, find some old pilings for a railroad water tower and there you’ll be within shouting distance of the Cushman homestead.

¹¹Ibid., 10, 70, 93.

father in the Bear Paw Saloon, where he tended a barber's chair. Dan was happiest hanging out there, to his mother's chagrin, watching men play poker and other games involving gambling. Sometimes he even got to sit on a gambler's lap because it was said he brought good luck.¹²

During the early teens, Box Elder was a community primarily defined by farming and ranching. But in 1916, the town found itself an intricate part of the newly formed Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. In fact, Cushmans' homestead lay in its midst.

The reservation came about thanks to the combined efforts of people like Chief Rocky Boy, a Chippewa, and Chief Little Bear, a Cree, as well as the artist Charlie Russell and author Frank Linderman. They persuaded the federal government to declare 56,000 acres, primarily to the southeast of Box Elder, home of the Chippewa Cree Indian Tribe.¹³

As Box Elder was the only established community in the vicinity, the Chippewa and Cree did business there. Dan remembered seeing Chief Little Bear quite often. He would hang around outside his father's barbershop. Dan also befriended and has never forgotten Louis Champagne. He was a Cree of French Canadian descent, a métis. Champagne was in his twenties and would seek out Dan in order to gain some of the luck the poker players said he brought.

"He used to carry me around Box Elder on his back because he had the idea he could beat the punchboards (thanks to me)," Dan said.¹⁴

Punchboards were common in stores during the country's first decade. They were boards with many holes that contained slips of paper, rolled up or

¹²Ibid., 49.

¹³Chippewa Cree Tribe, "The Rocky Boy's Reservation."

¹⁴Cushman, author, interview by author, 25 January 1998, Great Falls, Mont., tape recording.

folded accordion style, with numbers on them. A player paid a small fee to punch out his choice of holes. The store would award a designated prize if a player punched out the correct slip. What prize he might win depended on the board. Candy boards and jewelry boards were most popular in Box Elder.¹⁵

“And I’d point,” Dan said. “I was just a little kid, maybe 5 years old, and I’d point to that,” Dan gestured to a hole in an imaginary punchboard.¹⁶

Dan’s father always kept one around his barber shop, and Dan recalled watching many players try their luck:

Snk, snk, the little tight accordion-folded numbers would come out, breaking through their crisp covering, a very attractive sound, new with hope and opportunity. Some fellows would catch them in their hand on the underside, while some would let them fall to the glass showcase. The price was always ten cents a punch, and when things were rolling people would take at least five at a bunch, often ten. Then they’d open them, and when they didn’t win the impulse was always to go on. You see, the board was all the better. Ten punches were gone, and they were *all losers*.¹⁷

Obviously, to beat the punch boards a player would have to win the prize early on because if too many holes were punched the fees to play soon added up to the worth of the prize.

In 1917, Dan Sr. moved his family to Zurich, another small town about sixty miles to the northeast. There, Dan Sr. operated for a short time a pool and dance hall. By 1918, the family moved to Havre, where Dan Sr. sold the homestead to a real estate firm.

While in Havre, Dan wrote his first book, titled Climbers of the Sagebrush Hills. He was 9 at the time and wrote the story after reading Zane Grey’s Riders of the Purple Sage. Dan said the sage-covered hills of the Milk

¹⁵Cushman, Plenty, 132.

¹⁶Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998; *Ibid.*, 3 March 1999.

¹⁷Cushman, Plenty, 133.

River Valley, where Havre sits, influenced his story. He illustrated and bound the story, but later lost it.¹⁸

Dan's early beginning as a writer didn't strike him as unusual.

"Oh, I suppose most all kids sit down, like Penrod, and try to write a story," he said.¹⁹

Dan's daughter, Mary Lou Iverson—who is a teacher in Colorado and goes by the nickname Mimi—said his mother may have been the first to encourage him to write.

"Think about this. It was 1918, or something. There wasn't a lot of things to entertain a kid with in a long Montana winter," Mimi said. "He was much younger than his brother and sister and didn't have a lot of kids to play with. I bet you anything his mother put him up to it."²⁰

By the summer of 1919 the Cushmans had returned to Michigan, to Ann Arbor where Fern and Beecher planned to go to college. Their time there didn't last long, though, as Beecher headed to Colorado after a semester and Fern made a similar move.²¹

Dan Sr. and Rose, perhaps spoiled by the West, weren't partial to their native state either. Dan recalled his father's feelings about Ann Arbor:

He didn't care much about Ann Arbor. Out in Montana everybody spoke to you. You could be a stranger in Havre or Great Falls and stop on the street and people would come along and talk to you. You did that in Ann Arbor and people walked right by. You'd say, "Hey, there!" to some fellow and he'd "lay down his ears and scoot"—Pa's description.

"These sons of bitches all seem scared you'll steal something off them."

¹⁸Montana Committee for the Humanities Awards, videocassette.

¹⁹Cushman, Plenty 188, 182; Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

²⁰Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, Dan Cushman's son and daughter, interview by author, 23 April 1998, Missoula, Mont., tape recording.

²¹Cushman, Plenty, 260.

In Ann Arbor Pa once managed to stop an old man and talk to him.

"Where you hail from?" asked Pa.

"I came from over on Ann Street."

"But where'd you come from in the first place?"

"I was born there."

We lived toward the lower end of Geddes Avenue, and Ann Street, as I recall, was about seven blocks away.

The poor son of a bitch. How pa pitied him.

"What a town to be bogged down in."²²

Dan and his parents soon returned to Big Sandy, which is just ten miles west of Box Elder, and settled permanently. Dan was 11 by then and about to begin his writing career in earnest.

In addition to barbering and running dance halls, Dan Sr. tried to earn a little extra income a number of ways. He was even a tractor salesman for a short time. He made money through his art just once and it was "pretty bad," Dan said. It was of a woman with pythons wrapped around her, an advertisement for the entrance to a snake and freak show.²³

Although Dan's mother grew tired of moving, his father never did.

"One time he saw a picture called the The Silver Horde, and it was about the booming days of salmon along the Alaska Peninsula," Dan said. "And he came home and he was all wild to go to Alaska. My mother said to him, 'I've moved for the last time. You pack your suitcase and go to Alaska,' and that's the last we heard about it. That's the way the old man was. He'd come home wild with enthusiasm, believe this damn fool picture they made down in Hollywood."²⁴

Some time after the Cushmans settled in Big Sandy, his father took a moment down at his barber shop to retrace the places he'd taken his family.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 43.

²⁴Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

“(My father) named over the towns we lived in permanently,” Dan said. “I think it was whatever my age was at the time, 15. And these were the towns we lived in permanently. We lived in a great many others, of course. Those were the towns we’d actually put down roots, his favorite (saying) was, ‘We put down roots and we grew with the country,’ you know that cliché. He loved boom towns, mining towns and capital towns.”²⁵

In the years to come Dan developed a similar fondness, growing to love mining towns the most.

A letter written by 11-year-old Dan to his brother at college leaves the impression that Dan wrote stories regularly at a young age. He already leaned toward comedy and foreshadowing. He also showed some inventive spelling and wild punctuation:

Feb. 24. '21

Dear Beech:

I thought I would send you my latest story It was a chapter out of an other story so you missed the introduction. ma or pa or nobody helped me with a single thing except the spelling of a few words and if you notice some of the words you will think I was indeed helped with a very few. old Miss Bensin our new teacher is going to keep us all in for resess for a week because some sissy's stayed in the hall and cloak room. the danged old fool!...?!xxx-etc. ect.

The teacher up here pronounces corrals—corals like they find in the bottom of the sea. the poor nut—.

well there isent eny news so long—

Dan Cushman

P.S. It looks like a lawyers scribe doesn't it

THE ROMANCE OF A
SHHIMMY
BY S.D. CUSHMAN JR.

One Saturday morning in mid October Al Tompson, Bill Jonson, Jim Laro, Howay Young, and Bob Hauckens were lieing in Bob's hayloft. The

²⁵Ibid., 31 January 1998.

Saturday morning was quiet windy. The boy's were lawing very earnest plans for the circus that was going to be given at 2 oclock in the afternoon. "I thought of sumpin" cried Bob after a long thotful silance, "we could dress Bill up in that ole green silk peace o cloth thats in m- "Well sow you think yer gonna get me to put on or rap that peace o silk around my waist why yuh cin see plumb through that peace of silk put it on yer self."

"Why that ain't nothen when I was down to charltown I saw some girls upon the stage and theyed think they was escmoes if they ever had that much clothes on thear backs and theyed get up and dance and kick like this." and Bob gave a remarkable deminstration of a shimmy and hula-hula combined.

"Yas why dont youh shake yer shimmy yer self I cant see how yuh cin shake it so fast." said Bill regarding Bob coldly.

"Sure go ahead Bob you know how to do it and besides you havent got so much to do as the rest of us." said Jim getting up and trying to get some hayseeds from the back of his neck.

"I've got as much to do as the rest of you ain't it me that's gotta walk the pole ain't it me that's gotta climb the pole huh ain't it me"

"Well now well give yuh the biggest share of the mony and pins and you cin be the clown all through the second act." offered Al. Bob like most boy's excepted the offer. "Alright," he said, "but does that mean I don't pout nuthen on except theat silk you know its only a foot wide and 3 and a half feet long."

11 oclock found 3 big sines posted in diffrent places and there were 5 or 6 children gaping at each of them. one read:

WODERFUL SHOW GIVEN AT BOB'S

BOB WILL CLIMB A POLE AND WOCK A SLACK POLE THE SAME WILL SHAKE A SHIMMY IN HIS WONDERFUL LOW CUT EVENING GOWN. HE'S THE ONLY! ONLY! ONLY! SNAKEDANCER HE'S LIVED WITH SNAKES 2 YEARS AND HAS LERNED HOW THEY DANCE. IT'S THE GREATEST SHOW OF ALL AGES. 5 BIG ACTS 10 MINITS LONG THE ADMITION WILL BE 2 (CENTS) OR 25 PINS OR 15 NAILS NO BENT ONES TAKEN.

—ITS A CIRCUS—

by 1 oclock all the children in town had herd of the show and were trying to shak enough out of the hole in their bank's for admition. 1 oclock also found the circus very sutible They had no circus tent as they made a wall of old rag carpts and gunnysacks At last 2 oclock came and Al was shouting outside. "Comeand see this wonderful circus, It's the greatest show of all age's, come, ladies and gentilmen come and see Bob in his wonderful low cut evening gown the show will start in 5 minutes the admician is only 2 (cents) one 20th part of a dollar." ect. ect.

when the place had about 15 children in it the circus begun. Bill stuck his head out of the barn window and said. "Now I present to you Huchie Cuchie the first and only snakedance, the first and only watch him." Bob pranced out with the peace of silk and it hung loosely to his nees (the peace of silk

was all he had on) Bob's mother was looking out of the window watching the performance and she seemed petrified to her chair at sight of "Huchie cuchie" Bob first crouched down and he didn't exactly know what had happen until it was all over "but somehow the string that held up his evening gown busted" and at the same time the wind tuck it up over the barn Bob's mother said one word "**ROBERT**," the boy's flew to their several homes while Bob suffered the consequences.²⁶

True to his Cushman blood, Dan was turning out different from those around him. He wasn't one for clubs or sports, which often define the adolescent years for many kids in towns like Big Sandy.

"I wasn't much good to tell you the truth," Dan said. "I was slow and too light. I didn't spend much time on the playing field. Never played a game of basketball. Nothing attracted me."²⁷

He also was also not charmed by the cowboy image. This was probably a little unusual for a Big Sandy kid. Cowboys were ubiquitous to this high plains country, and such well-known originals as Charlie Russell had ridden the range nearby.

Perhaps this disinterest is one of the earliest signs of how different Dan was, not only from other children, but also from his brother. Beecher had done all he could to strike the cowboy pose ten years earlier when the Cushmans lived in Box Elder.

He was thirteen and wanted to be a cowboy. Beech had nailed extra leather on the heels of his shoes so they were raised like riding boots; he had bought some old spurs for 50 cents; and he refused to wear suspenders, letting his pants hang low on his hips.

"Pull your pants up," Pa would say, "You can see the crack of your ass."
...Beech with his heels, spurs and low-hung pants was evincing no lofty ambitions because in that day cowboys were not highly regarded.²⁸

²⁶Dan Cushman to Beecher Cushman, 25 February 1921, provided by Doug Giebel, Dan Cushman's nephew.

²⁷Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

²⁸Cushman, Plenty, 9.

Dan did appreciate western history, though. In a letter to editor of the Great Falls Tribune in 1978, Dan recalled how a childhood hunt for Indian art in the country just south of Big Sandy turned up instead an early work of Charlie Russell.

In the early 1920s, when I was a boy living in Big Sandy, Dave Tingley, son of the pioneer ranching family, remarked (laughingly) that if I was interested in Indian lore, which I was, I should seek out an Indian writing-on-stone on a knoll about three miles to the south on the Judith road. My brother-in-law, Edmund Giebel, and I thereupon searched it out and found it covered with grass and drift sand, and quite a number of curious made the same journey, with some speculation as to what it said.

Time passed, and one day hearing a remark about the stone, Mr. R.S. (Babe) Tingley, Dave's brother, scoffed and said, "That's not Indian writing. Charlie Russell did that one summer when he was staying at the ranch. (The Tingley home ranch was about a mile to the west.) He was a couple days trying to find out how the Indians did it."²⁹

It was this type of history that caused Dan to seek out settings where he'd find adult men conversing. He liked to sit and listen.

"I'd hang around Pep Williford's bar and poolroom," Dan said. "There was an old left-handed pitcher who had been everywhere, a great storyteller (who) knew all the French novelists. It would surprise you sometimes who you would sometimes run on to, who on paper were uneducated, but they had educated themselves. He was a very well read man and I don't think he ever got out of the eighth grade."³⁰

Dan especially enjoyed adults who "had a great deal of history behind them."³¹

²⁹Great Falls Tribune, 17 December 1978, 12.

³⁰Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

³¹Ibid.

One man who was paramount to Dan during his years in Big Sandy was C.J. McNamara. McNamara, who had a towering role in the community of Big Sandy, was a man of wealth. Many people respect him there to this day.

“McNamara would be my choice as the most important man I ever knew,” Dan said. “He was generous. His own generosity embarrassed him.”³²

Dan described McNamara as an “unusual man” who perhaps spent time in the military. McNamara came to Montana in 1879 and invested in the Big Sandy area.³³ He, along with a couple other businessmen, later owned part of the Montana Central Railroad, a branch of the Great Northern that ran through town, and he owned most of the M & M Ranch, a large cattle operation in the Bear Paw Mountains.³⁴

McNamara also owned a mercantile, an implement dealership, and the bank in Big Sandy. He was the first state senator from Chouteau County.³⁵

“He believed in the term noblesse oblige,” Dan said. “He saw it was his privilege, his obligation, to take care of the poor people in his domain. That makes him sound more arrogant than he was.”³⁶

When Dan was about 12, he spent time with a geologist who also made a strong impression.³⁷ Not only was he a scientist, the man was an outrageous storyteller, Dan said.

³²Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

³³Ibid.

³⁴A large portion of this ranch still exists as the IX Ranch southeast of Big Sandy.

³⁵Doug Giebel, “The Big Sandy, Montana Centennial Calendar 1885 to 1985,” (Big Sandy: The Performing Arts Group, 1984).

³⁶Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

³⁷For some reason, discretion perhaps for whatever reason, Dan always refrained from using this man’s real name. Instead, Dan called him “Doc” or “Dr. Downey,” the same name that he gave the main character of his novel Goodbye Old Dry, but I don’t believe either are names

He had a Ph.D. and carried his Doctor's cap and gown with him everywhere so he could put it on at a moment's notice in case he was asked to speak. He was a true man of learning, although it often seemed diminished because of the high regard he expressed for himself at all conceivable opportunities.

"Well, I see by the public press that they took my advice," Doc would say. "They finally got around to opening the tomb of Tutankhatmen." And he would tell how he had been instrumental in locating the spot through translation of some hieroglyphics in the Cairo Museum when he was in charge of the archeological field group for Oxford University. Or we might be driving down the street past Pep Williford's saloon in his Packard car, which was on the scale of a Palace Pullman; he'd hear a couple of old, itinerant musicians playing the *Herd Girl's Dream* on the violin and harp, and he'd slam on the brakes and in we'd go. "That's as fine as anything I heard in the great opera houses of Europe," he'd cry out, and drop a whole silver dollar in the tin cup. He was a liar, but on a grand scale, and practically non-stop. He had read vastly in almost every subject one could think of. The combination of learning and braggadocio was awesome, as those who set out to deflate him soon found out, and he would leave them one and all routed, or in shock.³⁸

There was no way for Dan to know that this combination of men of history, self-taught storytellers, and flamboyant scientists would ultimately have more influence on his life than any formal education he would receive.

Still, there were a couple other people in Big Sandy who, whether they knew it or not, greatly affected Dan's life. They were writers whose presence in Big Sandy impressed upon Dan that a career in writing was a real possibility. In 1966, Dan recalled how their livelihoods affected him:

At the age of fourteen I confessed to my father that I wanted to become a writer, an ambition which so met with his approbation that he ordered, on a free trial basis, the *Elinor Glyn Course in Short Story Writing*. There are two things I remember about the course. One was that it was never paid for. My father had ordered it in my name and letters from New Jersey lawyers

the man went by. I do believe the fictitious Dr. Downey Dan created resembles very closely the man Dan hung around in his youth.

³⁸Dan Cushman, *The Great North Trail: America's Route of the Ages*, The American Trail Series, Vol. 8 (New York: McGraw-Hill), 371.

were still reaching me years later after I went away to college. The other was a piece of advice Miss Glyn offered. "Write about what you know," she said. "What is dull and routine to you may be entrancing to somebody else. If you are a beauty operator, lay your story in a beauty shop. If you are a bricklayer, write about bricklaying."

At that time I was nothing much, but I lived in Montana, in *The West*, land of cowboys, gold and Indians, the most marketable scene a writer could have. As proof of that I did not even have to go to the newsstand and see the flaming magazine covers of the day. I had only to look across several sage-covered lots to the Great Northern Railroad section house where, until very recently, had lived B.M. Bower, schoolteacher, wife of Bower the section boss, and author of, among others, the best-selling *Chip of the Flying U*. And by looking farther I could see the high false front and mounted elk horns of Barney Van Alstyne's Exchange Saloon where Bertrand W. Sinclair, "The Fiddleback Kid," had tended bar. Fiddleback had made his literary mark also. When Mr. Bower was out working on the section and they were free of nonliterary distractions, Mrs. Bower and Fiddleback had collaborated, the result being novels with the hard-driving Sinclair story line and the creamy Bower dialogue, characterization and syntax. A collateral result was that Mrs. Bower became Mrs. Sinclair, and some of her stories had been signed B.M. Sinclair. But of the time I write she had married yet again, and resumed her old *nom*, while Fiddleback was one of the fixtures of the pulp magazines.

I sold no short stories, but my interest got me on as an apprentice printer at the local *Bear Paw Mountaineer*, and correspondent, at 15 cents an inch, for the *Great Falls Tribune*.

There is nothing that encourages a writer like seeing his stuff in print, and the realization that my accounts of local car-loadings, deaths and basketball games were being read all over Montana was strong wine indeed.³⁹

A school superintendent was the previous correspondent for Big Sandy, but the job fell into Dan's lap when the superintendent left for a summer.

Although the superintendent had focused mainly on basketball games, an editor at the Great Falls Tribune told Dan the paper wanted agriculture to be the main focus.

Dan was in an ideal spot for such news, as the railroad made Big Sandy an important shipping point in those days. He often saw parked trains more than

³⁹ibid., 369.

a mile long waiting to be filled with grain, and watched ranchers arrive at the town's stockyards after trailing their cattle from sixty miles away.⁴⁰

Between his correspondence work and other odd jobs, Dan did well for a teenager in Big Sandy. He took pride in his ability to earn money without breaking his back.

"I used to shine shoes at my dad's barber shop, things like that, you know, and I made pretty good money out of the Tribune," Dan said. "I had the reputation of being the laziest person in town. And even my brother-in-law one time said, 'He's been around here all summer and hasn't lifted a finger.' I said, 'Good God, do you want to know what I've made,' and I illuminated to him I made more money than he did. But you see in Big Sandy they felt that if you didn't have to have your hands half soiled, you weren't working."⁴¹

Dan found that his writing greatly improved with every assignment. This was largely due to the fact that the Great Falls Tribune wouldn't stand for overwriting.

Besides earning money and being edited, Dan learned something about human nature with his correspondence work. Since his editors wouldn't allow any more words than necessary, Dan filled his copy with as many names as he could.

"Vladimer Christopherson and so on, great big long names, you know, I was getting 15 cents an inch for those great big long names," Dan said, smiling at the thought of it.

The newspaper benefited from the addition of so many names as well.

⁴⁰Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

⁴¹Ibid.

“I discovered that people who have their names in print will do anything to get ahold of that paper,” he said. Public events with lots of locals attending were a bonanza. The more names, the more sales. “So, the Tribune wasn’t as dumb as my 15-year-old mind thought they were.”⁴²

But, as Dan became more proficient with the reporting and writing, he grew tired of the newspaper writing style.

[I]t was not long before the limitations of the news form became apparent. It is not a large accomplishment to answer the five W’s—who-what-when-where and why—in the opening sentence and to develop them in succeeding paragraphs, an organization prized for coherence, and because it allows the hurried editor to whack off with a long pair of shears as much of your story as he can use, leaving it complete to that point, but no chance for suspense, no climax. The *Mountaineer*, where I often set up my work directly from the fonts, gave more latitude; but I met what seemed a cloddish lack of appreciation for my finest efforts.⁴³

Over time, Dan also learned that a community didn’t always appreciate an honest reporter. One experience in particular left a bitter taste that would always remain in Dan’s mouth.

He attended a meeting where it was mentioned that the M & M Ranch, having the first water rights for Big Sandy Creek, was using all of the water to irrigate its fields. The upshot was the town of Big Sandy didn’t have water to fill its watertower and, therefore, had no way of fighting fire if one were to start. Of course, this meant that McNamara, owner of the ranch and Dan’s idol, was compromising the town’s safety for hay production.

“I wrote, oh, I don’t know, about that long (Dan put roughly 10 inches between his fingers) about the fire danger in Big Sandy and all it meant to me was about 15 cents an inch,” he said. “But when I came down town, Jesus! Everybody was after me saying they’ll cancel our (fire) insurance. And my

⁴²Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

⁴³Cushman, North Trail, 369.

answer to that was, 'That story's the truth! If you don't want the truth don't read the newspaper.' I was probably fighting like a cornered dog.

"I was walking up the street and McNamara was coming across the street and his second in command, the president of the bank, came out and stopped me about it. He said, 'What a damn fool thing that was to write.' I said, 'Well, you guys are taking the water aren't you.' I said, 'All you got to do is turn the water loose and they can fill some water in that tank,' which was the truth," Dan said.

"McNamara was standing across the street and (had heard me) and he walked by me like that," Dan said, making a disgruntled face. He added with a laugh, "He was madder than hell. It should be the conclusion that they turned the water loose, but they didn't do it."

After that the bank president wouldn't speak to Dan, but McNamara not only spoke to him, he helped him a few years later.

"Now this is the difference between two men," Dan said.⁴⁴

Dan's own father raised hell with him when he read the article.

"What were you thinking about when you sent that off to the paper?" he said.

But Dan's mother had the opposite reaction.

"Don't you worry about it," she said, "you just told the truth."⁴⁵

Dan summed up his time as a correspondent by saying, "It was in Big Sandy where I learned all the trouble you can cause by printing all the news of a small town. You know you can get by with some of the lies. It's the truth you can't print."⁴⁶

⁴⁴Dan Cushman, author, interview by author, 3 March 1999, Great Falls, Mont., tape recording.

⁴⁵Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

If Dan turned away from writing for a while, the time it afforded him he spent reading. A self-described lousy student, he was able to worm his way into the library. It kept him out of trouble and broadened his mind.

“We had one hell of a library,” Dan said. “It was all bound in red silk and gold edgings at the top and every book I opened, like the Koran or something, would go zing, zing, zing. Nobody had read it before in all those years.”⁴⁷

Dan said he persuaded school administrators to let him take care of the library.

“The librarian in Big Sandy High School was also the home economics teacher in the basement and the library was on the top floor. And she had a hard time,” he said.

Taking care of the library allowed Dan to delve into such classics as Moby Dick.⁴⁸

“He opens with the line, ‘Call me Ishmael.’ I liked it,” Dan said. “I thought it was a whang-up good book about whales, when I read it (then). After I got to college it was full of symbols and shmimbles, but I always thought it was just a good book about whales. And I guessed that fella was building his own coffin. I thought, ‘Ishmael’s going to end up in there.’”

“I remember they had a complete Darwin (set). That surprised me as I read it. I expected to be shocked, but Darwin got poorer as I went along.”

Dan watched over the library the last two and half years of his time in high school and beyond that whenever he could.

⁴⁶Great Falls Tribune, 7 January 1968, tab 2.

⁴⁷Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

⁴⁸Dan Cushman, author, interview by author, 2 March 1999, Great Falls, Mont., tape recording.

“After I’d left high school and I was (still) in Big Sandy, I’d get the key and say, ‘It should be aired out.’ That was my library. But to this day, I bet you can go up there and find books I hadn’t got to, hadn’t touched, hadn’t reached yet, and you can open them and they’ll go zing, zing, zing....”⁴⁹

⁴⁹Ibid., 31 January 1998.

CHAPTER II

FROM COLLEGE STUDENT TO PULP WRITER

*A man may write any time, if he will set himself
doggedly to it.*

—Samuel Johnson.

Dan graduated from Big Sandy High School in 1928 with a desire to attend college. Although Dan had told his father years before that he wanted to be a writer, he didn't want to pursue that calling alone. Thanks to being born a rock hound and spending time with Big Sandy's worldly scientist, Doc, he went to college a year after high school with a leaning toward geology.

As he left for college his father gave him some advice:

Learn something so that you can be your own boss. Don't ever get tied down where you'll spend your life taking order from some son of a bitch. I'd rather have a liverwurst stand on the corner than the best God damn job in the United States.¹

He enrolled in the fall of 1929 at Northern Montana College in Havre. "I got some pretty good stuff up at Havre. I got [some] science that I needed, biology and botany. I didn't get geology until I went to Dillon," Dan said.²

Dan studied just one quarter at Havre before he transferred to Dillon. In October of 1930, during his third quarter at Dillon, his father died of a paralytic stroke. The Great Falls Tribune ran an article headlined "Dan Cushman of Big

¹Cushman, Plenty, 54.

²Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1998.

Sandy Passes Away.” Beneath the headline it said, “Funeral held for Pioneer Barber; Was Friend of All Children.”³

When Dan was back in Big Sandy for the funeral, McNamara stopped him on the street and asked him if he still had an account at his bank.

“Yeah, I got \$20 in it,” Dan replied.

McNamara didn’t care about his balance.

“You will write checks against that account,” McNamara said, “and we will hold them until such time that you can make them good.”⁴

Dan went home and told his mother, but she didn’t believe him. He wrote checks toward the account adding up to about a \$150 to \$200 overdraft. He later learned from a clerk that when one of these checks arrived at the bank the manager would “throw it on the floor and jump on it.”

“‘Another Goddamn bum check from Cushman!’ the manager would exclaim,” Dan said. “But then he’d wipe it off and lay it on the counter because there was nothing else he could do.”⁵

Dan attended five quarters at Dillon before transferring to The University of Montana in Missoula, where he spent the fall quarter of 1931. He said he did “spectacularly badly” in school, having some unsavory but maturing experiences.⁶

³Great Falls Tribune, 9 October 1930, 4.

⁴Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

“To please my brother I joined something called the Sigma Chi, socially the leading fraternity there,” he said “I lasted a record of, oh, I must have lasted a couple weeks,” Dan said.

He did not fit in with that group and did not try to.

“(P)retty soon they got me up on the carpet,” he said. “I had bought a new beautiful red shirt with white buttons and I wore it to the football game. (It was) a wool shirt. I had bought down at the Missoula Mercantile and it was expensive. It caused some trouble because for some reason that was a dull, gray society at that time. I don’t know why. I don’t think it would be commented on today.

“So, they called me on the carpet at the Sigma Chi and they said, ‘Cushman we noticed you at the football game and we noticed you were wearing a red shirt. Now that may be all right for out deer hunting, but us Sigs don’t do that sort of thing,’” Dan said, mimicking their grim faces.

“They were seniors see. There were three of them sitting there looking at me. I wish I had a camera. But then they came to the nub of it. He says, ‘I notice you’ve been palling around with somebody, a fella, he’s a nigger or sumphin.’

“I never forget that ‘a nigger or sumphin,’ s-u-m-p-h-i-n, sumphin. This,” he said laughing, “from a senior at the University of Montana.”

Dan said he didn’t stand up for himself or his friend, whose name he didn’t recall. Instead he just left and never returned.

“But I didn’t go back,” Dan said. “I never went back. I don’t think I was a fraternity man, I could see that. I didn’t fit in with that class. I didn’t fit in with the rest of the student body.”⁷

⁷Ibid.

Dan then took the winter quarter of 1932 off and worked in Helena, studying old newspapers.

“There was a mining company that wanted me to work up there,” Dan said. “Instead of going into these mining camps and opening up the old tunnels and shafts like that it (was) much cheaper to go through the old newspapers. The Historical Society has files of those old newspapers and they’d print everything. You can believe everything you read in those because you’re talking to people in camp. But you can’t believe everything they say (at the present) because they’ll remember the way they want to, see. So, the easiest way to get the history of those mining camps is to go through the old newspapers, one after the other, including the five and a half pinion type or whatever size type they print the legals in. That might be the most important thing.

“I worked around Helena, for one winter that way, doing that sort of thing and getting paid for it, not a great deal, but I got paid, and damn good food over at Eybel’s Cafe. Back in those days you could get a full meal at Eybel’s Cafe for about 25 cents. That was the depth of the Depression.”⁸

Dan enjoyed his time in Helena but in the spring of 1932, he returned to classes in Dillon.

“I fit in best in Dillon,” Dan said. “They had a very superior president and the faculty was superior. It really was. I liked the town. Few people locked their doors.”

Dan remembered one house in particular, belonging to a wealthy man who’d made a fortune in shipping.

⁸Ibid., 25 January 1998.

“He had all the new books by the current authors, all the book club books like that. Like most all readers, he was generous with his advantage,” Dan said.⁹

While at Dillon, Dan was able to learn more about geology, liking that it was a combination of geography, chemistry and physics. He also worked in an assayers office while he was in school. The man who ran the office would leave in the winter and Dan watched over the office. “There wasn’t much work to do (then), only with underground miners because you couldn’t prospect with the snow on the ground,” Dan said.

He remembered some of the things he saw, especially from one graphite mine.

“It wasn’t constant or continuous enough to make money, but they had some beautiful specimens they’d bring in,” Dan said. “It looked just like silver. It looked like handfuls of silver fluoride, but it was solid graphite and you rub it and your hands would be black.”¹⁰

Dan learned to appreciate the optimism that mining country afforded people, an optimism amplified to a level rarely seen in the agricultural setting of Big Sandy.

“In mining country,” Dan said, “everybody thinks they’ll be rich next year.”¹¹

Dan became acquainted with people who brought in specimens and liked hearing their stories. These conversations would come in handy later in life.

“Tell what I’d do. I worked with geological surveyors and those guys would wander all over the world and I would sit and keep my mouth shut and

⁹Ibid., 31 January 1998.

¹⁰Ibid., 29 October 1997.

¹¹Ibid., 19 October 1997.

listen,” Dan said. “I had a good memory. Their conversations were half attitude. They all had a certain attitude.”

He liked the surveyors and their flare.

“You sit and listen to those guys talk, the attitude in their conversations was interesting,” he said.

After seven more quarters at Dillon, Dan had earned a bachelor’s degree in education with a major in social science and minors in science and English. Over the years, Dan would forget that his was an education degree and choose to say instead that he had a degree in science. He graduated in the spring of 1934.

“I had enough credits to get a master’s degree someplace, I suppose, if I strung them together,” he said. “But there was no point in it. I didn’t want to teach.”¹²

After he graduated from college, Dan, then 25, was “chased around by the Depression.”¹³ He prospected for a little while, living in a camp tent, and he served as secretary, or perhaps treasurer, of a mining venture. But his involvement is unclear. His mining days likely were spent in the Dillon area.¹⁴

Dan returned to Great Falls by 1935 with the intention of getting a job with either the Great Falls Tribune or its afternoon affiliate, the Great Falls Leader. He was willing to give the newspaper industry another chance.¹⁵

¹²Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997. I retrieved the exact details of where and when Dan went to school and what he studied from the registrar’s office at Western Montana College of The University of Montana in Dillon.

¹³Great Falls Tribune, 11 November 1996, 1A.

¹⁴Bob Cushman, Dan Cushman’s son, email to author, 16 March 1999.

¹⁵Polk’s Great Falls (Montana) City Directory (R.L. Polk & Co.) 1935.

Dan found no openings at the papers and instead went to work at KFBB radio, then housed in the First National Bank Building in downtown Great Falls. He took a room not far away, in an apartment building at the head of First Avenue North.

He may not have known it when he first hired on, but working for radio would turn out to be an important experience. Radio demanded a different style of writing than what he'd learned at the newspaper. It was a style that was more easily understood.

"I would write a quarter-hour news broadcast, which would take me an hour and a half," Dan said. "And it had to be readable. By God, it had to be readable! And if it wasn't, you found out. As long as I could keep [the announcer] happy so that he could read that on the air without hesitation, I knew that I was writing pretty well. That is where I really learned to write in a professional manner."¹⁶

Dan also announced and because he spoke like his mother, people thought he was a little different. "Again" would come out with a hard a.¹⁷

"I learned my English at home," Dan explained, "and (when) I went to work for the radio my brother said, 'You learned all those mispronunciations from your mother.'"

Dan gave an example of saying "motorcycle" with a soft i sound for the "y."

"As it happened, she was right," Dan said. "That's what the old dictionary would say. When you hear them jump out at you over the radio, you notice it. But I didn't try to correct myself because I thought I was correct already."¹⁸

¹⁶Montana Committee for the Humanities Awards, videocassette.

¹⁷ Doug Giebel, Dan Cushman's nephew, interview by author, 26 May 1998, Big Sandy, Mont., tape recording.

Then Dan suffered a setback after working with KFBB for a time.

"I was making the princely sum of \$119 a month, which was more or less quite a bit of money then," Dan said. "Then they hired a girl for \$75 a month."¹⁹

The station let Dan go, but he understood the decision. She did everything he did, but for less. Dan found work in Idaho for a short time, perhaps in 1936 or 1937. While he was there he worked in three different locations: Idaho Falls, Rexburg and Blackfoot, these towns being south of Dillon.

Sometime in 1937, Dan returned to Great Falls and moved into an apartment on Central Avenue. He went to work for the advertising department of the Great Falls Tribune. His brother had been working there and by the next year Beecher was the head of the department.

"I didn't care much for advertising," Dan said. "I wrote some and dummied the paper. I kind of got fun out of dummying the paper. You know, how it all goes together. I would pyramid the ads and stuff like that."²⁰

Dan didn't mind rewriting the ads he'd pick up on his beat. And he saw himself as a detriment to those people in radio who fired him some time before.

"I was the worst competition the radio station could have because I knew the beats of everybody in town," he said.²¹

He went to the different advertisers, convincing them that the paper gave the best bang for the buck. He spoke to The Hub Clothing Company, which had "every name brand there was, every name brand," and told them, "You're the only people in town who have Arrow shirts," Dan told them. "You just (buy an ad that says) 'Arrow shirts, Hub Clothing Company.'"

¹⁸Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

¹⁹Ibid., 29 October 1997.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 25 January 1998.

"I was taking three-fourths of their money. The radio station hated me," Dan said, laughing.²²

Dan persuaded the clothing store to buy five small ads from the Tribune that got right to the point, instead of the minute-long radio commercials. Dan said no one wanted to listen to these long commercials and told the store owner, "You can't describe a Hart Schaffner and Marx suit. [T]hey can look at pictures of them in Esquire."²³

The Great Falls Liberty Theater was another prized advertiser for the radio and newspapers. After approaching its owner, Dan found a way to garner more ads from him.

"I would get long promotional stuff of various stars from Hollywood, see, from up at the Liberty Theater," Dan said. "They knew that if they sent it to the Tribune, (the paper) wouldn't print it because it was all set up in boiler plates. I would take and rewrite it. No one knew that what's her name used to live in Pony, Montana." Dan laughed.

Dan didn't think the stars would mind because it was publicity for them.

"Before I was through every star in Hollywood had been in Montana."²⁴

Dan made \$25 a week working for the Tribune advertising department.

"Chinamen's wages, if you'll excuse the racist slur," he said.

But as he visited the businesses on his beat he found an incentive that made keeping a close eye on their ad needs worthwhile.

"What I prized was not their advertising for the paper. I didn't worry about that," Dan said. "I had a place in (each business) where I could type."²⁵

²²Ibid., 29 October 1997.

²³Ibid., 25 January 1998.

²⁴Ibid, 29 October 1997.

²⁵Ibid., 25 January 1998.

This typing was unrelated to the advertising department or the newspaper. Instead, these idle typewriters were key to Dan embarking on his career as a pulp fiction writer.

In fact, Dan found the Liberty Theater's office, on Central Avenue, an exceptional place for writing.

"I wrote a lot of stories up there," Dan said. The owner "had a hell of a good typewriter. I wrote more of my stories at (the theater) than I did at any place else."²⁶

Pulp fiction was to the first half of the twentieth century what TV would be to the second half. In one account of pulp fiction's history, Jeff Dykes, an editor of Westerns, said it belonged to the "third of four great publishing movements to provide leisure-time reading matter for the masses at a price within reach of all."

The first movement, Dykes explained, consisted of short novels and novelettes, known as "yellow backs," published roughly between the 1830s and the 1860s. These stories cost a reader about 12 cents. The second movement was the dime novel, which was most prevalent between the 1860s and 1885. Pulp magazines emerged in the 1870s, but didn't compete with dime novels until the advent of the twentieth century. Dime novels petered out around World War I, and the pulp magazine heyday arrived in the 1920s.

"[I]t is said that at its peak as many as three hundred different pulp magazines were issued each week," Dykes said. "The contents varied, of course, but a rather typical issue would include a novel (short), a novelette (or long short

²⁶Ibid.

story) and three or four short stories plus a fact feature (usually illustrated) and almost invariably a letters-to-the-editor column,” Dykes said.²⁷

A pulp magazine usually sold for 25 cents.

In 1939 the first pocket books came on the scene, targeting the pulp magazine readers. Pulp remained popular until the 1950s and Dan cashed in on the movement’s last decade.

Pulp fiction ranged from weird tales to detective stories to romance, but Dan saw his opportunity in adventure writing. Certain publishers “thought there was a great shortage of jungle stories, a great shortage of northern stories,” Dan said.²⁸

Although much pulp fiction is looked upon as violent or sleazy or sub-literary, “adventure writing was a legitimate attempt at showing people the world,” Dan said.

“They would try to find people who would do it. Of course, you’re either a writer or you’re not,” he said. “You don’t find too many sailors that come home and start writing books.”²⁹

Dan was the opposite of a worldly sailor. Not since childhood had he spent much time outside of Montana, but if telling stories like a sailor could earn him an income through writing, he was up for the challenge. As Dan prepared to write pulps in the late 1930s, he drew from his conversations with the worldly geological surveyors and the attitudes they possessed. He also began searching the library for facts on far away places.

²⁷John M. Carroll, ed., Eggenhofer: The Pulp Years (Fort Collins, Colo.: The Old Army Press, 1975), 3.

²⁸Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

²⁹Ibid., 2 March 1999.

Combining facts with attitude, Dan began spinning yarns of adventure. Soon he was sending manuscripts off to pulp publishers.

As Dan embarked on his career, the only ace-in-the-hole he had was the time he had spent listening to entertaining storytellers and the belief he could do just as good a job. And he had the addresses of the magazines.

“I had no contacts. I would just send them to the publisher,” he said. It was called, “coming over the transom. I just did it myself. There was no way to do it, except to just do it.”³⁰

Around the time Dan was breaking into the pulps, he crossed paths with his future wife. Betty Lou Loudon was his landlord’s daughter. She was from Great Falls and recently had graduated from college. When Dan met her, she was living with her mother, Dan’s landlord, and working for the Great Falls Recreation Department.³¹

Dan’s daughter, Mimi, recalled how her mother and father met.

“The story is my grandmother lured,” Mimi paused and clarified—“this is [Dad’s] story not my mother’s—that my grandmother kind of lured him into the apartment to have, you know, dessert and to play pinochle and so on. And this was her master plan to entrap him into marrying her daughter.”³²

Dan and Betty wed June 10, 1940, after dating for about a year. He was 31 and she was 23. Both Catholic, they were married in St. Ann’s Cathedral in Great Falls. Part of the newspaper notice read:

³⁰Ibid., 31 January 1998.

³¹Great Falls Tribune, 16 November 1979, 7.

³²Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998; Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998; Great Falls Tribune, 11 June 1940, 6.

Miss Jean Vines of Butte attended the bride and Beecher Cushman acted as the best man. For the ceremony the bride wore a pink and blue street ensemble with white accessories and a corsage of gardenias.

The service was followed by a breakfast at the Park Hotel, where covers were laid for 18. Roses and lilies of the valley and ivory tapers were used in decorations.

Immediately following the breakfast, Mr. and Mrs. Cushman left for Helena from where they were to fly that afternoon to Seattle. They will make their home in this city.³³

Following their honeymoon, they bought their first home, a small, humble house located at 416 North Eleventh Street, near what was then the Deaconess Hospital. Dan resumed his work at the Great Falls Tribune. And at some point during the early 1940s, Dan also reported and photographed for the Great Falls Leader. He vaguely remembered that as a Leader reporter he was expected to turn in one local story each day with a photo.

Unfortunately, this period of his life is unclear. Whether he worked in both the Tribune's advertising department and the Leader's news room simultaneously, or was moved from the ad department to the newsroom, he cannot say with certainty.

What is clear of the early 1940s was Dan's relentless pursuit of the pulps. He wrote fiction whenever he could, and like most beginning writers, he had his share of rejections. The rejections said that his stories were too long. He learned to scale them back and his persistence paid off.

"I wrote a long-winded story," Dan said, "and I got a letter back from the editor. It said, 'I'm sorry but there's too damn many words.' Instead of rewriting it, I wrote another and it sold. I sold it for \$130, which in those days was a hell of a good month's wages."³⁴

³³Great Falls Tribune, 11 June 1940, 6.

³⁴Dan Cushman, author, interview by author, 30 June 1998, Great Falls, Mont., tape recording.

In fact, this was \$30 more than he made in a month working for the advertising department.

Dan earned this first money writing pulp in 1940 for a story on the frozen north. It paid for his appendix operation needed around the same time.³⁵

But the story didn't see the light of day until 1943, as the pulps often bought stories well in advance of publishing them.³⁶ When the story finally came out the Great Falls Tribune ran a brief on his accomplishment:

The first story by Dan Cushman, local writer, to appear in print is now on newsstands here in North-West Romances, published by Glen Kel Publishing Co. of New York City.

Its title is "Girl of the Golden Lode," and its setting is the Alaskan placer camps, and the experiences of Blake Colbrook, involved in a mesh of northland murder and intrigue.

Cushman in the past few months has sold a number of novelettes and stories to the action type magazine.³⁷

Another first for Dan about this time was his daughter. Mary Lou was born in 1942.

For a time it looked as though Dan would be shipped off to World War II. The draft board called Dan and he went to Salt Lake City for a physical. O.S. Worden, then owner of the Great Falls Tribune, intervened with the draft board on Dan's behalf, as well as that of some other employees, and Dan did not have to go to war.³⁸

The war had a definite effect on Great Falls. Once a town defined by cows, crops and hydropower, in the early 1940s it also became home to an air

³⁵Ibid.; Ibid., 3 March 1999.

³⁶Jon Tuska, Dan Cushman's agent, interview by author, June 1998, by phone from Portland, Ore.

³⁷Great Falls Tribune, 14 November 1943, 12.

³⁸Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999.

force base. It was an exciting time for the town, as it helped diversify the economy and help it grow.

After this brief hiatus, Dan returned to writing. A few successful adventures about Africa, the Far East and the Northwest, didn't mean Dan's career had taken flight. In fact, Dan worried that readers might realize he had never been near many of the places he wrote about.

Then one day he received a letter from a person in South Africa who had read one of his jungle stories.

"(He) wrote, yeah, he knew what I was talking about this tribe and that tribe, but I was wrong about this one," Dan said. "I had the guy fooled who was living in Elizabethville! So I thought what the hell was I worried about?"

The letter also drove home how widespread the popularity of pulp fiction was.

"Adventure was read all over the world," Dan said. "It really was."³⁹

John Jakes—the acclaimed author of the bestseller North and South, published in 1982, as well as numerous other historical novels—said that during the 1940s Dan's byline hooked him every time. Jakes recalled that Dan's writing was "vivid, swiftly paced, holding the reader to the last word." Dan was a fine writer by anyone's standard, Jakes continues, "by the standards of the pulp magazines he was a literary star."

"What I liked most about Cushman stories—still do—is the wealth of specific detail that brings alive the locale and period," Jakes recalled. "As an

³⁹Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998; *Ibid.*, 2 March 1999.

aspiring beginner, I wondered how he did his tricks; worked his magic. I had no knowledge or research method, or how you take personal experience and use it in crafting fiction.”⁴⁰

Dan shared some of his tricks with me.

“I had a book put out by the Japanese,” he said, pausing before remembering its title. “It was called Glimpses of the East, and it described every port that the Japanese lined. That was an invaluable book. And I got another book, designed for the Merchant Marines. It was that thick,” he said, holding his thumb and forefinger three or four inches apart.

“And I subscribed to a magazine that was devoted to independent steamboat companies,” Dan said. “It would have columns called ‘Guideline Chatter’ and like that. Get all the terminology. Terminology is the hardest thing. The fact of a certain port, that’s easy. Terminology is tough.”⁴¹

Dan said he created a system that helped him develop stories: “I would find an old copy of a magazine and read a good story. I would turn it on its head. I would tell it from the villain’s point-of-view.”

That was a technique Dan used throughout his career, especially when writing light fiction.

“Now by doing that you’d change the entire attitude of the story. Telling it from the villain’s point-of-view, he becomes the hero,” Dan said.⁴²

⁴⁰Dan Cushman, Voyageurs of the Midnight Sun, with Foreword by John Jakes (Hampton Falls, N.H.: Sagebrush Large Print, 1995), 2.

⁴¹Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

⁴²Ibid.

In 1943, Dan and Betty bought their second home in Great Falls at 2719 Second Avenue South, a one story cottage-like house.

He spent more and more time writing fiction each year. He'd write when others went to lunch, and during working hours he sat in the dime store with big sheets of yellow paper, penning a thousand or two thousand words.

In the spring of 1945, Betty gave birth to a boy, Robert who'd go by Bob. About six months later, Dan quit his job at the newspaper when he realized that he made more money writing fiction.⁴³ Dan also had never forgotten the advice his father gave him years before about not having to take orders from someone else.

If Dan ever second-guessed his decision to become a full-time freelancer, he doesn't talk about it. All that he remembers was an insatiable market.

"I have had copies of the North-West Romances come out that consist of three novelettes and I wrote all three of them, one under my own name and the other two under pen names, house names," Dan said.⁴⁴

Pulp magazines often kept house names in case they needed to create the illusion more than one writer contributed to an issue. Dan's current literary agent Jon Tuska, who has helped Dan republish some of his pulp work as books,

⁴³Ibid, 6 June 1998; Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999; Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

⁴⁴Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

said some of the house names that magazines used on Dan's stories were "John Starr" and "Tom O'Neal."

Dan wrote more than 125 stories, short novels and novelettes, between 1943 and 1955. Tuska believed this work was an apprenticeship for Dan.

"The most important point about pulp fiction is you had a latitude in the kinds of stories you could tell," Tuska said.

That was because pulp fiction magazines didn't carry advertising. Advertising often determines the scope of a publication and a magazine with no advertising is like a land without fences, writers can roam. And Dan, through his adventures, roamed the world.

Pulp writing paid two cents a word and once Dan had made his mark he was expected to deliver a short novel every quarter, Tuska said.

But, as usual, Dan stood apart from the group he came to belong to. Unlike other pulp writers, Dan was "not an author for the masses," according to Tuska. And he also qualified Dan's work as "an acquired taste," having resolutions readers often didn't like.

Dan always commented on the human condition and often used humor, something few others did in adventure writing, Tuska said.⁴⁵

One of Dan's fans during the 1940s was his nephew, Doug Giebel, the son of Dan's sister, Fern, who had become a Big Sandy school teacher. By the mid-1940s, Doug was about 10 years old, and he remembered well the feeling he got whenever he saw his uncle's stories in the pulp magazines.

⁴⁵Tuska, interview by author, June 1998.

“Oh God, it was a thrill,” Doug said. “I can remember going downtown (in Big Sandy to a place where) they had ice cream, cigars and a pool room in the back. And they had magazines. Have you seen some of the covers some of them had? With some big busty woman on there and there is a bear attacking a ranger right there.”

Looking back, Doug noted that behind the flashy covers, writers were improving their abilities and finding their voices.

“In there, hey, people were writing, and like Dan, some went on to certainly bigger and better things,” Doug said. “This stuff was the university for these writers. It was the learning ground, the proving ground, the testing ground. You had to tell a story that had to have a beginning, middle and end, and had to be clear, gripping in some way. Entertaining.”⁴⁶

The following is a sample of Dan’s work. This story appeared in North-West Romances in the winter of 1944. In this excerpt, the main character, Mr. Bagby, is riding a steamboat to Alaska in search of rubies.

All afternoon the little man stood by the rail, an unexpected loneliness clutching at his throat. Night came and he retired to his “deluxe stateroom.” After an hour of rigid wakefulness, he dressed and found his way to the crowded little bar.

“Yours?” demanded the florid, impatient bartender.

“Milk. Hot milk.”

“Listen, shorty, does this look like a dairy lunch?”

Mr. Bagby was irked. He mutter indignantly.

“What’s wrong pard?”

He glanced up into a pair of cynical, smiling eyes. They belonged to a handsome fellow of thirty or so, a tall man whose Bob Fitzsimmons shoulders tapered to a narrow waist, and whose skin had been burned brown in climes warmer than Seattle’s.

“I merely wanted some hot milk, but that uncivil bartender...”

“Well now! Why don’t you try a hot Jamaica?”

⁴⁶Giebel, interview by author, 26 May 1998.

Mr. Bagby did, and he felt considerably better when it was inside him. He hitched up his belt a notch and slapped a ten-dollar gold piece on the bar.

"Two more!" He extended his hand. "Bagby is the name."

"Carveth. Captain Sidney Carveth of the Guatemalan navy."

"Oh," said Mr. Bagby politely, "a seafaring man!"

"Me? Hell no. That 'Captain' is just a title the Conservative Socialists hung on me after I promoted that last revolution of theirs."

Now, Mr. Bagby was a lifelong Republican. He did not favor revolutions. He would have been less shocked had the Cap owned to being a pirate.

"About revolutions," he felt constrained to say, "I've always maintained that if you divided all the money up, evenly, mind you..."

"Whoa! I'm a revolutioner, not a revolutionary. Bourgeoisie, class struggle—I don't care about those things. To hell with 'em. I help the outs get in."

This proved a trifle confusing to Mr. Bagby, so he ordered two more Jamaicas. Cap shook a doleful head.

"Business is bad. Used to be I could dump a boatload of rifles on one of those two-bit South American ports and have a dandy insurrection sputtering away by sundown. Ah, those were the days!" He chuckled over his hot Jamaica. "One time, over at Carupano, I split a shipment between the Liberal Constitutionals and the Social Republicans so they could shoot at the Radical Reactionaries come election day. They got to shooting at each other instead, and the Radical Reactionaries slipped in and elected a president and fifty-six senators. Got forty dollars a head for those guns, and do you know what they were?"

Bagby didn't.

"Buffalo sharps. And I delivered Mausers this last load. Genuine Mausers. Bought 'em off a general in Barranquilla who was paying off his gambling debts. Eight-fifty, they cost me, and I had to sell 'em for bull hides. Got the hides to Frisco and the market was down so it liked to clean my wallet like a Dutchman's kitchen."⁴⁷

⁴⁷Cushman, *Voyageurs*, 214-216.

CHAPTER III

A WRITER AMONG AUTHORS

The chief glory of every people arises from its authors.

—Samuel Johnson.

As Dan recalled his years as a pulp writer, it was clear the 1940s were some of the most carefree and entertaining years of his life. He enjoyed writing for the pulp market and he was making a name for himself. He remembered some of his first recognition.

“You know the first time I was ever mentioned in the The New York Times was before I wrote a book,” Dan said. “I was writing for Adventure Magazine and I had written this story called the ‘Jewel of the Java Sea.’ I had never seen (the Java Sea), but I wrote about it the way it should be.”

The story struck a chord with someone because they sent a synopsis of the story to the The New York Times and asked who wrote it.

“Somebody wrote in (to the paper) and said ‘Jewel of the Java Sea’ by Dan Cushman. That was the first time I was ever mentioned in the The New York Times,” Dan said.¹

Though being mentioned in the The New York Times was a serious milestone for Dan, he knew that the pulp industry was not the place for a serious

¹Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

writer. As he recalled those days, Dan laughed, thinking of how the magazine decided to depict a scene from “Jewel of the Java Sea” for its cover of an issue.

Dan did not have a copy of it but described it for me.

“It had this fella sitting there,” and Dan swung his leg up on the coffee table. “And he has a wooden leg and he’s cutting a notch in his wooden leg with a knife,” Dan said, gritting his teeth, acting like he had a wooden leg and was notching it.²

“Jewel of the Java Sea” later came out as a book of the same title. Dan had a copy of it on his coffee table, and he picked it up and read the summary from its back in a falsely earnest and dramatic way:

Through the tropical heat of the Java Sea, from island to island, from woman to woman, Frisco Dougherty follows the diamond trail. Cockney Jaske knew part of the answer. Voluptuous Locheng knew more. A Chinese merchant knew it all. Hard-bitten Frisco had to hit it rich or end up a derelict in Java’s port.³

After finishing, he returned to his normal voice, saying, “and I did it all without leaving Montana.” He smiled and laughed.

The absurdity of the pulps didn’t bother Dan as much as some of the editing that occurred. Sometimes Dan picked a magazine off the rack and found an editor had mutilated one of his stories.

“I’ve had some egregious editing,” Dan said, “places where people would throw a whole page away and wouldn’t even connect the sentences, people who were tired of their jobs.”⁴

²Ibid.

³Dan Cushman, Jewel of the Java Sea (New York: Fawcett, 1951; reprint, G.K. Hall and Co., 1999) back cover (reference to reprint edition).

⁴Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

After he was established in the pulp markets, a publisher approached him with a contract, in which Dan would have to commit to writing a certain amount of words per year.

“Oh my God, it was a lot,” Dan said, pausing to think, “I think it was something like two million words a year. It would have meant I write everything for him.”

Such a guarantee would have had its benefits, especially for a man with young family. In fact, in 1946 they had bought another home, a larger one with a full basement and detached garage, on the corner of Twenty-second Street and First Avenue North. But Dan declined the publisher’s offer and never regretted it.”

“Because if he felt himself obligated to buy these, it probably wouldn’t have been any good,” Dan said, adding, “I had greater ambitions. I wanted to write novels.”

When asked if being in such demand was exciting for him, perhaps like seeing a pipe dream become a reality, Dan said no.

“I was no more excited than my wife was; we needed the money,” he responded. He paused to think and said, “I needed the money and that’s why I did it. It was not any love of literature or wanting to empty out the frustrations of my soul.

“I was a professional writer, but with that said, everybody likes to be good at what he does. There’s no simple explanation, but I did it for the money,” he said.⁵

⁵Ibid.

Dan took being a professional writer very seriously. He made sure his time was not squandered and his concentration not broken. His daughter remembered that before he quit his advertising job at the Great Falls Tribune, he'd come home from work and go straight into his office and stay there for hours.

But Mimi better remembered him writing in the house on the corner of First Avenue North where he had "a really, really dumpy office down in the basement."

Despite its appearance, Dan was still very particular about his place of work. His son Bob, a photographer who bases out of Missoula, Mont., remembered certain details.

"There was always certain elements. He always had his books and his typewriter and typing table. He usually had a couple of desks arranged in there. And he'd have a couch or some place he could take a nap, which he often did," Bob said.

Dan would map out his stories on a wall of his office. Dan's nephew, Doug, recalled how it worked. "On the wall he'd have all of these charts that he worked off of, the plot and the characters," Doug said. "He would also do things that computers today would do. He would cut the pages up and paste them back together, take chunks out of them."

Dan never had a telephone in his office and kids were not allowed to go in, even when he wasn't there.

"It was like a sanctuary," Mimi said.

Of course, sometimes the kids would sneak in.

One reason for the transgression was to steal a glimpse of a piece of art by Branson Stevenson, a Great Falls artist, that Dan always kept on his office wall. It is a small portrait of a partially naked woman done in a very tasteful

manner. The neighbor kids, especially, were fascinated by this and would sometimes peer in at it through the basement window.

Dan explained to Bob that the picture was a piece of art and that it was all right if he had a naked woman on the wall. Some people in the neighborhood did not see it as such and raised their eyebrows when they heard of the picture.

“They were positive he was a dirty old man,” Mimi said.

Along with being very conscious of having a “sanctuary,” Dan started a tradition of taking a daily walk. He might cover five or six miles around Great Falls. Mimi sometimes accompanied him and she remembers him going over lines from his writing as they walked. He did the same thing when he was alone.

“His lips would be moving and some people, I think, thought he was crazy,” Mimi said. “He always had a reputation as being kind of a character around town.”⁶

During his walks Dan would see friends and acquaintances. He also encountered fellow writers, as Great Falls was a hotbed for Montana authors at the time.

He often saw Joseph Kinsey Howard and Norman Fox, as both writers lived not far from Dan’s house. He might also see A.B. Guthrie, Mildred Walker Schemm and other writers who did not live in Great Falls at the time but frequented its downtown area.

Joe Howard was Dan’s favorite of the group, perhaps because he had worked with him at the newspaper. Upon graduating from high school in 1923, Howard went to work for the Great Falls Leader and stayed with the paper until

⁶Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

1944. During that time he made money on the side writing articles for the publications such as Survey Graphic and the Progressive.

In Howard's last year with the Great Falls Leader his first book, Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, was released. It sold well, won wide critical acclaim and convinced him to focus his efforts on writing books.

This first book was a collection of essays about Montana's history, and went through eight editions in its first three years of printing. Guthrie, who would come to see Howard as "Montana's conscience," described his first book like this:

This is a book about a lot of things, from the dried buffalo bones that littered the plains in the nineties to the Federal Reserve policy that dried the state up in the twenties. It is about John Wesley Powell, the prophet honored too late, whose ideas about the management of Western lands would have saved many a heartbreak. It is about the copper kings and their brazen capers in business and politics. It is about cattle and ranchers and rustlers. It is about Jim Hill's railroad and the poor rubes who were attracted by visions of gold ploughed out of ground which turned out to be richer in weeds. It is about Indians and the mistreatment of Indians. It is about taxes and tax fights, about water and water rights and wasting of soil and the rain that was all the state (as well as hell) needed. It deals with past, present, future, with geography and climate, with politics and economics and belated but promising planning.⁷

Howard's approach to writing history made the book a success, Dan said.

"It was a snatch of history here and a snatch there and it was the most interesting thing he could put together, so it made the state very interesting," he said.⁸

Like Guthrie, Dan had great respect for Howard.

⁷Joseph Kinsey Howard, Montana: High, Wide and Handsome (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1943; reprint, with a Foreword by A.B. Guthrie, Jr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), xii (page references are to reprint edition).

⁸Dan Cushman, author, interview by author, 22 February 1998, Great Falls, Mont., tape recording.

“(He) was a very intelligent guy and he had a hell of a library. He’d do anything to research a book. He learned French so that he could read the French accounts of Louis Riel.”⁹

Guthrie was another familiar face to Dan, although he didn’t call the Great Falls area home until after 1953. Like Howard, Guthrie was a newspaperman before an author. He graduated from the University of Montana School of Journalism in 1923. Three years later, he hooked up with the Lexington Leader, of Lexington, Kentucky, and worked there until 1947.

It was that year that Guthrie’s novel The Big Sky came out. It did well and Guthrie, like Howard, decided to quit the newspaper for the sake of books. He taught creative writing for a while, but after 1953 his income came from writing alone. Around this time he returned for good to Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front west of Great Falls.¹⁰

The Big Sky turned out to be the first of a loose trilogy, for which Guthrie earned a Pulitzer Prize. The prize was specifically awarded for the second book of the series, The Way West, but many scholars and critics believe it was with The Big Sky that Guthrie earned the prize. Wallace Stegner, another successful author of the West, said this about the book:

The Big Sky is ... for me the best of the three novels... What makes it special is not merely its narrative and scenic vividness, but the ways in which (the main character) exemplifies and modifies an enduring American type.

...[H]e is both mountain man and myth, both individual and archetype, which means that the record of his violent life is both credible and exhilarating. And he has one tender and attractive thing about him: an inarticulate but powerful love for the sweep of plain and peak and sky, the

⁹Ibid., 25 January 1998. This research by Howard was for his book Strange Empire: A Narrative of the Northwest, which, according to my research, Howard was originally going to title Halfbreed Nation.

¹⁰Great Falls Tribune, 26 April 1991, 1A; Ibid., 7 September 1997, 1P.

intimacy of cutbank and wildrose island, the free distance shaped by butte and hogback and aspenblotched mountainside.¹¹

Dan did not speak as appreciatively of Guthrie as he did of Howard. But he did respect him and enjoyed conversing with him.

Dan recalled one story Guthrie told about a car salesman.

“(Bud) used to drive an old Plymouth sedan,” Dan said. “And if he would just take his hand off the wheel, it would drive itself and end up down in front of the Rainbow Bar. Yeah, he wouldn’t even have to steer it. It was out of habit, you know. A fella came up to him and was going to sell him a new car.” Dan said the man had been trained to convince customers, “What people think of you is what you are.”

Dan imitated the man, saying “Mr. Guthrie, a person with your reputation can’t afford to drive around in a car like that.”

Dan said that Bud lost his temper.

“What do you mean I can’t afford to...a person with my reputation can go around with his stuff in a wheel barrel if he wants.”

Dan laughed as he recalled Guthrie’s response.

As a writer, Dan said, “You can go around town with a jock strap on and nothing else and it won’t make any difference to your sales, and it might improve them.”¹²

Dan did not know Mildred Walker Schemm as well as he did Howard and Guthrie. He remembered that at the time he was writing for the pulps she was “quite a spectacular success with Winter Wheat.”

¹¹A.B. Guthrie, Jr., The Big Sky, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947; reprint, with a Foreword by Wallace Stegner, New York: Bantam, 1982) ix (page references are to the reprint edition).

¹²Cushman, interview by author, 22 February 1998.

While Howard and Guthrie were just beginning their book careers, Walker already had a handful of books published by the mid-1940s. In 1944, Winter Wheat was published and honored as a Literary Guild selection that year.

James Welch, a current author of the West (and critic of Dan's Stay Away, Joe), wrote an introduction for a reprint of the book and Schemm's ability:

Mildred Walker's success is in creating a keen psychological portrait of her main character. We see through (the main character's) eyes. We feel the stalks of wheat through her fingers, the wind through her hair. We hear the howl of the blizzard through her ears. We smell her mother's borscht through her nose. Above all, we are in her mind as she attempts to make sense of her emotions, of her relationship with her parents, of her parents' relationship with each other, of their relationship with the land.

...(This book) is a classic novel of the American West. That doesn't mean it is an old-fashioned novel. It could have been written last year, or next year--but it was written during the period it portrays, giving it an immediacy that is timeless.¹³

Unlike Howard and Guthrie, Walker did not come from a newspaper background. After marrying Dr. Ferdinand Ripley Schemm in 1927, she received a master's of arts degree in creative writing from the University of Michigan. In 1933 she and her husband moved from Michigan to Great Falls.

It is said that she sometimes wrote as she waited in the car during her husband's house calls in the country.¹⁴

Perhaps the person Dan would get to know best out of this group was Norman Fox. Fox had penned a number of novels by the mid-1940s. He had neither a career in newspapers, nor a college degree. He grew up in Great Falls, graduating from Great Falls High in 1929. After high school, he worked as a bookkeeper until 1938. That year he decided to turn his hobby into his career and began selling Westerns.

¹³Mildred Walker, Winter Wheat (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1944; reprint, with an Introduction by James Welch, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) x-xi (page references are to the reprint edition).

¹⁴Ibid., xii; Great Falls Tribune, 5 March 1998, 3M.

His first novel, Gunsight Kid, came out in 1941. Fox's claim to fame was his ability to write for Hollywood. The 1953 movie Gunsmoke was an adaptation of Fox's novel Roughshod.¹⁵

"He was just full of plots," Dan said. "They were conventional plots and would fit various stars at the time. He sold four or five (books to Hollywood). They paid him very well and he'd get some publicity out of it."¹⁶

Of the social habits of all these writers, Dan remembered Fox as being the most "distant."¹⁷ But this distance could be credited to the fact that while Howard, Guthrie and Walker all would come to have summer homes west of Choteau, near the Rocky Mountain Front, Fox spent his summers at his home in Virginia City.

Dan and Norman became closer in the following years.

By the late 1940s, Dan was working on his first novel. The difference between writing pulps and writing novels was clear to him.

"There's more dignity to (writing novels)—you're not a hack," he said. "What would you rather do, be a barber and cut hair, or be a sculptor like Michelangelo?"¹⁸

Forty-years-old with a decade of pulp fiction behind him, Dan knew that if he were to become a novelist he should adhere to the advice he found as a teenager in the Elinor Glyn Course in Short Story Writing. He would write about something he knew well.

¹⁵Great Falls Tribune, 23 March 1960, 9.

¹⁶Cushman, interview by author, 22 February 1998.

¹⁷Ibid., 25 January 1998.

¹⁸Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

He decided to write a story about Montana with a main character who'd debuted in one of his pulp stories. He was a road agent, a bandit known to strike northwestern stage routes, with the name "Dutch John."

"I suppose I wrote a couple hundred thousand words of him in novelettes. Then I wrote a full-length story," Dan said.¹⁹

But before Dan began writing the novel, he read the work of successful Western novelists.

"I read all the way through them, which was quite a chore," he said. "Not to copy them mind you, but to see how they did it. I noticed they each had a specialty. One was a great plotter. He'd have a powerful hero and a powerful villain who'd meet each other in a dramatic showdown just before the end. Zane Grey was a local color man and he'd always have an imputation of incest."

As he started writing, he had it in his mind that he'd improve on all of them.²⁰

As much as his main character was an original in the world of Westerns, he wasn't unique. Dutch John was a real road agent, Dan said, part of the notorious Henry Plummer gang. It's a fact that the Montana Vigilantes hanged the gang of about 24 men in the early 1860s. Dutch John was one of the last executed.

"(Dutch John) and some other fella had robbed an outgoing caravan in the winter time and they both got shot," Dan said.

The caravan had just left Bannack, Montana, headed to Salt Lake City. Dutch John was wounded in the shoulder. It was far from a fatal wound, but the

¹⁹Ibid., 2 March 1999.

²⁰Great Falls Tribune, 7 January 1968, tab 2.

Vigilantes soon caught him and hanged him from the beam of an unfinished building in Bannack.

“I can’t say I copied him, I just took the name,” he said.²¹

The real Dutch John was described in Thomas J. Dimsdale’s The Vigilantes of Montana, first published in 1866.

“A more courageous, stalwart, or reckless desperado never threw spurs on the flanks of a cayuse, or cried ‘Halt!’ to a true man,” Dimsdale wrote.²²

Let it not be imagined that this man was any ordinary felon, or one easy to capture. He stood upwards of six feet; was well and most powerfully built, being immensely strong, and both coolly and ferociously brave. His swarthy visage, determined-looking jaw, and high cheekbones were topped off with a pair of dark eyes, whose deadly glare few could face without shrinking.²³

The story of the Montana Vigilantes was widely known for years, was popular to Montanans, and would have been one Dan had cut his teeth on. It’s no surprise that Dan grabbed hold of his character for the pulps and then a novel. Besides the character, he knew well Dutch John’s stomping grounds, the Dillon area, and, therefore, had infinite details to weave in for color and background.

But before Dan wrote the novel about Dutch John, the character went through a name change.

“After about the third (story about Dutch John), the pulp magazine that I was selling them to changed the name to ‘Comanche John,’” Dan said, adding that the name was “probably better.”²⁴

²¹Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

²²Thomas J. Dimsdale, The Vigilantes of Montana (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953; reprint, with an Introduction by E. DeGolyer, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 60.

²³Ibid., 140.

²⁴Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

Dan's description of Comanche John's personality closely resembles Dimsdale's depiction of Dutch John. In Dan's story, a friend of Comanche John describes the road agent as the "(t)oughest, roughest, war hooping gun talker that ever beat the hair off a horse on the long trail from Californy. Look at him, brothers, and give him room, because I'd just as soon do battle with a bar'l of rattlesnakes."²⁵

As for physical likeness, both Johns had what is best described as a "swarthy visage," but that was about it. Comanche John's dimensions, proportions and style were all Dan's.

(Comanche John) was about forty, and broader than most men. He had long arms and easy-hanging shoulders; his skin was burned coffee-brown from many years in the sun. He wore a black slouch hat, sweat-stained and crusted with dust; his shirt was Cree buckskin with most of the beadwork gone; his homespun trousers were thrust in the tops of scuffed jackboots. Around his waist hung a brace of Navy Colts on crossed belts.²⁶

Dan's greatest deviation from the real Dutch John was when he gave Comanche John the habits of Robin Hood. He is also a Confederate sympathizer and pro-slavery.

"It was a lovable highwayman, you know. I civilized him quite a bit. He was good natured and whatnot. I couldn't make a hero out of a [complete] villain, but that was the idea."²⁷

When Macmillan Publishing Company published Montana Here I Be! in 1950, Comanche John proved to be a reformed criminal who just couldn't shake a taste for trouble.

²⁵Dan Cushman, Montana, Here I Be! (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 21.

²⁶Ibid., 1.

²⁷Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

A parson sets the reckless, young Comanche John on the Christian path, one that he tries to maintain though he struggles to stop entirely his outlaw ways. The parson's influence manifests many times throughout the story, including the time Comanche John uses an alias to get a hot meal from a stranger's camp late one night:

"And who in the name o' Judas be you?"

"Name's Jones and I'm nigh starved."

The woman lowered her double gun and said, "Now there's a houn' dog answer if I ever gave ear to one. He's hungry, he says. Hungry at this time o' night after me slaving over a hot kettle since before sunup this morning." She wheeled around and bellowed toward a log house more substantial than the others and evidently the cook shanty.

"Wong, ye heathen, get up and kindle the fire. We got a pilgrim with his ribs showing."

A middle-aged Chinese in loose shirt and trousers appeared in the door holding a candle in one hand and a butcher knife in the other.

"You likee stew het up?"

"Heat it up. All of it. This one looks like he could eat like my poor dead husband's no-account relations."

John untied the halter string and refixed it as a hobble. By the time he returned, a big iron kettle of buffalo stew and dumplings was thumping to a boil in the fireplace.

The smell of it made John so hungry he could scarcely walk, but he managed to reach the cookhouse door and sat cross-legged on the ground just beyond any direct light.

"Praise be your name, Mrs. Coppens, you've revived my hope in the salvation o' the human race. I'd got to thinking the world was a jug full of varmints without the charity to take a weary pilgrim off the rocky trail of life. *For I am a stranger with ye, and a sojourner*, and that's right out of the Psalms o' David, it is for a fact."

"Bless me, you don't look like a religious man with them Navies on your hips, but you do have a sound of one."

"Don't let that gunmetal fool ye, ma'am. I just wear 'em so I'll have the right ballast on my horse. Share and share alike, that's my motto, and a Christian one, too."

"Amen!" Mrs. Coppens heaped stew on the a sheat-metal plate, dipping deep to find the tenderest morsels of buffalo rump.²⁸

²⁸Cushman, Montana, Here I Be!, 57-58.

What Mrs. Coppens doesn't know is that Comanche John thinks that to "share and share alike" is to shoot at two men instead of one, though in this story he never kills anyone. Rather, he likes to make a precise shot near his enemy to scare him or, at worst, shoot the gun out of his hand.

Dan wrote a song that appears occasionally in the story. It is a kind of campfire song that tells of John's deeds and exploits. As the story unfolds, the song lengthens.

"I sat down one day, wrote about forty or fifty stanzas," Dan recalled. "It was easy. He was always singing songs about himself, you know," and Dan sang the first stanza, "Co-man-che John was a highwayman/ He came from County Pike/ With a pal called Henry Singleshot/ And one named Injun Ike."

Dan paused for a moment then, not trusting his memory said, "I don't know if that's one or not, but I could do it all day." He chuckled.²⁹

His memory had not faltered. Early in the book, the song went on a few more stanzas:

They drifted out to Kansas
In the year of fifty-three
To fight in the election
On the side of slaver-ee
John lit out for Yuba town
With a pal named Jimmy Dale,
And just for some excitement
They robbed the eastern mail.
Now Jimmy's six foot underground
And much he ruses the day
And Comanche rides the long cou-lee
Tryin' to git away.³⁰

The time he spent writing Montana, Here I Be! was the some of the best time he had writing a book, Dan said. Perhaps it was because it was the first

²⁹Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

³⁰Cushman, Montana, Here I Be!, 5.

time he created a larger-than-life character, meanwhile deriving a plot from historical fact and providing a what-if. Maybe too, it was because he felt like he was coming into his own as an author.³¹

A month before Montana Here I Be! hit the bookstores, the Great Falls Tribune ran an article that said, “Another Great Falls free-lancer has joined the growing battalion of local writers who have had a novel placed between covers by a leading eastern publishing firm.”

The newspaper closed the article noting that Dan’s story was written for fun: “His first novel will please devotees of the western story and should have additional interest for Montana readers because of its local settings. The yarn is spun for entertainment, and should not be taken seriously as history, especially by sons and daughters of Montana pioneers.”³²

The story of Montana Here I Be! tells of a young entrepreneur who sees that although the Great Falls of the Missouri stops steam boats from proceeding past Ft. Benton, Montana, it might be possible to build a smaller, lighter steam-powered vessel to carry cargo from just above the falls and into the mountains where rich gold camps awaited supplies.

The historical fact was that after reaching Ft. Benton, shippers transferred steamboat cargo to jerkline outfits, wagons pulled by mules or oxen, that traveled another two hundred to four hundred miles into the mountains.

The entrepreneur’s idea is that jerk-line outfits need only to carry the cargo twenty miles around the falls. Then his smaller boat could carry the cargo to the fictitious gold camp “American Flag,” near real-life Helena where the first gold camps along the Missouri were encountered.

³¹Great Falls Tribune, 7 January 1968, 2.

³²Ibid., 18 June 1950, 11.

The story's villain is a man who owns the jerk-line outfits and makes good money on the long hauls. He doesn't want the young entrepreneur to succeed, so in the guise of a Vigilante the villain and his gang try to hang him.

The hanging is justified, they say, because the man is the infamous road agent, Comanche John. The real Comanche John foils their plot, however, by stepping forward as the innocent man stands at the gallows.

That's where the story begins. Comanche John is pulled into the innocent man's fight against the villain and his so-called vigilantes.

As Dan's first novel hit the bookshelves, so did a brief but catchy account of his 41 years. Certain embellishments enriched Dan's personal history, not unlike the difference between factual Dutch John and fictitious Comanche John:

Dan Cushman's earliest recollections are of Box Elder at the edge of the Bear Paw Mountains in northern Montana before that country was cut up by homesteader's barbed wire. He worked for cattle outfits and metal mines, and as a prospector and assayer. After considerable time drifting, he headed back to the home range and stopped off in Great Falls where he wangled an audition at a radio station. Landing a job, he split his time between a mike and an Underwood. Later he worked on newspapers as copy writer, reporter and photographer. He drifted into freelancing when he found out that there were people back in New York's forty story shacks who were willing to pay him for the same tall tales he'd listened to without charge from the cowpunchers and old-time Indian fighters back in Box Elder.³³

This would be the only biographical information readers of Cushman's books would find for years. Although Dan maintains he prospected in his youth, he doesn't remember working for any cattle ranches, saying, "I was above that."³⁴

³³Cushman, Montana, Here I Be!, dust jacket.

³⁴Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

But it seems the more western an author of a Westerns appeared, the better. To make sure the readers were clear Dan had swallowed his share of dust on cattle trails, he tips a Stetson in the portrait gracing the book's dust jacket.

And the biographical information did, indeed, have a noteworthy effect on one reviewer of Montana Here I Be!

"The fact that the author, as a born Westerner and former cow-puncher and prospector, writes with more background knowledge than some others in this field, should recommend the book to a wider audience than the established Western fan," said a review in the Library Journal.³⁵

Another reviewer, for the Chicago Sunday Tribune focused more on Dan's brainchild: "You'll like rugged, hard-boiled, but clean-minded old Comanche John and his exciting adventures in banditry and benevolence. We hope to see more of him."³⁶

As it turned out Dan did not surpass all other Western novelists, but he did do well enough that Macmillan wanted more from him, especially more of Comanche John.

"Two things prevent an author's second book," Dan said. "First, he's afraid they'll compare it with the first (especially if it was a great success) and tear it to pieces and, second, he isn't hungry enough. Success doesn't encourage a man to write."³⁷

Dan was neither and he quickly went to work on his next book. It seemed like Dan's floodgates opened up and his fiction couldn't be stopped.

³⁵Review of Montana, Here I Be!, in Library Journal, Volume 75 (July 1950): 1177.

³⁶Review of Montana, Here I Be!, in Chicago Sunday Tribune (20 August 1950): 4.

³⁷Great Falls Tribune, 7 January 1968, 2.

Dan still wrote for the pulps and about the same time his first novel appeared in bookstores he'd taken on a key role in the pulp magazine The Pecos Kid Western.

(The magazine) featured a long short novel in every issue about the Pecos Kid, but unlike most of the Western hero pulp magazines all of these stories were written by a single author, Dan Cushman, who had created the character especially for The Pecos Kid Western. The year 1950 was not an auspicious time to be creating a new pulp magazine, since pulp magazines were being replaced on newsstands by paperback books, many of them being published by magazine publishers like Dell Publishing. Despite the hostile market in 1950, The Pecos Kid Western did continue publication for five issues, concluding with the issue dated June 1951.³⁸

In addition to writing another Western for Macmillan, Dan found a market with Fawcett, contributing "Gold Medal" pocketbooks. The "Gold Medal" seal on Fawcett pocketbooks meant they were original stories, not former hardback stories reprinted as paperbacks.

Just as Dan was enjoying some success in writing books, perhaps even gaining ground on the Choteau writers, the one member of the group he most respected died unexpectedly. Joe Howard, newspaperman and author, died of a heart attack at his summer cabin in Choteau in 1951. Howard was 45.

"He was cut off in his prime," Dan said. Dan would always remember how Howard, with his great library, introduced him to the work of James Joyce. "I'd never heard of (Joyce) before, that's how ignorant I was."³⁹

The year Howard died, Macmillan published Dan's second novel, Badlands Justice. Meanwhile Fawcett published two pocketbooks by Dan, Jewel of the Java Sea and Naked Ebony, a jungle adventure story. (Obviously, Fawcett had no qualms about taking a pulp article and putting its "Gold Medal" seal on it.)

³⁸ Dan Cushman, The Pecos Kid Returns (Unity, Maine: Five Star, 2000), Editor's Note.

³⁹ Cushman, interview by author, 22 February 1998; *Ibid.*, 25 January 1998.

Although Macmillan wanted more of Comanche John, Badlands Justice had a different theme. It is the story of two young brothers trying to keep their hard-earned homestead out of the hands of greedy neighbors known as the "Association." Dan places the story of grass and guns in the vicinity of his childhood hometown of Box Elder.

When the book hit town, the Great Falls Tribune, which had weeks prior announced the arrival of Jewel of the Java Sea, noted Dan's versatility.

Dan Cushman turns from sarongs to saddles in his latest book, "Badlands Justice"....

The local writer, author of three novels and numerous magazine stories, shows his versatility by completing the circuit of his book locales from his native Montana ("Montana Here I Be!") to the south seas ("Jewel of the Java Sea") and home again to the main street of Box Elder.⁴⁰

In 1952, Macmillan published another Comanche John novel. In The Ripper From Rawhide, Comanche John found himself in another tangle. Again the story had gold camps in its background, with cargo shipping a key role. But Dan put a twist in the plot that only a bush-league geologist might create.

As the story progresses, a man, shot and dying, puts a piece of whitish rock in Comanche John's hands and makes John promise to deliver it to his partner. John, who knows his rocks, recognizes this one to be a chunk of "wuthless dumpite." He questions himself, though, because once he has possession of the rock, he has to dodge bullets himself. Still, he fulfills his promise as best he can and then goes on about his business.

As always happens, Comanche gets pulled back into the heat of things and finds out why the "wuthless dumpite" was so precious. It gave the location of \$2 million worth of gold. Gold that, after being extracted, had been put on a mackinaw boat and then mysteriously sank in the Yellowstone River. Only the

⁴⁰Great Falls Tribune, 16 February 1951, 9.

dying man knew the location of the gold. The rock he gave John to deliver to the partner had been a clue to the gold's location.

Toward the end of the novel, Comanche John finds the whitish rock's source, but not before the story's villain found it:

The high water of repeated springs had left its mark with deposits of sand and gravel. As (Comanche John) had expected, there was the whitish rock. Erosion had smoothed it in most places, but at one spot he could see where a piece had been broken out. He knew that it was the very piece that had been treasured (by the dying man).... Of the strata he had seen, only this lay above high-water mark; of all the strata only this one had been visible along the north bank when (the dying man) had swum ashore.

"Should o' found it," he muttered.⁴¹

Comanche John is not entirely without luck, but whenever something comes his way, such as a cache of gold, he loses it. If he had come away with \$2 million in gold, his road agent ways might have ended and Dan still had another Comanche John novel in him.

He continued to write pocketbooks and had Savage Interlude published by Fawcett in 1952. Jungle She was published the following year. The pocketbooks continued in the same vein as Dan's earlier ones, with macho men adventuring after treasures in exotic places far away.

By this time, Dan had proven that he could produce, and perhaps more importantly, keep producing. He had achieved his goal: He was now writing full-fledged novels. By 1953, he had reached the same plane as his contemporary Norman Fox, with the only difference being that while Fox's work had made it to Hollywood, Dan still had one foot firmly planted in pulp.

At this point for all the progress Dan had made as a writer, he still hadn't made a mark as a novelist. He had only cashed in on some regional history and

⁴¹Dan Cushman, The Ripper From Rawhide, (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 164.

brought the world Comanche John, another Western character. He stayed with what he knew would sell. This would soon change.

CHAPTER IV

STAY AWAY, JOE

From the time of life when fancy begins to be overruled by reason and corrected by experience, the most artful tale raises little curiosity when it is known to be false.

—Samuel Johnson.

The 1950s are known as the heyday of the Western.

People couldn't get enough of cowboys and Indians, and to satisfy their appetites, the ranks of Western writers grew steadily. Dan was never one to be satisfied with belonging to a group and he must have realized distinction would be hard to come by in such a popular trend.

Not only that, a story idea, something a little different, had been eating at Dan for the past 10 years.

"I was on the street one day, I was working for the Tribune or something like that, and I met a fella up from the street of the Falls Hotel and near Suhr's Buick. I was talking to him and he said, 'Aw God, I've got a job to do today that I don't look forward to.'"

"What's that?" Dan asked.

"I've got to go up and steal a car from an Indian in Browning (Montana)."

The man continued, "You know those Indians get that car from you on the easy payment plan, you know General Motors Acceptance Corporation and so on, and he gets it into the reservation (doesn't pay, but) you can't seize it. Your authority stops at the reservation line."

The man then described the job to Dan. He had repossessed a number of cars on the reservation and had a system. A friend would give the man a ride to Browning. He would go equipped with a key that fit the car and a can of gasoline. The two men would locate the car, perhaps at a local dance or something, and the man doing the repossessing would bale out. After making sure no one was near, the man would jump in the car, start it up and race for the reservation line.

The man always wondered if the car would be low on gas, possibly not even having enough to get off the reservation. He'd be okay if he reached the border because his friend was waiting there with the extra gas. The thought of not reaching the border worried the man.

Dan laughed at the thought of it.

"He had a job to do, whether it succeeded (that time) or not, I don't know," Dan said. "But it stayed in my mind."¹

Dan had never spent much time around Browning, located on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, but he did have his own memories of the Indians at Rocky Boy. The story of the car repossession reminded him of his childhood friend Louis Champagne and how he'd hoist Dan on his shoulders and try to beat the odds at the punchboards.

Even though that had been 30 years prior, he remembered Champagne clearly, particularly his strong French accent. Besides the accent, Champagne, a métis, was known to eject a phrase that Dan described as "Coyotie French."²

¹Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998. There exists at least one other account of how Dan came across this seed for Stay Away, Joe. It is slightly different in its details than the one above, but the one above is the one Dan told me.

²Coyotie French, a language once spoken by some of the Rocky Boy people, especially métis, was a carryover from life prior to the establishment of the Rocky Boy's reservation. The Chippewa and Cree people, some of whom settled on the reservation, belonged to small bands whose origins fell on both sides of the Canadian line. Some of the people had mingled many years before with the French trappers and these trappers imparted to the Indians

Dan became an expert in Champagne's accent and the types of things he'd say thanks to the time he spent riding on Champagne's shoulders. In many situations Dan knew what Champagne would say before he spoke.

"I didn't know where it came from; it was (like it was) always there." But looking back Dan had a theory: "Everything Louis said come through his spinal column, the vibration of his voice, into my tailbone and up to my brain. (That's how) I knew everything he was always going to say," Dan said.³

Dan remembered Champagne as a "very personable and intelligent guy."⁴

Thanks to the man's repossession anecdote, a story of pure fiction started to accumulate in Dan involving Champagne. After some time, Dan had to get it off of his chest. This effort resulted in Stay Away, Joe.

It took him about three months to write the novel, as the characters and plot came easy. Dan's nephew, Doug, recalled how Dan wasn't so much in control of the story, as it was in control of him.

"When he was writing (that book) he was laughing out loud," Giebel said, remembering a day he dropped in to visit Cushman's when Dan was writing the story.

"He was in great spirits," Giebel said.⁵

"It just kinda wrote itself," Dan admitted. "I didn't even change [much] the name of the chief character, Louis Champlain."

some French, not to mention bloodlines. Dan described Coyotie French as "violent and explosive with a wild metallic twang in its nasal sounds."

³Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

⁴Great Falls Tribune, 9 June 1994, 1A.

⁵Giebel, interview by author, 26 May 1998.

“(Louis) practically wrote himself and he’s really the main character of the book,” Dan said, contrary many readers’ assumption that the book is about Louis’s son Joe, who was also a resident of Rocky Boy at the time.⁶

In the novel’s beginning a congressman and a friend of the Champlains arrive at the ranch to tell Louis that they would like the Champlains to take part in an experiment. As they explain to him:

“We’re out here to put you in the cattle business.”

“Eh?”

“I mean we can make it possible for you to secure some cattle—a few, twenty head perhaps, surplus derived from the experimental herd at Fort Price Reservation. Purebred Herefords.”

“Louis whispered, “For *me*? For me this?”

“Mind you, there’s nothing certain about it, but it’s my belief. And of course, we had to speak to you first.”

“By gare, anything ol’ Congrèss say, she is done. Down at Big Springs, I hear talk about Congrèss. ‘He is a great man,’ they say. ‘He has got plenty thing from Washington, he is drink tea with ol’ Presidenté.’ Oho! If Congrèss say he will get those cow for his poor friend, Louis Champlain, then I am like seeing those cow right now.”

“Now, Louis!” cautioned Wilcox (his friend).

“Oui?”

“Louis, I want you to understand one thing. Our reputation is riding on this. If it’s successful, then we’re successful. If it’s a failure—well, you can see what people will say about Congressman Morrissey and myself.”

“Eh, by gare!”

“This is an experiment. We’re trying this out with you. If you build this herd up, clear your indebtedness, add to your holdings, then the government may adopt such a policy of rehabilitation for other landless Indians. It depends on *you!*”

Louis Champlain stood very straight, his head tilted slightly back, his hands raised to shoulder height and pointed toward the sky. He spoke, and his voice trembled with solemnity of a vow. “You, Congrèss! You M’shu Wilcox, my friend! Hear me, Louis Champlain, he’s speak: I will do this thing. I will take care of those cow. I will raise many fine strong calf. ‘B’shu

⁶Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998; Great Falls Tribune, 9 June 1994, 1A. Rocky Boy resident John Sunchild said the Champagne homestead, where Louis raised his family, is in Gravel Coulee on the Rocky Boy’s Reservation. However, he said the setting of the Champlain homestead in Dan’s book is more like the country found in and around Beaver Creek County Park south of Havre.

M'shu Champlain,' people will say. 'This is fine suit of clothes you are wearing. Did you get this suit at Lou Lucke's in Havre, eh?' They will say, 'And what a fine silk dress your old squaw is wearing!' This they will say. And when they do, 'Voilà!' I will say. 'Congr ss, he has done this thing.' Then they will come to my ranch, and I will point to my fine, fat cows and say, 'This I, Louis Champlain, have raised. All this to prove that landless Indian is good man. All this to prove that my dear friends, Congr ss and Wilcox, they are damn good, too."⁷

The next thing Louis knows, 19 heifers and one young bull stand in the pasture near the house. Louis feels good that such fortune has come his way, and he intends to come through on his promise. Word spreads that the Champlains are now in the cattle business, and friends and family begin appearing in driveway so that they can help him celebrate.

As the celebration went into its third day, and people are still showing up to congratulate him, Louis realizes he will have to butcher one of his fine heifers in order to keep his company happy. At the same time Louis convinces his wife one cow of nineteen is a small sacrifice for his reputation as a generous man, he sees another truck pull into the drive:

Sight of the tall young man brought Louis up rigid and popeyed. He shouted, "O! woman, come quick! See who has come home from Korea and Madison Square Garden! It is my boy Big Joe!"

Joe heard his father's voice and waited while Louis crossed the yard with long, down hill strides. They embraced, and Louis wept. He pulled Joe down and kissed him on the cheeks, talking French, Cree and English all the same time. The word of Joe's arrival spread, and the crowd swarmed from inside. they tore Big Joe away from his father and wrestled with him and called him strong names, and pounded him on the back. Someone thrust a can of beer into his hand. Louis kept pushing them away, trying to keep charge of Joe, saying, "This is my boy, Goddam, you let me talk to my boy. Two-three year I have not seen my boy. Joe here's your papa, wait long tam."⁸

⁷Dan Cushman, *Stay Away, Joe* (New York: Viking, 1953; reprint, Great Falls, Mont.: Stay Away, Joe Publishers, 1981), 14-15 (page references are to the reprint edition).

⁸Ibid., 55.

The celebration continues and Louis, seeing himself blessed all the greater, imbibes all the more. Some time later Louis wakes up with a hangover and learns what the celebrating had cost him.

He asked, "What day is it?"

"Saturday," (his wife responded.)

It was Thursday night that Big Joe had come home. Louis tried to sort out all the crazy happenings of that night, and yesterday, and yesterday night, when the dance had become a drunken brawl and finally, in search of more beer, everyone had left for Callahan's. He jerked his head back, making a dry laugh, showing his large brownish teeth, and said, "By gare, we eat meat on Friday."

"Your fine bull."

"He stiffened and said, "Eh?"

"Yes, your fine bull."

"They butchered the *bull*?"

"You didn't know?"

He cried, "Of course I did not know! I thought perhaps they butchered one cow."

Mama said wearily, "It was the bull."

"Goddam." Louis looked very ill now.⁹

The dilemma is obvious, and Big Joe vows to help Louis get back in the ranching business.

"You need a bull? Okay, then I will get you a bull."¹⁰

But Joe's attempts to remedy the situation are halfhearted, his connections and cash do not run as deep as he lets on. Besides he's busy roping calves and bull-dogging steers, when he's not chasing women.

Finally, Joe, seeing none of his friends with stock are going to loan out a bull, goes to Louis requesting two heifers, so that he may go buy a bull worth five or six heifers from a friend who's willing to cut him a deal in Great Falls.

Joe was gone four days and returned behind the wheel of a huge new emerald-green Buick sedan.

⁹Ibid., 65.

¹⁰Ibid., 77.

Without getting out of the car, he honked the horn. The clear, trumpet-like sound echoed from the far hills as Joe blew in steady blasts, looking neither one way nor the other. Louis had stopped whittling and was on his feet. Grandpere brought his eyes slowly to focus, saw who it was, and said, "Chief! Chief!"....

In the doorway, Mama said, "Louis, see what he has done? He has traded our two cows for a new car."

"Eh?" said Louis. "He would not do that."¹¹

Whether Joe sold the heifers and put it towards the Buick is never known. He says that the Cadillac he drove home from Madison Square Garden, where he'd won big, lost its transmission in Great Falls, and when he went to get the bull, he'd retrieved the repaired car and traded it in on the Buick. His friend was bringing the bull home, he says.

As the story continues, Louis's herd continues to dwindle thanks to Joe and Louis's wife, who demands that he sell some heifers so that she can improve their home, mainly so that she can impress the mother of Mary's white boyfriend.

Joe finally delivers on his promise of a bull about halfway into the story. A friend of Joe's loans them a bull, but he turns out to be old and uninterested in his duties. Louis points this out to Joe:

"Listen, I will tell you how it is with an old bull." He tapped his forehead. "Old bull has big ideas up here. 'Hoho!' he says before he gets up in the morning. 'Feel pretty good this morning. I think I will have one cow.' But old bull, he is very lame in the knees, and his back aches. So he says, 'First I will eat some breakfast and then I will have one cow.' But breakfast makes him very sleepy. So what does this old bull say? He says, 'Hohum, I think I will take nap and digest my hay; *then* I will have one cow.' But when he wakes up from his nap it is very hot, and he lays there, chewing his cud, and he has forgotten all about that poor cow. So you see how it is with the old bull. But a *young* bull, oho! Listen, I will tell you about the young bull. Young bull, he's wake up ver' earlee. 'Hoho!' he's say, this young bull, pawing dirt all over. 'I feel fine this morning. Bring me three cow so I can get good appetite for breakfast.' Then this young bull say, ' This make me ver' hongree, bring me whole bale alfalfa hay. ' So he's eat that hay, does the young bull take a nap? No. 'This hay has made me ver' strong. Bring me *five* cow.' That is what the young bull say.

¹¹Ibid., 94.

“I know all that,” Joe said. “But I got him for nothing.”
In the doorway, with folded arms, Mama said, “And he is *worth*
nothing.”¹²

Things go from bad to worse for the Champlains, particularly Joe. Feeling good one night, Joe drives home unaware that his car is rolling on four flats. This ruins not only the tires, but also the Buick’s rims and the car never moves by its own power again.

Though Joe receives letters regarding the car from “Great Falls Time Credit Corporation,” which are understood to be payment bills, he just looks at them and laughs. He has no intention of paying for the car, or giving it back. Instead, he realizes the disabled Buick still has a purpose and he begins parting the car out piece by piece:

He traded the car’s tail lamps and ashtrays for small beer money. He sold the radio to a bookkeeper from the Agency for twenty-two-fifty. He sold the gearshift and steering column, and then turned his attention to the engine, selling the fuel pump and carburetor, the spark plugs, cylinder head, and oil pan. Then, when the Big Springs garage expressed interest in a transmission, he made a really good dicker, trading the transmission, together with the cylinders and connecting rods, for a Harley Davidson motorcycle in first-class condition.

Once more Joe had a means of rapid transportation.¹³

Joe still had not solved Louis’s ranching problem and had worn out his welcome at his stepmother’s house, hence the novel’s title. With no home to go to, he takes to living in the shell of his Buick sitting in the yard. Soon he had the sedan set up like a small studio apartment.

Toward the end of the book, the “Great Falls Times Credit Corporation” figures out Joe and sends a man to repossess the Buick. As with the story Dan had borrowed from his acquaintance who was headed to Browning years before,

¹²Ibid., 111

¹³Ibid., 158.

the man hitches a ride with a friend who helps him locate the car on the reservation. Here they've just located the car in Champlain's yard:

"I can see it," he said, fooling with the adjustment of the (binoculars). "It's the car, all right. Hasn't been dented up either. Body looks to be in first-class shape. It's parked up by the house in some bushes."

"Anybody around?"

"Seems to set awful low. I hope it hasn't got a flat tire. No, if it had a flat it'd be slonched off to one side. It's just the bushes make it look that way."

"Anybody around?" the kid asked again.

"Can't see anybody."

"Luck!"

"Well, I hope so." The man got down and handed the binoculars to the kid, who put them in the glove compartment. From his pocket the man took two keys wired together. "I hope these fit."

He started away and the kid said, "Good luck."

"Ya. When I come past in that Buick I'll be rolling pretty good. Now there's a chance it'll be low on gas, and if it is I'll yell at you, and you have the can ready. Otherwise I'll keep booming right along until we're over into Chouteau County. I don't want any trouble with the Indian Police or with the local sheriff. You know how they are, always out to throw it into somebody from Great Falls."

...(The man) anticipated no trouble from the law once he got the car off the Champlain premises. It was not the first time he had performed such a job. Once before he had swiped a car from a Blackfeet up in Glacier Park—ward of the government, like this Joseph Champlain, who, like him, had secured a car on the easy payment plan. It was strictly seller beware if an Indian got a piece of merchandise from you on contract, because Indians were legally not responsible, and you had no recourse to law, short of an act of Congress.

...He crashed through knee-deep buckbrush, breathed thanks at finding the car door unlocked, and leaped inside.

There was no front seat where he expected it. He tried to save himself, but there was nothing to grab ahold of. He fell to the floor on one elbow. He picked himself up and looked around. There was no back seat either. A bedroll had been folded and pushed away to the rear; an old wooden rocking chair was at one side. There was no steering gear or shift lever. The instruments of the dash had mostly been removed. A tiny stove had been installed on triangular wood blocks to make it sit level on the slanting floor beneath the dash, and a pipe had been run out through the ventilator hole. Higher up, beneath the dash were shelves made of halves of apple boxes, in which pancake flour, coffee, canned goods, and some old pots and skillets were stacked.

He decided to get out and check the serial number. Now he saw that the running boards almost touched the ground. No tires. No wheels either. He

opened the hood. There was no engine. Nothing. Slowly he closed the hood. He closed the doors. A woman, broad and dark, had come to the cabin door to look at him. She did not speak but stood there watching him as he slunk away across the creek toward where his car was waiting.¹⁴

By the book's end, the Champlains are down to one heifer, and, ironically, two bulls. They had the old, ineffective one and the young bull, which Joe had arranged for on his earlier trip to Great Falls, finally arrives.

Though Louis is without an income when the story begins, and is no better off when it ends, the Champlains do a lot of living thanks to the government's gift of twenty head. And the living they do provides much entertainment.

As much as Dan's humor shaped the book's main plot, it is just as important to the book's subplots. Here Dan fleshes out the cast of characters: Louis and his conviction to be known as a great, generous friend and neighbor to the point where he loses what he had gained; Mama with her attempts to keep up with the Joneses, regardless of the fact she has neither electricity nor running water; Mary who must operate dually in white society and her family's world; and Grandpere who yearns for the days of the buffalo, but finds hope in Edward R. Murrow's apocalyptic radio talk-show.

Of course, there's Joe who brings trouble even when he has the best intentions. Although good intentions come rarely to Joe, he never means to do real harm, even when he's philandering, with the nearby barkeep's wife and daughter.

It is the barkeep, Callahan, realizing that Joe was sleeping with his wife, who pulls the valve cores out of the tires of the Buick:

¹⁴Ibid., 212-215.

Joe did not notice how his car hugged the ground when he half fell into the front seat and started for home. It had no pickup, and steering it took all his strength. "Wahoo!" shouted Joe, leaning from the front window, fanning the car with his hat. He kept it wide open in second gear. The flattened tires roared and hammered on the gravel road and tore themselves to shreds, but nothing could stop Joe, armed with the mighty Buick....

"Joe?" called Louis from the window. "Is that you Joe? What's the trouble? I could hear you coming for a mile."

"Had a puncture." Then Joe, with the yard steepness accelerating his momentum, walked with long steps to the shed, where he flopped in the hay, and went to sleep.

About noon Louis came down and said, "Joe, you had better come out and look at your tires. By gare, I think you ruined the rims too."

Joe went to the pump. On his knees, with his head under the spout, he worked the handle and pumped water over his head. Then, dripping water like a surfaced beaver, he regarded the state of his car. "Goddam," he said, "Four punctures."

"No, somebody took the valve cores out."

One of the valve stems was still intact, and, sure enough, the core was missing.

"That damned Callahan!" Joe said, remembering the big time they had the night before. "He can't even take a little joke. I wish I had him in the Marine Corps; they would show him how to take a joke."

He walked around the car, looking at the tires, which were cut to shreds, with rags of cord and rubber sticking out for six inches from the wheels. The sight and the brightness of the sun hurt his eyes. He sat down, cross-legged, on the ground, with his hands over his eyes and his thumbs pressing his temples, and said, "If there is one thing I can't stand it's a man with no sense of humor."¹⁵

Those who had written about Indians prior to Dan had treaded lightly, choosing to propagate the romantic image of Indians long before they were driven to reservations. But Dan chose to face the realities of reservation life of the mid-twentieth century.

That is not to say the novel was a cold or harsh portrayal of Indians. Throughout the book, it is clear the fondness that Dan holds for the time, place and people he describes. This is especially true with the characters of Louis Champlain and his daughter Mary.

¹⁵Ibid., 147.

Take for instance the scene where Mary comes to talk to her father about the loss of the bull:

Shortly after dark he saw Mary coming in Hy Slager's old Packard car. He got up quickly, before she could see him, and circled the house, keeping out of sight behind Grandpere's brush clump, and then out of sight past the corrals until he could double back to the horse shed. He stood there in the dark, cursing softly to himself, watching through the chink in the logs, surrounded by the warm horse and manure smells, listening as the car door closed and Mary talked to Mama outside the house. Then they went inside, and for a long time it was quiet. At last he was surprised by the sound of a footstep, and his daughter's voice close by the doorway.

"Where are you, Pa?"

He hesitated a second and said, "Yes?"

"What's the matter, Pa?"

"Ho, this damn old hackamore." He pretended to be hanging a hackamore back on one of the pegs. He shuffled to the door, making no sound, the soft corral earth beneath his soft moccasins. "I guess I need light to fix him old hackamore."

She stood very small and quiet, waiting for him, pretending to believe he was only fixing a hackamore. She said, "I heard about the bull. It wasn't your fault, Pa."

"No, of course not. It was that old Matthew Horse Chaser, all-tam talk, talk, say your father is a cheapskate, too stingy to buy grub. By gare, if those old woman there in the house had let me sell one cow to Chief Littlehorse we would still have our young bull. But no—"

"I'd rather you butchered the bull than sell anything to Littlehorse."

He recalled her fight with (Littlehorse's daughter) and said, "Sure. Anyhow, I never said to kill the bull. One cow, I told them. It was that Horse Chaser said to kill the bull. I should have the sheriff after that Horse Chaser, getting them to butcher my bull."

She laughed and said, "Anyhow, you really put on a good old-fashioned whoop-up."

Louis laughed too. "By gare, never in this country has there been whoop-up lak the one throw by Louis Champlain!"¹⁶

Another such scene is when the mother of Mary's boyfriend, Mrs. Hankins, comes to the Champlain house for dinner. Here Louis plays host, but Mama, who wants to impress the woman from the big city of Helena, feels Louis

¹⁶Ibid., 69-70.

is doing everything wrong and using swear words to boot. Louis sees the shame in Mama's eyes and apologizes for his behavior.

Louis said, "Sure, that's me, always say the wrong thing. I am French, you know. All my people métis, Indian French, from long way back, long tam, French-Canadien, viva la Canadá! You know how it is with French; you can teach Polack, Dutchman, even goddam Irishman almost, speak English in five-six year, but Frenchman—oho! Frenchman, he never learn notheeng. Look at this Charles Boyer—movie actor, you know—been in this country maybe twenty year, can't speak English yet. So, your poor host, I talk, run out of English, throw in a goddam or two until I think of the right word to say."

Mrs. Hankins herself had dreaded the visit, but here, to her surprise, was a man whose charm was completely disarming.¹⁷

Dan may not have known at the time he was writing the novel how much people would identify with the characters he developed. Especially, people living on Montana's Hi-Line.¹⁸

Still, even from the first time the manuscript of Stay Away, Joe was read there were those who didn't believe the story it told.

Perhaps the best-known, most highly regarded book with a story most similar to Stay Away, Joe is John Steinbeck's Tortilla Flat, published in 1935. This book tells the tale of a group of paisano, a mixture of Spanish, Indian, Mexican and Caucasian blood, living in poverty in Monterey, California. The main character of Steinbeck's novel is Danny who comes back from World War I to find he has inherited two houses in Tortilla Flat. With this good fortune, he, like

¹⁷Ibid., 180-181.

¹⁸ The Hi-Line is top tier of Montana east of the Rocky Mountains, largely defined by Highway #2. This road will take you through or nearby four of Montana's seven Indian reservations. Driving from west to east, you start out in the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, on down the road a piece you pass within twenty miles of Rocky Boy's Reservation (as the crow flies), farther on you'll go through the top end of the Fort Belknap Reservation and finally through the Fort Peck Reservation, not far from North Dakota.

Louis Champlain, cannot help but be generous to his friends. This selfless, carefree generosity continues until the day he dies.

Like Dan's story, Steinbeck's book struck a chord in some people Steinbeck did not anticipate. Years after he'd written the book Steinbeck said he regretted what he'd done because some people who read the story went away with the wrong impression, sometimes not believing any such place really existed.¹⁹

That was case when for a reviewer for the The New York Times, who said: "Mr. Steinbeck tells a number of first-rate stories in his history of Danny's house. He has a gift for drollery and for turning Spanish talk and phrases into a gently mocking English. The book is consistently amusing...But we doubt if life in Tortilla Flat is as insouciant and pleasant and amusing as Mr. Steinbeck has made it seem."²⁰

Dan had not read Tortilla Flat when he wrote about the Champlains, but he'd seen the movie based on the book.²¹

Upon finishing Stay Away, Joe, Dan felt he wouldn't have any trouble publishing it. But when he sent it to Macmillan, the woman who'd worked with him on his three previous hardback novels rejected it. Dan's agent at the time, an editor for a pulp magazine who'd helped Dan move from the pulps to novels, agreed with her decision.

Dan recalled a line in a letter he received from this agent. "I hate to say this Dan,' comma, 'but I don't think this is a publishable book,'" Dan said. "And it

¹⁹John Steinbeck, (New York: Random House, 1935), 11.

²⁰F.T. Marsh, review of Tortilla Flat, by John Steinbeck, In New York Times (2 June 1935): 6.

²¹Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

wasn't as far as he was concerned because he was looking at it from a pulp story viewpoint."²²

The woman at Macmillan also wrote a letter containing phrases such as "found potentially hopeful material but has not handled with success," "would be disastrous to branch out," and "book does not have enough punch."²³

Perhaps too, the publisher and agent had problems with some of novel's overt commentary on reservation life. In one extreme case, Dan tells that rape is common among Indians. In this scene Mary is in a car, dealing with the unwanted advances of a young man who is part Indian and part white.

She twisted, wiry and strong, opened the door, and got away outside. He did not follow. He sat, leaning over in the seat, staring at her, his face in shadow, his eyes looking white—and at that moment he strongly showed his Indian blood. She did not generally think of (him) as anything but white, and now he frightened her, for she knew how often rape occurred among her people.²⁴

Regardless of the discouragement from his publisher and agent, Dan made no changes and did not lose heart. Instead, he sought out a third opinion.

Dan had been corresponding with Malcom Cowley, a well-known critic with The New Republic. Cowley had written an article about writers making it on their own some time before. After reading the article, Dan began corresponding with Cowley. When Dan found his publisher and agent not interested in Stay Away, Joe, he thought of Cowley, contacted him and asked if he'd look at the manuscript. Cowley said he would. To make sure his agent didn't balk at passing the manuscript along, Dan sent a telegram that said Cowley "was expecting it."²⁵

²²Ibid., 30 June 1998.

²³Great Falls Tribune, 6 May 1968, 8.

²⁴Cushman, Stay Away, 133.

²⁵Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

Then one day while he was downtown having a cup of coffee at the Club Cafeteria, Mildred Walker Schemm passed by and said to Dan, "I heard you've got a story over at the Viking Press."

"That's news to me," Dan responded

It turned out a woman who worked at the Viking Press had been Schemm's roommate during college. The woman had mentioned to Schemm that Viking was considering the book. It turned out that Cowley had read the first page of Stay Away, Joe, figured it sounded good and sent it on to a friend of his at Viking Press.²⁶

"Had I taken my agent's advice," Dan said, "'Joe' would have been a disaster and would still be in my dresser drawer."²⁷

Viking Press published the book and Dan dedicated it to his wife. The dedication reads: "For Betsy—my captive audience."

The dedication was one of the few he ever made and was perhaps the most meaningful. Over the years, Betty had typed Dan's stories, corrected his misspelled words and did other editing as well. And at the time Stay Away, Joe was coming out, she gave birth to their third child, Steve.²⁸

"Novel Written by Great Falls Author Selected by Book-of-the-Month Club," said a headline in the Great Falls Tribune in November 1952. Although the book was not yet published, and wouldn't be for another four months, the club made it the Book-of-the-Month selection for April 1953.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Great Falls Tribune, 6 May 1968, 8.

²⁸Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

The article said, "Officials of Viking Press, who will publish the book, congratulated Cushman on the selection in a telephone conversation from New York City."

"Selection of a book by the Book-of-the-Month Club is one of the most rewarding and sought-after honors in the writing profession," the article explained. The newspaper then gave Viking's view of Stay Away, Joe and Dan:

This violent and wildly comic saga of a few weeks in the lives of a Canadian-American Indian family in Montana marks the emergence of an American writer of striking individuality and solid achievement. In writing of a time, a place and a people he knows as well as any living American does, Dan Cushman displays a highly effective narrative style, a marvelous sense of comedy and a shrewd and loving perception of character that has marked few novels since Steinbeck's "Tortilla Flat."²⁹

After the book became available in bookstores, reviews began. On the local front, The Great Falls Tribune gave a blow by blow account of the story, then summed up by saying:

The novel is packed with comic incident. The narrative pace is fast but never forced. Descriptive passages are used to set the scene, no more. The dialogue rings as true and sharp as a skilled woodsman's ax.... (T)he comedy borders on pathos, the ultimate test of genuine comedy.³⁰

The reviewer closes by saying Dan should write a sequel about the Champlains.

In Montana Magazine of History another reviewer said this about Dan's book:

Nothing is glossed over, the dances with drinking, fighting and general brawling, are honestly pictured. The hap-hazard relationship of certain men and women are not approved but neither are the offenders ostracized. The greatest offense was to be "ashamed of your people."

²⁹Great Falls Tribune, 15 November 1952, 8.

³⁰Ibid., 22 March 1953, 14.

...I am sure it will give a great deal of enjoyment and entertainment to most of its readers. Perhaps it will shock others. But it is a good facet of Montana Indian life today, and as such deserves commendation.³¹

Such local reviews were welcome by Dan, but he knew what really mattered in the end would be the book's reception by publications in the East.

Caroline Bancroft, reviewing for The New York Time Book Review, praised Dan's work:

With brush strokes that are sharp and true, Dan Cushman has painted a segment of today's West.... To write of the West, and not write just another Western, requires a special ability. The Zane Greys, Harold Bell Wrights and Owen Wisters have left false romance hanging about the place like a pall, stifling the production of good fiction. Authors have avoided this pall, if they wrote of the more distant past: as, most notably, in Willa Cather's "Death Comes for the Archbishop." But the present has frequently eluded them.

Mr. Cushman writes about his native state of Montana in such a rollicking story that the pratfalls, ironies and boisterous absurdities may seem exaggerated to an Eastern reader. But anyone who knows and likes the West will find the incidents true to the life of the country.³²

It is important to note that Bancroft's own description at the review's bottom read: "Miss Bancroft is a Westerner and a student of Western lore."

As if on cue, other eastern publication reviews, done by true easterners, did not see the book as funny and did not value its realism. In The Atlantic Monthly, Edward Weeks begins his review by saying, "Romance is nonexistent in *Stay Away, Joe* ... a novel of an Indian reservation ..., which certainly hits a new low in squalor and shiftlessness." Weeks finds few redeeming aspects of the book and closes saying:

Since no one in the book except Mary has ever taken a bath, done a day's work, or spoken a grammatical word, the story has what you might call atmosphere. Which would be all very well if it had native charm too, or more

³¹ Anne McDonnell, review of Stay Away, Joe, In Montana Magazine of History (Spring 1953): 54-55.

³² Caroline Bancroft, review of Stay Away, Joe, In The New York Time Book Review (29 March 1953): 5.

than one sympathetic character, or momentum. But in spite of the fact hell pops all the time, I only get an impression of frantic random action. The author has not enough control of the story to make it funny, and I get very tired of the dialect, the beer, and the dirt.³³

The New Yorker also was unimpressed with the book. Its review reads, "The characters are all from comic books but are not comic, the humor is broad, the laughter is empty, the setting is drab, there is noise but no spirit, and every element of humanity is missing."³⁴

The trouble Dan had finding a publisher for Stay Away, Joe and the immediate reviews of the book captured well what would become its legacy. Readers of the book fall into one of two camps; those who do not see, or want to believe the reality found in Stay Away, Joe, and those who believe he delved into something no other writer had the guts for.

Dan laughed, remembering how he was warned that at least two groups in particular wouldn't find his book all that funny, the Buick corporation and Indians.

"Somebody said someplace that I had better not show up in Flint, Mich., where the Buick Company could get ahold of me," Dan said. "That man could not have been farther wrong."³⁵

Turned out, the Buick people liked the book and would special order it. As for the Indian readers' opinion, Dan sought it out shortly after the book was published.

"I stuck my head (out) around the reservation to see if anybody wanted to take a shot at me," Dan said. "They said they liked it."³⁶

³³Edward Weeks, review of Stay Away, Joe, In The Atlantic Monthly 191(April 1953): 80.

³⁴Review of Stay Away, Joe, In The New Yorker 29 (4 April 1953): 129.

³⁵Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

³⁶Great Falls Tribune, 9 June 1994, 1A.

But when Dan and his brother-in-law, Edward Giebel, sought out Louis Champagne to see what he thought of the book it turned out that he hadn't read it.³⁷

Some Indians liked the book so much Dan ended up having to take his number out of the phone book. Those visiting Great Falls would call Dan at all hours.

"I would get calls in the middle of the night and it would scare the hell out of my wife," he said.³⁸

More than one Blackfeet Indian claimed to be the inspiration for Joe, Dan said. Even though he pointed out Joe was Cree and Assiniboine, he couldn't convince them otherwise.

Dan's daughter remembered that the period immediately after Stay Away, Joe came out was the happiest time of Dan's life. "He was a young man then and it was a wonderful success for him," Mimi said. "Everything was working out so well."³⁹

For many years afterward people would stop Dan on the street and tell him how good the book was.

Despite the eastern reviews of the book, some people on Broadway saw the humor in Stay Away, Joe and thought it was a great story. Two well-known producers contacted Dan in the summer of 1954 about making the book into a musical. On top of that, he went to Malibu, Calif., that autumn to begin adapting the book to the stage. The adaptation wasn't completed until four years later.

³⁷Cushman, interview by author, 3 March 1999.

³⁸Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

³⁹Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

“He was in hog heaven when he spent a few weeks in Malibu with Cy Feuer and Ernie Martin,” Dan’s son, Bob, recalled.⁴⁰

Feuer and Martin took on Stay Away, Joe with confidence as they had produced five hits in a row: “Where’s Charley?” “Guys and Dolls,” “Can-Can,” “The Boy Friend” and “Silk Stockings.”⁴¹

In addition to working on the Stay Away, Joe adaptation, Dan wrote a script during that time about a lovable con man on the high plains during the 1920s, another story with roots going back to his childhood. He and Martin approached Meredith Wilson about turning the script into a musical comedy. But Wilson passed.⁴²

Wilson’s refusal was of small consequence. The prospect that his work was going to be on Broadway, and the possibility it might become a mainstay was something that excited Dan like nothing else. It was the fuel he ran on for the next three years. And judging by Dan’s outpouring of fiction in those years, it was nothing less than jet fuel.

⁴⁰Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999.

⁴¹Great Falls Tribune, 29 August 1955, 12.

⁴²Ibid., 5 November 1978, 10.

CHAPTER V

STRIKING INDIVIDUALITY, SOLID ACHIEVEMENT

*The greatest part of a writer's time is spent
reading, in order to write....*

—*Samuel Johnson.*

Dan must have felt like he'd achieved success when the Viking Press described him as "an American writer of striking individuality and solid achievement." He'd sought, consciously or unconsciously, such a singular distinction since his boyhood days in Big Sandy.

Whatever effect such a description had on him, it didn't cause him to become any more persnickety when choosing what he'd write or for whom. After all, while he was enjoying the success of Stay Away, Joe, he was receiving recognition for some of his less serious efforts.

In February 1954, Dan sold the movie rights to a Gold Medal pocket book to Republic Pictures. Timberjack had been published the previous year and was described as "a modern lumbering story."

The plot of the movie involved a son coming home to take over his father's lumber mill. The production of the film began in August 1954, with much of the filming in western Montana in places such as the Blackfoot River Valley and Glacier National Park. Meanwhile the indoor scenes were shot in Hollywood.

The film cost \$1,000 an hour to make and premiered in Missoula in February 1955.¹

Dan—who had just become a father for the fourth time with Betty giving birth to another son, this one named Matt—went to Missoula to participate in the premiere ceremonies. There he met some of the movie’s actors, including Sterling Hayden, Vera Ralston, David Brian, Adolph Menjou, Hoagy Carmichael and Chill Wills.

A picture of the ceremonies that day showed Dan riding next to Vera Ralston on top of the back seat of a Buick convertible, the soft-top version of the car Joe parted out.²

Whatever the hoopla was worth, the film flopped. Dan said that after watching the show, “I felt like crawling out on my hands and knees. (It) was terrible. They spent a fortune on it.”³

Dan was not as impressed with Hollywood as he was with Broadway.

“It is transient publicity that you get from Hollywood,” he said.⁴

Dan then received more recognition for another kind of writing in The New Yorker. Since leaving the Great Falls Tribune advertising department Dan had continued to write one advertisement per year for Kaufmans, a clothing store in Great Falls.

“Each January, (Dan) resumes his former roll as advertising copy writer,” a newspaper article said, “to create the original, amusing ads that herald Kaufmans’ annual ‘stampede’ sales.”⁵

¹Great Falls Tribune, 17 February 1954, 10; *Ibid.*, 23 August 1954, 7; *Ibid.*, 30 September 1954, 14.

²Missoulian, 19 April 1998, E2.

³Cushman, interview by author, 22 February 1998.

⁴*Ibid.*

“Those did very well,” Dan said. “Those were double truck ads and I know that one of them won the National Clothiers Award for the best ad of the year.”⁶

Still, Dan was surprised in 1955, when in The New Yorker he found prose of his own under a headline, “THERE’LL ALWAYS BE AN ADMAN BUT NOT ALWAYS ONE JUST LIKE THIS ONE,” with a subhead, “[Adv. in the Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune].” He saw the magazine ran verbatim part of an ad that he had written for the newspaper months before:

Just 150 years ago Captain Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, and their expedition, guided by Sacajewea, the Bird Woman, arrived in Montana having been sent by the U.S. Government, the new proprietor. Many people know this, but what fewer know is that 1955 is also the half-150th anniversary of the arrival of another explorer, one who leaned on no government subsidy and had no Indian maiden to guide him, but was forced to lay out cash money on the steamboat. Yes, it is just 75 years since Mose Kaufman arrived in Fort Benton and made history by setting up the first three-story pushcart in Montana. Unfortunately there are no pictures extant of this establishment (although the present store, since moved to Great Falls, still has in stock five or six of the slower items of merchandise), but its dimensions and general appointments have been perpetuated in folk ballads which recently were tape recorded by an ethnological expedition into the breaks of the Marias River, and from such sources as Mr. Stan Legowik, the local artist, was able to reconstruct it in the drawing herewith, an addition to the annals of history if we ever heard tell of one. All hail Lewis and Clark, explorers for the government! All hail Sacajawea, intrepid Bird Woman! All hail Mose Kaufman, first merchant in the Territory of Montana to price \$5 pants at \$4.95! All hail his boys, Fred and Ira, tomorrow cleaning out old merchandise at less than cost! Hail Teddy Pichavas, friend of all bookmakers, who presses and alters the clothes but not tomorrow! Tomorrow you’ll have to take them home just as they are. Hail Dave Jacobson and Bill Lander! Hail Ed Rule and John Tonkovitch! All of whom will let you try on anything in stock without assistance or interference. Hail two beauteous gals in the office, Rita and Edith! Who have been instructed no refunds, even if you’re short changed you can’t get your money back.⁷

⁵Great Falls Tribune, 3 March 1955, 17.

⁶Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

⁷Dan Cushman, “THERE’LL ALWAYS BE AN ADMAN, BUT NOT ALWAYS ONE JUST LIKE THIS ONE,” The New Yorker, 19 February 1955, 99.

The ad was meant to poke fun at Kaufmans, their employees, and the slower items in the store, but Dan figures the magazine picked it up because of its edgy humor in light of World War II.

“The reason The New Yorker printed it was because I was making fun of the Jews,” Dan said.⁸

The magazine didn’t have the guts to write such humor themselves, Dan said, but were willing to run it if someone else went out on the limb.⁹ Alex Worden, the president of the Great Falls Tribune, had actually come up with the idea using such humor in the ads.

“He’s the one who broke the ice,” Dan said.

“At that time being a Jew, it was Hitler’s day you know, was a very ticklish sort of thing,” Dan said, recalling another Kaufman ad he wrote.

“I amazed people by writing a whole Jewish ad in extreme Yiddish. Every cliché of being a Jew was in it, see, all the unspoken things I’d put in there.... I went on to give every damn joke that would be possible aimed at Yiddish people.”¹⁰

Here’s one example from the ad in 1955:

Satchel, Suitcase and Grip Dept.
1 bag 1 2-suiter bag
Was \$60 now \$18.94 plus tax.

⁸Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

⁹Ibid., 22 February 1998.

¹⁰Ibid.

Forming a set worth \$60 not counting the tax. That's what we were trying to get, 60 bucks. Had 'em so long folks got to saying they were the same ones that Mose carried when he got off the boat in Fort Benton. It's a lie. Mose's old alligator skin valise we sold at our sale five years ago. Still got the old German sock he carried his money in, though. Ask Rita, she'll show it to you.¹¹

While Dan may have liked that The New Yorker found his ad amusing, he'd have liked it a lot more had they paid him something for using it. After all, he was a professional writer.

But he said he didn't have a leg to stand on had he tried to get something out of the magazine because of the roundabout way the ad came to its attention. Somebody found it in a "National Clothiers Gazetteer or something," Dan said, not in the newspaper, and then passed it on to the magazine.¹²

Always a faithful reader of The New Yorker, Dan from then on looked upon it with some bitterness. It now had two strikes against in Dan's eyes: it panned Stay Away, Joe; and it never compensated him for his ad.

In 1955 Dan and Betty had been married for about 15 years. They more or less had two sets of children with nearly a decade between them. Matt was a newborn and Steve was 2. Meanwhile Bob was 10 and Mimi was entering her teenage years.

The older children saw great differences in their parents. To begin with, their social natures contrasted greatly. But during this time they struck a nice balance.

"She was as social as he was a loner. It was good. She kind of forced him to do things," Mimi said.

¹¹Great Falls Tribune, 9 January 1955, 8.

¹²Cushman , interview by author, 25 January 1998. Dan said The New Yorker picked up more than one of his Kaufman ads, never once paying him, but I could find no evidence of any more besides the one above. There might very well be more and I just didn't find them.

Whereas Dan couldn't force himself to stick with a fraternity, Betty graduated from college a member of the Chi Omega Sorority. And while Betty attended a bridge club religiously and belonged to the local Young Woman's Club—serving as its president at one point—Dan's socializing was more of an informal sort.

If Dan had an equivalent to Betty's bridge club, it was the daily walk he took, during which he might drop in on friends who lived in the neighborhood. He spent many hours with his contemporary Norman Fox, who was racking up quite a collection of Westerns at the time. Much of Fox's work was translated into foreign languages, giving him an international reputation.¹³

Fox said more than once to Dan that the villains in his books were the heroes in his. Dan enjoyed hearing that.¹⁴

Another friend Dan often visited was Jim Bulger, a local physician. He and Dan shared a number of things in common. Both were Catholic, men of ideas, and well read. Bulger was a few years younger than Dan and arrived in Great Falls in the mid-1940s. Though he was a devoted family practitioner, he had an interest in writing and contributed articles to medical journals.¹⁵

Dan also liked to visit with Monsignor James Donovan. Msgr. Donovan was an extraordinarily well-rounded priest. He was an author, a sociologist, an educator and the holder of the Great Falls city weightlifting title for a time. He was born in Ireland in 1909 and came to Great Falls in 1943, filling the vicar-General position of the Great Falls diocese. Five years later he became the president of the College of Great Falls, beginning a long career in education.¹⁶

¹³Great Falls Tribune, 25 March 1960, 1.

¹⁴Tuska, interview by author, June 1998.

¹⁵Carol Van Valkenburg, daughter of Dan Cushman's close friend Jim Bulger, interview by author, March 1998, Missoula, Mont.; Great Falls Tribune, 31 December 1995, 2B.

Along with the visits, Dan's social life included evening trips through downtown Great Falls. He'd drop by the library, the Liberty Theater, the Rainbow Theater, Val's Cigars and News and the Public Drug.

"Generally, he could find an audience at one or more of these places and would provide entertainment if possible," Dan's son, Bob, recalled.¹⁷

Dan and Betty also had contrasting interests. Betty was not one for hobbies, but did enjoy math and statistics. She was a "shark" at income taxes and offered her accounting services for a fee. Had she belonged to a later era her interest may have led to a more formal career.¹⁸

Dan, on the other hand, was known to be a man of many hobbies ranging from making chokecherry wine to throwing pottery. His chokecherry wine hobby involved everyone but Betty who wasn't keen on the outdoors. Dan and the kids would pick buckets and buckets of chokecherries.

His pottery was more of a solo effort. He'd throw pieces on his potter's wheel and fire the work in one of two kilns. Although his early work was rather crude, cups and such, he became much better with time. He displayed some of his handiwork at home, one example being the lamp hung from his living room ceiling. After awhile he got into collecting his own glazes and would dig clay by the river. Sometimes his friend Jim Bulger joined him.¹⁹

But Dan's favorite hobby by far was reading, which took an "an enormous amount of time," his children said.²⁰

¹⁶Great Falls Tribune, 24 January 1968, 1.

¹⁷Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999.

¹⁸Cushman, interview by author, 22 February 1998; Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

¹⁹Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

²⁰Bob Cushman, interview by author, 4 March 1999, Missoula, Mont.

One of the few times Dan ever willingly belonged to a group was in 1953 when he helped develop the Western Writers of America, Inc. He joked as he remembered his help in getting the organization going by saying, "I was one of the funding members!"²¹

Dan, along with some other writers of traditional Westerns, founded W.W.A in order to promote literature of the American West. They began awarding Spur Awards for the best work in different fields including fiction, history, romance and young adult writing.²²

But however much he appreciated his ability to write a Western and could only benefit from the promotion of Western writing, it was not his reading of choice. He liked work that had stood the test of time.

"He knows a lot about literature," Mimi said. "I mean classical literature. If you drop a line from Shakespeare, he will finish it for you. You drop a line from Tennessee Williams, he'll finish that for you."²³

Bob laughed, recalling how when he was a teenager he'd go to school equipped, thanks to Dan, with alternative views of the authors his class was studying. Dan was known to go through periods intensely interested in a particular author, rereading certain books a number of times. Bob described much of his reading as "esoteric stuff."²⁴

He enjoyed reading François Rabelais, the French humorist and satirist from the sixteenth century.

"I spent a month reading Rabelais. He was a great, great writer," Dan said. "From the time he was a boy, he was a great favorite for wealthy people,

²¹Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

²²<http://www.westernwriters.org>

²³Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

²⁴Bob Cushman, interview by author, 4 March 1999.

kind of like a house dog, you know. He was like one of their family, so he must have been a very interesting person.”

He was a professional heathen, Dan remembered, and “knew every argument in the world.” Rabelais was best known for a collection of work, Gargantua et Pantagruel.²⁵

Barbara Bowen, an expert in sixteenth century French and Romance language studies has this to say about Rabelais:

(He) is a difficult and often misunderstood author, whose coarse ‘Rabelaisian’ jesting and ‘gargantuan’ indulgence in food, drink and sex, is highly misleading. He was in fact a committed humanist who expressed strong views on religion, good government, education, and much more through the mock heroic adventures of his giants.²⁶

Dan particularly enjoyed the eighteenth century work of Edward Gibbon, Samuel Johnson and James Boswell. Of these writers, Gibbon was par excellence for Dan.

“I was struck dumb by the size and the structure of Gibbon’s, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” Dan said. “Nobody ever wrote better than Gibbon. Some people could write sentences and things like that, but nobody could ever turn out paragraphs like Gibbon.”²⁷

The history of the Roman Empire was Gibbon’s most famous work. The book’s success was “partly due to the wide range it covers with such clarity and ease and partly due to the perfect matching of style to the subject.”²⁸

²⁵Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

²⁶Barbara C. Bowen, Enter Rabelais Laughing (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), dust jacket.

²⁷Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

²⁸Bernard Johnston, ed. Collier’s Encyclopedia (New York: P.F. Collier Inc., 1993), s.v. “Edward Gibbon,” by Jane E Norton.

“They say he would sit there for an hour and a half,” Dan said, “and construct these great paragraphs and then he’d turn and write as fast as he could, writing in complete paragraphs. It’s not easy, the pipe fitting of a good paragraph because it’s a chapter in itself, almost always. I read The Decline and Fall a couple times.”²⁹

Dan also enjoyed reading Boswell’s The Life of Samuel Johnson. Boswell is accepted as a “conscious artist with sense of the dramatic and an eye for significant detail.” He was known to create complete scenes, true to the smallest details, from condensed notes he took years before.³⁰

Boswell’s account of Johnson not only provided “the doctor” a kind of immortality, but it was the first biography of its kind, recreating, among other things, verbatim conversations Johnson had in his lifetime.

“If the good doctor didn’t actually say it, Dan would say it for him,” his son, Bob, said. “He read every word of Boswell’s Life of Johnson at least twice.”³¹

From the nineteenth century Dan enjoyed French novelist and poet Victor Hugo, author of Hunchback of Notre Dame, and America’s Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain. Clemens was a “very entertaining man,” Dan said. “I enjoyed reading his work.”

Dan found it interesting that Clemens had a hard time publishing and selling the story of Huck Finn. Critics didn’t like that it contained poor grammar. “Everything changes, you know,” he remarked.³²

²⁹Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

³⁰Bernard Johnston, ed. Collier’s Encyclopedia (New York: P.F. Collier Inc., 1993), s.v. “Samuel Johnson,” by E.L. McAdam, Jr.

³¹Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999.

³²Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

Dan's kids also remember Dan reading many twentieth century writers including Evelyn Waugh, an English writer known for black comedy such as The Loved One, an Anglo-American Tragedy; Tennessee Williams, an American playwright best known for Streetcar Named Desire, whose work often showed sensual impulse conflicting with a longing for spiritual transcendence;³³ and Henry Louis Mencken, an American journalist known for his boisterous style and deadpan hyperbola. Mencken's work also was characterized as sharp pointed, infuriating and witty.

Dan probably related to Mencken's distaste of Americans with "our growing impatience with the free play of ideas, our increasing tendency to reduce all virtues to a single conformity, our relentless and all pervading standardization...."³⁴

Dan also enjoyed Leslie Fiedler who lived in Missoula from 1941 to 1964 and taught English at the university.

"I knew Fiedler, and he was fun to talk to," Dan said. "He was quite a relief. He was a hell of a smart fella."³⁵

Fiedler is best known for Love and Death in the American Novel, but he also wrote a controversial piece for the Partisan Review titled "The Montana Face." The piece, published in 1949, told of Fiedler's experience when he arrived in the state from the East:

I was met unexpectedly by the Montana Face...a face developed not for sociability or feeling, but for facing into the weather. It said friendly things, to be sure, and meant them; but it had no adequate physical expressions even

³³Bernard Johnston, ed. Collier's Encyclopedia (New York: P.F. Collier Inc., 1993), s.v. "Tennessee Williams," by Foster Hirsch.

³⁴Marion Elizabeth Rodgers, ed. The Impossible H.L. Mencken, with a Foreword by Gore Vidal (New York: Doubleday, 1991), xx.

³⁵Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

for friendliness, and the muscles around the mouth and eyes were obviously unprepared to cope with the demands of any more complicated emotion.³⁶

Fiedler later amended these impressions in other work, but he maintained a reputation for pissing off people.

“Genius gone awry,” was how Dan described him.

In addition to newspapers and books, Dan had a steady consumption of magazines. He’s read Vanity Fair since 1922 and has received The New Yorker since it was first published in 1925. He also likes The New York Magazine. In this vein, Gore Vidal and John Updike are two of his favorite writers.³⁷

Another publication Dan looked forward to was the New York Herald Tribune. He was never happier than when he was “with a three-day old Herald Tribune.”³⁸

Dan’s literary selections and hobbies demonstrate his steady inclination to be different, but when it came to creating a home he was very deliberate about maintaining traditions. He was the breadwinner and Betty took care of the house and family. Dan liked it that way. Since their wedding Dan had done well, and better with each year. By the mid-1950s he’d experienced a couple of financial windfalls no one could have foreseen.

When Dan worked at the newspaper he made at least \$1,200 a year. In 1945, he saw that his freelancing income would exceed that and from 1946 to 1950, his children recall that he did really well, but they couldn’t speculate what his income was.

³⁶William Kittredge and Annick Smith, eds., The Last Best Place: A Montana Anthology (Helena, Mont.: The Falcon Press, 1988), 747.

³⁷Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

³⁸Ibid., 2 March 1999.

Estimating that he sold just four pulp novelettes a year adding up to about 120,000 words at 2 cents a word, it's reasonable that he doubled his income after he left the newspaper.

If nothing else, he'd done well enough to afford a second home in Phillipsburg, Mont. The purchase is telling of both a fear that gripped the nation at that time and Dan's personality.

After World War II ended with an atomic bomb explosion many people imagined one could be dropped anytime. Dan did his best to prepare his family for such an incident. As a result, he bought the Phillipsburg home as a refuge for the family in case of another big war.

His children noted that this was during the days of "duck and cover" and fallout shelters. Bob remembered other measures Dan took.

"He did things, like he bought a three-year supply of baking powder. And if you go up in the house (in Great Falls), you'll still find a big crate full of 30-30 ammunition, never mind that I have the rifle (in Missoula)."

Bob continued, "One of the reasons he used to get the New York Herald Tribune is they had this very nice weather map with all the weather currents and he was following those to see where the safest place in Montana would be from radiation fog."³⁹

The sleepy, secluded mountain town of Phillipsburg must have seemed the perfect spot to Dan. It was a bonus, no doubt, that Phillipsburg had one of the most successful silver mines in Montana's history, making it a town where mining lore ran deep.

But the Phillipsburg scene was short-lived for Dan and his family. In 1953 or 1954, they sold the Phillipsburg home because they weren't spending

³⁹Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

enough time there to justify it. Perhaps they would have gone down there more often if the roads from Great Falls to Phillipsburg weren't so taxing.

"Dan hated driving and let everyone know it," Bob said, recalling the family's trips. "He drove slow, refused to stop at restaurants or gas stations unless absolutely necessary, so everybody hated the drive. Once there, an excuse would soon be found to go back to Great Falls."⁴⁰

Still however decent Dan's income was at the onset of the 1950s, he'd never seen, perhaps never even imagined, the money that came to him in the following five years: money from the sales of Stay Away Joe—thanks to the Book-of-the-Month Club; money from the book's stage rights; money from Timberjack and its movie rights; and money he made from lesser-known books such as The Fabulous Finn and Port Orient published by Fawcett in 1954 and 1955, and from Tongking published by Ace in 1955.

Although Dan's children don't know what this all added up to, Bob said the Timberjack deal alone might have earned Dan \$15,000, "which seemed like a huge sum in those days," he said.

Mimi said there was a year when Dan made \$25,000. To put this in perspective she said, "I think that same year my uncle made \$12,000 as the business manager of The Leader."

And the children remember that during a four-year period in the mid-1950s, Dan and Betty spent money like never before. In 1954, they purchased a two-story home at 1305 First Avenue North, a short distance from the Paris Gibson School. (Here, Dan made his writing office in the attic.) Around this same time they bought a new car.

⁴⁰Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 December 2000.

Dan was no lover of automobiles. He didn't like driving and cared even less for fumes. Still, there was no getting around needing a car and now he could afford the best.

"He went down and bought a Buick Roadmaster, and he paid cash for it," Mimi said. "He could have bought a Cadillac, but he decided a Cadillac would be too much. It would be too snobbish."⁴¹

The car Dan bought was just like the one Joe drove. Mimi said he felt obligated to buy a Buick because when he was writing the book he went down to the showroom and measured the interior of the car to make sure the rocking chair, stove and other items would really fit. The day he did the measuring the salesman thought for sure they had a sale, not knowing it was just research.⁴²

Dan and Betty also joined the local country club and were known to buy wine by the case. Sometimes, Mimi said, Dan would really splurge and buy Courvoisier, an expensive cognac, but he never brought home a case of it.

"Of course, when you are young and successful, you think it's going to continue, so they lived it up," Mimi said. "They had a great time."⁴³

As much as Dan was enjoying the high life, he was writing steadily.

In 1955, Dan's final Comanche John book, The Fastest Gun came out. This time Macmillan, who published the first two Comanche John novels, was not the publisher. Macmillan didn't publish any more of Dan's work, obviously fallout from Macmillan's discouraging words with Stay Away, Joe. Dell, a new publisher for Dan, published The Fastest Gun.

⁴¹Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.; According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index: \$4,000 in 1955 would be about \$25,000 in 1999; \$12,000 would be \$72,000; and \$25,000 would be \$150,000.

Dan's connection to Dell would turn out to be a blessing. Dell wasn't run very well at the time, Dan said, but they treated him better than any other publishing house he'd write for.

"(Dell was) a great publisher to have," Dan said, explaining that they had published Five Novels Monthly. Dan was one of its contributors and later the people at Dell always remembered his work for the magazine.

"They'd wire me and I'd write four or five chapters or 20 pages or so and send it off, and they'd be selling it before I finished," Dan said, laughing. "They're the kind of customer I liked. They paid very well."⁴⁴

Besides that, Dan was lined up with an editor at Dell by the name of Marc Jaffe, with whom he hit it off. Jaffe would become an important connection for Dan and though he didn't remain at Dell as long as he was in the business Dan knew he had an outlet for his pocketbooks.

In The Fastest Gun, the "black whiskered man" agrees to lead a wagon train of farmers through the wild and dangerous Idaho Territory. The settlers don't know their guide is the notorious Comanche John, but are fortunate to have such a savvy character in their midst. The true villain of the story, with the help of hired killers and so-called law, is out to get them.

Vigilantes and mining had played important roles in the two previous Comanche John books. Dan's inclusion of the settlers intent on farming in the third book adds a new dimension to Comanche John's world. Comanche John can't understand the attraction such a living provides the settlers. He tries to persuade them to change their course with a destination point where they could direct their efforts solely toward mining and, with luck, strike it rich:

⁴⁴Cushman,, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

“There isn't a man among us who knows the first thing about mining.”
“No-o (Comanche John responds) but on the other hand it's been my observation that most folks are happier starving to death digging for gold than getting medium fat on a farm. With a farm you know you won't get far, but a mine is different. Never a miner that didn't have a million dollars just two feet ahead of his shovel.”⁴⁵

The settlers don't agree with his logic and as the story unfolds Comanche John realizes the West is changing and begins to look forward to a more peaceful existence. Always one to benefit from rumored death, Comanche John rides into the sunset at the book's end with no one the wiser. This time, though, he's never heard from again.

⁴⁵Dan Cushman, The Fastest Gun (New York: Dell, 1955), 41.

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD COPPER COLLAR AND THE SILVER MOUNTAIN

Books without knowledge of life are useless.
—Samuel Johnson.

Dan probably didn't give much thought to the fact that his Comanche John tales were complete. In 1955 and 1956, he was fully involved in writing other books. One he hoped would follow Stay Away, Joe to Broadway.

"The reason I wrote The Old Copper Collar was I thought it would make a good musical show," Dan said.¹

It was about Montana politics at the turn of the twentieth century, a time when the Copper Kings of Butte, Montana, ruled the economy of the state. One of the mining magnates, William Andrews Clark, felt that becoming a U.S. senator would round out his life nicely and he spent huge sums of money trying to get elected. He did it more than once.

Dan focused on Clark's third run at the office. This was when the state's congressman was elected by the state legislature alone and not by the voters of Montana. This meant that Clark need only to bribe the legislative body.

But few people liked Clark and one potent enemy was a rival Copper King, Marcus Daly, owner of the Amalgamated Copper Mining Company, later renamed the Anaconda Mining Company. Every time Clark ran for office, Daly

¹Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

cost Clark votes. On Clark's third try, Daly unleashed the newspaper he owned, Anaconda Standard and directed it to expose Clark's unscrupulous behavior.

For a time it seemed as though Daly's efforts had denied Clark the office yet again. But Clark, with tricks never before seen, still managed to wiggle his way into office, ultimately serving an undistinguished six-year term as a U.S. senator.

Although the events were well recorded, by the mid-1950s no fiction writer had yet capitalized on the outrageousness of the blatant bribery. Undoubtedly, nobody had dreamed of turning the story into a musical either. With a stack of Anaconda Standards at his side, Dan went to work.²

"They were 'the company's' papers and they were the ones to have because they accused him of everything in God's world," Dan said.

"And Clark did, according to history, walk down the hall and if the people who wouldn't talk to him had their transoms open, he'd make a bundle of currency, \$10,000 or so or more than that, and he'd throw it over the transom. And if they didn't throw it back, if they kept it, he'd know he had them."³

Dan noted that this was 1898 and that was a lot of money. He also said the question wasn't who would or wouldn't take Clark's bribe, rather who could be bribed twice. Daly and "the company" had an agenda and bribed people first to not vote for Clark, then Clark came around with more money to change their minds, Dan said.⁴

History says, "47 votes were bought in eighteen days for a total of \$431,000, the individual price ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Thirteen senators

²ibid.

³ibid., 25 January 1998.

⁴ibid., 2 March 1999.

refused bribes which totaled \$200,000. Clark, a Democrat, was able to buy all but 4 of 15 Republican votes in the Senate.”⁵

In telling the story, Dan followed the course of events as the Anaconda Standard told them, making a few changes and additions to turn it into a more fictional and a better story. Dan changed Clark’s name to H.B. Bennett and made the hero Bennett’s son, Fred, who managed the campaign.

It was Clark’s son who managed his campaign and Dan used a real-life statement by Charles Clark to describe the unyielding nature of the campaign. “Gentlemen,” said Fred (and Charles), “we’ll either put the old man in the Senate, or we’ll put him in the poorhouse!”⁶

Dan had learned with Stay Away, Joe that a good novel did not mean an easy stage adaptation and understood a lot of trouble could be saved if a writer made certain accommodations.

“If you have a musical in mind, you stage it to where it can be made into a musical,” Dan said. “So, it won’t be impossible to bring it together in one small piece.”⁷

“I had a problem and that was how was I going to get enough girls,” Dan said. Girls were not something one found in Montana politics of 1899. In order to include some, he made Fred an aspiring playwright.

“So, I had Fred wire New York, where he had been working to produce a show. He wired them to send a chorus of this song he was writing. The fella misinterprets the letter, the telegram, (and) he sends all the girls (West).

⁵Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 67.

⁶Ibid.; Dan Cushman, The Old Copper Collar (New York: Ballentine, 1957; reprint, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, Great Britain: Chivers Press, 1998), 67 (page references are to the reprint edition).

⁷Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

“Now he has all these women, see. It was the best excuse for a chorus, the girls would kick their feet and (other stuff) like that,” Dan said.⁸

Creating the opportunity for a chorus line in the show was perhaps greatest alteration he did as he turned history into fiction He also has Fred fall in love with a company man’s daughter, providing the book one of its subplots.

But beyond that, the real-life campaigning of Clark and his son gave ample opportunity for Dan to make humorous scenes, such as when he has some of the politicians becoming a little too dependent on Fred’s bribes, or as Dan calls it, his “campaign literature.”

There was Mulligan. Mulligan, all grizzly-bear two hundred pounds of him, draped himself over Fred’s shoulders. “F.J. me lad! Now it’s yourself I’ve been waiting to see for these past two days. I’m anxious to have you meet Representative O’Mara.”

O’Mara was a small Irishman with a long upper lip and a pucker mouth that needed only a clay pipe to look like a cartoon of Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion. Fred shook him by the hand.

“O’Mara has a very serious problem.” Mulligan was confidential so as not to embarrass O’Mara. “The poor lad was down at the Swedish Palm Garden, with the money you so kindly lent him, and somebody picked his pockets. O’Mara, show him how much money you have left to your name after those sons of bitches got through with you.”

O’Mara had been slowed by liquor. Each move was a separate problem. He reached in each of his pockets. He drew a silver dollar from one, some matches and small change from another, then some keys and a wadded piece of paper. The paper he smoothed. It proved to be a five-dollar bill. O’Mara had it in his mind that Fred was needing a loan. He tried to give him the five dollars.

“No lad,” cried Mulligan, “Fred doesn’t need your money. Oh, dear old O’Mara, there’s a man for you. He’d give you the shirt off his back.”

Fred said to Mulligan, “Damn it, I thought you said you’d take care of that money.”

“I did me best. He was out of sight for no more than a couple hours. I was at the Capitol speaking on behalf of your own father, and the scoundrels got to him.”⁹

⁸Ibid.

⁹Cushman, Old Copper, 52-53.

Fred finds himself refilling the pockets of a number of politicians—especially Mulligan. The refilling is necessary so that they won't run out of cash and look to "the company" for more. Before the election is over, Fred has, among other measures, set up an escrow account for Mulligan.

"There's a scene in there that everybody likes, and it surprised me," Dan said. The scene is at the end of the book after the campaigning is over and Fred is relieved to be done with it all. Mulligan, who has kept himself steadily inebriated for much of the time, doesn't realize the party's over and calls Fred:

"This is Senator Mulligan. I'm all out of liquor and the bar refuses to send me a drop. What should I do about it."

Fred knew quite well what the Senator should do about it.

"Do you have your pants on?"

"I do that."

"Good. Look in your pockets. Do you have twenty-five cents?"

There had been a pause. "Yes, I have it."

"All right, now here's what you do. You take that son-of-a-bitching twenty-five cents, and go downstairs, and outside and thence cross over the Shipwreck Saloon. Is that clear? Now, when you get inside that saloon I want you to walk right up and lay that son-of-a-bitching twenty-five cents on their filthy bar and tell them that you want a drink of whiskey, that I *sent you!*"¹⁰

Dan said the scene was not an original.

"You know I never thought of it," Dan said, explaining that it was an anecdote he'd heard about Roy Rogers, except that Rogers had called someone up and said he was hungry.

"That's where I get my ideas—from life," he said.¹¹

Besides using material he'd picked up here and there, Dan doesn't pass up the opportunity to make a little social commentary with the story, particularly

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

about the weak character of politicians. As one of Fred's colleagues explains toward the end of the book:

“Now these fellows have all sold out to H.B. when they promised to oppose him. When they go home their constituents ought to smear them with green manure and ride them out of town on a fence rail. That's what they *ought* to do, but will they? Don't make me laugh. The folks may sneer behind their backs, but secretly they'll think they're pretty smart to get all that money without work. Keep watch, Fred, and you'll see there aren't many in this world who won't get down and kiss the puckered ass of wealth when it's offered to them.”¹²

Throughout the book, H.B. Bennett is not the most admirable candidate to run for office, but he would do a better job, it seems, than would “the company's” candidate. And this was the way Dan saw Clark's efforts.

When it came to the Clark election, no one voted by their own free will, Dan said. He has little admiration for those who refused Clark's bribes because they probably walked away with money given to them by Daly. Whatever was the case, they went away, in Dan's words, “holding halos over their heads.”¹³

By 1957, The Old Copper Collar was complete and Ballentine Books agreed to publish it. The book was released in September and received mixed reviews. His beloved New York Herald Tribune did him no favor.

“Oh Jesus, I took a beating from the Herald Tribune. It left me in awe. I didn't even save (it),” Dan said.

Part of the review by C.W. Casewit said:

There are few writers who can match Dan Cushman's knowledge of Montana.... Moreover, Mr. Cushman writes a brittle and amiable prose. He knows how to create some delightful situations. But one cannot say fairly that the Montana author made an effort to furnish more than funny situations. There is no plot in “The Old Copper Collar”; and the few threads wind up rather predictably.¹⁴

¹²Cushman, Old Copper, 117.

¹³Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

Dan did better closer to home. Lucius Beebe wrote in the The Territorial Enterprise and Virginia City News that “Somewhere, sometime somebody may write a more hilarious novel of American Politics in the Western manner than Dan Cushman has done in ‘The Old Copper Collar,’ but if and when he does, this reviewer does not want to encounter the book because the result would be sure and certain apoplexy.”¹⁵

The Great Falls Tribune hit on Dan’s hopes when it told of the book. “The color of the copper king politicking comes to life in the book, which is full of amusing dialogue. If ‘Stay Away, Joe,’ now being made into a Broadway musical, becomes successful, there is a good chance that Montana’s legislative follies of 1899 may be featured on stage and screen.”¹⁶

But Dan had no such luck. The book, although enjoyable for many readers—particularly Montanans—didn’t do well enough that anyone asked to buy the stage or screen rights.

“I couldn’t sell it,” Dan said. “It takes a lot of money to capitalize a musical. There’s many a slip between the lip and the hip, that was the old bootlegging saying.”¹⁷

One thing did work out for Dan though, thanks to an agreement Ballentine made.

¹⁴C.W. Caswit, review of The Old Copper Collar, In New York Herald Tribune (22 December 1957): 3.

¹⁵Lucius Beebe, review of The Old Copper Collar, In The Territorial Enterprise and Virginia City News (13 September 1957):3.

¹⁶Great Falls Tribune, 8 September 1957, 5.

¹⁷Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

“It immediately sold 26,000 copies to the Armed Services Club,” Dan said. “It made me quite a bit of money.”¹⁸

Dan had a couple other books published in 1957. One was a Western published by Dell and titled Tall Wyoming. In this story the main character is a cowboy who’s quicker to use his head than his gun, and, being a savvy entrepreneur, he challenges the establishment’s traditional cattle roundup.

The story is set in the open range period, and the man thinks he knows a better way of getting the beef off the range and into the packing houses. One scene in particular shows how Dan’s hero is more cerebral than your average nineteenth century cowpoke.

It was his problem to get the association going. His mind clicked making totals—tonnages times rates times rebate decimal, less probable expenses. The figure he came up with was somewhere in the neighborhood of nineteen thousand a year. Split sixty-forty between the shippers and himself, it would net something like seventy-six hundred, and that was only a starter, based on the five per cent figure. Eight would make it a great deal more, as would the packing house premiums. His mind ranged on. With improved breeds of cattle—a great many shorthorns were being brought into the country—and better utilization of the range which would come as the natural result of first class shipping and packing facilities, that figure might double or triple. Then there were other possibilities, all inherent in the new country, untouched, unexploited, the great level seas of grasses opened by railroad, all the great smiling country waiting to be taken—range, cropland, coal, mineral, timber—it made a man feel drunk to contemplate it.¹⁹

Dan’s creation of a cowboy who thinks about tonnages, percents and improved breeds—instead of whiskey, gun fights and bucking broncs—shows he continues to offer something different from your typical Western. The story also

¹⁸Ibid., 2 March 1999; During my 31 January 1998 interview, Dan said the Armed Services Club bought 40,000 copies. I’m going with the smaller number because even that number could have grown with time.

¹⁹ Dan Cushman, Tall Wyoming (New York: Dell, 1957), 91.

harkens back to his childhood, when he appreciated men of learning above the glorified cowboy.

His other book of 1957 also falls in the Western category but is a historical novel, 442 pages long. The book, published by Appleton-Century-Crofts, was an epic tale of three individuals, two men and a woman, who come to Montana during its early mining days. Although each of these characters arrive with different backgrounds, they share one thing in common: they possess little more than a thirst for adventure and the will to succeed. Ultimately the three experience true wealth thanks to a silver mine in the southwestern part of the state in country that, by no coincidence, much resembles Phillipsburg.

Dan liked spending time in Phillipsburg and saw that the mine, though not as rich as the one in Butte, did have a claim to fame. It paid out more in dividends than the one in Butte, Dan said, meaning that while only a few people became extraordinarily rich at the Butte hill, more people enjoyed a lesser wealth in the Phillipsburg venture.

In the early 1950s, Dan had borrowed from the Phillipsburg Mail bound copies of the newspaper dating back to the 1890s. He also came up with copies of several other nearby newspapers from that era.²⁰

Although Phillipsburg may be the most obvious influence on The Silver Mountain, Dan also capitalized on the state's history of people going from rags to riches at seemingly warp speed, which he describes when he tells about the destiny of one of the main characters.

When John Ballard moved to Helena after making his fortune he became part of a migration that had started in the 'eighties. When a man grew wealthy enough, it was considered the thing to do. The mining, cattle or the horse-freight king, whose last residence might have been some sod-roofed cabin situated at a howling spot in the coulees, suddenly, in Helena sported

²⁰Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 December 2000.

as the big-assed master of a Georgian or French Renaissance castle replete with carriage house, servant's quarters, cast-iron fountains, Dresden China and a pair of bronzed lions to watch over the grand entrance. The Family laid in a supply of European Liquor and thrust itself into society, and it was considered manly for the master to try his hand at politics.²¹

It was C.J. McNamara back in Big Sandy who impressed upon Dan what wealth was and in much of this book Dan displays a certain admiration for the wealthy. It was one of the reasons that Dan especially liked Helena.

"Helena knew what real wealth was," Dan said. "At one time (it) claimed more millionaires per capita than any town in the world, which I don't doubt a bit. Everybody who made a fortune seems like would go to Helena, build a mansion and put a couple lions out front and run for Congress."

"Everything was first class in Helena," Dan said.²²

But however much Ballard and his rise to wealth is the central theme of the novel, the development of other characters gives Dan the opportunity to show how the boom times affected people.

In addition to the bull-headed John Ballard, there's as equally stubborn and determined character in Neva Rush, who becomes Ballard's wife. Ballard and Rush both are ruthless and cunning in all aspects of their lives, especially with each other. Neva is perhaps the best example of the hardened will it took for a person to rise from the depths of poverty to the pinnacle of the mining society.

And then there's Grattan O'More, a man of great insight and good taste, but little drive and no desire to accumulate wealth. He has a devil-may-care attitude toward life and wouldn't have done so well in Montana, if he, Ballard and Rush hadn't traveled together and forged a friendship early on the trail in the story.

²¹Dan Cushman, *The Silver Mountain* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957; reprint, New York: Leisure Books, 1995), 382 (page references are to reprint edition).

²²Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

It is through O'More that Dan shows how the mining days brought not only financial wealth, but also a richness in daily living unique to mining camps and nearby towns that were littered with saloons and brothels.

I don't so much mind the smell of fumes with these Irish sounds at every hand. In fact, I like (Butte) first rate. I've been all over the world, or half over it anyhow, and I can truthfully say that these Western mining camps fill me with a peculiar joy. With a song, and we're rich, and there's no care for tomorrow. And *this* one! Ah, this is a city for you!"²³

The Silver Mountain also allowed Dan to put to use some of his knowledge about mining, which he had been accumulating since childhood but had so far used sparingly, primarily in the Comanche John stories. Parts of The Silver Mountain read like a well-written how-to book about metal mining.

(Ballard) had learned a great deal about silver veins in Colorado. When they decayed due to the action of air and surface water, "rusted out" as some of the miners said, the weak sulfuric and other acids thus produced were perfectly capable of taking the silver into solution, carrying it downward (for a vein was generally cracked and fissured offering a ready channel) and redepositing it wherever the solutions became stagnated and neutralized. The same happened with copper and, he had read, with zinc. Not gold, however. Gold, the king metal, was remarkably stable to all solvents found in nature. Gold had their big ends up. Gold stayed in place as the country eroded; it crumbled free at the surface, crept down the mountain, and settled heavy in the gulches to form the placer deposits of the Forty-niner. They were the poor man's bonanzas, so-called because all one needed was a pick and shovel and a string of wooden troughs in order to work them. Not so with bonanzas of silver and copper. They moved ever downward in the earth, keeping ahead of erosion, collecting in black, ruby and purple bonanzas at the water level which might lie at two, three, or five hundred feet below the surface. As a man never knew under which barren, leached outcropping they might exist, he did well to start with fifty thousand dollars in his kick, and no poor man's bonanza about it.²⁴

Another important aspect to this novel was its lack of comedy. The book would be one of the few literary novels Dan took on that didn't rely on, in one way

²³Cushman, Silver Mountain, 101.

²⁴Ibid., 133.

or another, contemplative laughter. It is more seriously reflective than anything Dan had done before, or would do after.

Perhaps the book's seriousness is due primarily to Dan telling the complete story of the gold, silver and copper bonanzas—not stopping when the main characters attained their wealth but ending when the natural resource ran out.

At the book's end, O'More tells Rush he wishes he could go back to their beginning.

"I need a good day with the ore roaring down the chutes of (the silver mine) Young Ireland, and those fellows all with their faces beaming like tomorrow's Rothschilds and their dinner buckets a great deal heavier in the hoisting than they were when the shift commenced. How all the games used to click away! And all the warm laughter. It met you every morning on the street. We struck it rich there. I'm not just talking about money. It was as if for a little while all mankind struck it rich."

"It was great" (Neva replied).

"It was like youth. It was great while it lasted. We threw it all away with both hands and never dreamed but that the supply was inexhaustible."²⁵

The Silver Mountain did well enough to require a second printing within a month of its release.

The Library Journal review said, "An excellent portrayal of a past era and of the men and women who built the West." Meanwhile, C. W. Casewitt, the New York Herald reviewer who had railed The Old Copper Collar, said, "The turn of the century backgrounds are authentic. The prose, on the other hand, is refreshingly modern, describing a very rich past with economy."²⁶

²⁵*Ibid.*, 431.

²⁶C.W. Casewitt, review of The Silver Mountain, In New York Herald Tribune (3 November 1957): 3.

In Saturday Review, Oliver La Farge said that the first half of the book—the early development of the characters—could have been omitted, but a redeeming quality of the story is “the author, thank goodness, is of the nature to feel an inward ‘Wow!’ at a good juicy item, whether it comes from his research or is recalled from early observation.”²⁷

Too long or not, The Silver Mountain earned Dan an award in June 1958, when the Western Writers of America gave Dan the Spur Award for best Western historical novel of 1957. Dan and Betty flew to Santa Rosa, Calif., to receive the award at the association’s annual meeting.

It also sold well in Spain the following year under the title, La Montana de Plata.

Dan always felt that had Appleton-Century had promoted the book more, it would have done better.²⁸

The fact that The Silver Mountain was published by Appleton-Century-Crofts gives insight to an important aspect of Dan’s career, not to mention his personality. It is yet again, a different publisher for Dan, and this would be the only book it would publish. It is clear Dan could not find a home for his serious novels. Most successful authors do.

Dan did have a home for his lighter fiction. Fawcett, as well as Dell and later Bantam, steadily published in his Westerns and adventure stories in pocketbook form. This would remain true until the mid-1960s.

But when it came to what Dan considered his more serious novels, he had moved by 1957 from Macmillan to Viking to Ballentine and then to Appleton.

²⁷Oliver La Farge, review of The Silver Mountain, In Saturday Review 40 (21 December 1957): 22.

²⁸Bob Cushman, email to author, 22 December 2000.

He didn't know it then, but his future publishers would include Doubleday and McGraw-Hill. This, according to Dan, was partially beyond his control.

"Well, I guess one time with me was enough," Dan said. "That's not flattering, you know."

"Take Viking for instance. They published (Stay Away, Joe) and they made a lot of money on it. (Then) they turn down my next book Silver Mountain. It would've sold well too."²⁹

Dan also admitted that the publisher's idea for his next book often didn't jibe with his own.

"I always wanted to go for something else," he said. "Every publisher, if your book's a success, he wants another one like it." But Dan didn't like the idea of a sequel. "I don't like to chew my gum twice," he said.³⁰

Dan did indeed appear to be a dynamic author, becoming more sophisticated with each novel. He may have felt as though a sequel would have cost him some of his reputation in the literary world, although he wasn't one to worry what others thought.

Still, it's only natural for someone who aspires to be a novelist to have certain standards. With Comanche John, Dan had done sequels. He would do no more.

It seems he was definitely on to more highbrow things when you look at the dust jacket of The Silver Mountain. On its back was a new portrait of Dan, one without a Stetson that gives him more the appearance of a true artist than a former "cow-puncher." It's a deliberate pose, his elbows resting on a table with his hands clasped beneath his chin, his sleeves rolled carelessly, but at the same

²⁹Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

³⁰Ibid., 2 March 1999.

time deliberately, and some of his hair standing on end, again looking like it was put that way on purpose. But more important are the words accompanying the picture.

“One hears about the country changing,” Dan Cushman writes nostalgically of the legendary West where he has lived for the most part ever since he was born. He continues: “and one attributes it to the automobile, the end of the horse, etc. And every so often the Rotary Club stages a ‘Go Western Day’ replete with insurance salesmen in big hats and genuine Gene Autry rayon shirts, and it’s pretty pitiful. The West wasn’t an item of methods, or costuming, it was a state of mind.”³¹

The irony here is that with his writing published by Fawcett, Dell and Bantam, he put money in the bank every year thanks to the “pitiful” romanticizing of the West. He didn’t write a typical Western, it can be argued—indeed each carried his stamp of distinction—but they, like all Westerns, went to a market built on an “item of methods” and “costumes.”

Given that, Dan appears a contradiction. On the one hand, he’d come to despise the popular notion of the West, but on the other, he made a living by it. His career had evolved into a dichotomy with one part of it done for the money and the other, in his words, “for the hell of it.”

The problem with doing anything “for the hell of it” is that you become uncompromising. It was Dan’s art and he could do as he pleased. He was beholden to no one. During the late 1950s there appeared to be countless bridges available. Burning one was of little consequence.

³¹Cushman, *Silver Mountain*, dust jacket; Leslie Fiedler’s influence on Dan becomes clear with this quote from Dan. In 1949, in his essay “The Montana Face,” Fiedler wrote: “In the last few years, Montana has seen an efflorescence of ‘Sheriff’s Posses’; dude ranches; chamber of commerce rodeos, hiring professional riders; and large-scale ‘Pioneer Days,’ during which the bank clerk and the auto salesman grow beards and ‘go Western’ to keep the tourists-crammed coaches of the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern rolling.”

"I never had much trouble getting published," Dan said.³²

More importantly he always had his lighter fiction markets to bolster him while he sought another home for his more literary efforts.

But this hopscotching would cost him in the end.

³²Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

CHAPTER VII

WHOOOP-UP AND GOODBYE OLD DRY

The best part of every author is generally to be found in his book....

—*Samuel Johnson.*

About the same time Dan received the Spur award, the Broadway adaptation of Stay Away, Joe came to fruition. The time Dan spent in Malibu in 1954 was merely to get the ball rolling. The financial negotiations between him and the producers weren't complete until the beginning of 1958, and even then there was much to be done to make the novel ready for Broadway.

Intrinsic to the financial end of the deal was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. MGM had become a partner in the stage production in return for the movie rights to the book, and it appeared for a time that MGM's movie would precede the Broadway show. But in February of 1958 The New York Times reported:

The future of Dan Cushman's popular novel, "Stay Away, Joe," has finally been clarified to the satisfaction of all concerned. Instead of the popular book emerging as a movie, the sing-and-dance variation will reach Broadway first. This has been decided by Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin.

"Whoop-Up" is the title of the new show, which has been scheduled for next season. Participating as a partner will be Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which controls the rights to the book.

Feuer and Martin are thinking of providing their own adaptation; if not an author will be drafted to handle the stint. The staging will be undertaken by Feuer.

The songs will be created by the new songwriting team of Morris I. Charlap (music) and Norman Gimbel (lyrics)....

No one has been signed for the cast of "Whoop-Up," but Bob Fosse and Walter Mathau are being considered....¹

In April The New York Times said that Feuer and Martin had reserved Dec. 8 for the premier of Whoop-Up on Broadway, but did not say at the time in what theater it would run. "The attraction will start practicing Oct. 1," the paper said. "The show is to make a five-week stand at Philadelphia starting in November."²

However excited Dan was about the idea of seeing his novel become a Broadway production, he saw that adapting his novel to the stage was a difficult business. As it turned out, Feuer and Martin did not look elsewhere for an author to write the book for the stage production. They decided to write it themselves.

In Feuer and Martin's adaptation, they move the focus from Champlain's lack of a bull to Joe's piecing out of the Buick. While their story kept little more than a handful of characters from Dan's book, it maintained the Montana reservation setting.

Here's how the stage production was described in the promotions of Whoop-Up:

The entire action of "Whoop-Up" takes place on or near a United States Indian reservation in northern Montana. The time is present. Glenda runs a bar which, by token of the fact that it is half on the reservation and half-off, is technically illegal. It is against the law to sell liquor on the Indian preserve. Glenda gets around that by a white line painted through her place, floor ceiling and walls. As the show opens, she receives news that Joe is on his way home after nearly two years on the rodeo circuit, with a Madison Square Garden prize purse to his credit. Joe is part Indian, part French-Canadian and grew up on the reservation. Since his homecoming is going to coincide with a tribal ceremony, Glenda and her reservation customers plan a wild evening of celebration. The ceremony begins and Joe, arriving early, meets the seductive Billie Mae Littlehorse before Glenda arrives. His problem is now not meeting Glenda, but rather finding a place to get Billie Mae alone. In the meantime, George Potter has persuaded his boss, Mr.

¹Great Falls Tribune, 2 February 1958, 10.

²Ibid., 13 April 1958, 32.

Kellenbach, to give him a chance at selling a car. He has heard of Joe's rodeo winnings and, if he sells the car to Joe and can win a permanent job as a salesman, he'll be able to propose to Joe's sister, Mary. When he suggests to Joe that he take a demonstration run in the car, Joe knows he's found the solution to the Billie Mae problem. Glenda arrives just too late to meet Joe and, hearing where he has gone, decides to break off her romance with him. However, later Joe stops by her saloon and she hits upon a scheme for revenge. Joe wants to set up drinks for everyone in the place, but Billie Mae has relieved him of all his cash. Glenda tricks him into pawning nearly half the car to her, piece by piece, in payment of his bar tab. Of course, Joe hasn't even bought the car. And, thereby hang the beginning ingredients of the lusty comedy tale of "*Whoop-Up*". How Glenda wins back Joe, how George gets Mary and a job—and how that car gets put back together again to the satisfaction of Mr. Kellenbach—all add up to a musical of pure pleasure.³

The promotions described also the cast as neatly balanced with a solid line-up of well-known personalities and a group of newcomers. Of the well-knowns, Paul Ford was most famous due to his role as Col. Hall in the TV series Sgt. Bilko. In the stage production, he played Mr. Kellenbach, the owner of the automobile agency.

The rest of the cast included Susan Johnson as Glenda, Ralph Young as Joe Champlain, Romo Vincent as Louis Champlain, and Sylvia Syms as Louis's wife, Annie. Of the lesser-known actors, Julienne Marie played Mary Champlain, Asia played Billie Mae Littlehorse, Danny Meehan played George Potter and P.J. Kelly played Grandpere.⁴

After the pre-Broadway run began Nov. 10 in Philadelphia, Feuer and Martin saw they had some problems. In a last ditch effort they brought Dan and Betty east, hoping Dan could help improve the show. Dan and Betty would spent six weeks back East between the show's Philadelphia run and its opening in New York City.

³Whoop-Up, (MGM Records cast recording, 1958), record cover.

⁴Ibid.

After a little more than two weeks into the pre-Broadway run, a reviewer for Billboard gave praise to the stage book and the production. "The strong book based on Stay Away, Joe...and the comedy situations that have been injected by both song and actions, give this production the guts and the trimmings to keep Joe, his family and his girls and fellow Indians repeating their parts night after night after night."⁵

The Great Falls Tribune, upon seeing this review, cheered Dan on in his efforts back East.

Reports from Philadelphia are that Cushman is working around the clock to strengthen the musical's story-line. Indications are that when "Whoop-Up" goes into the Shubert on Manhattan's Forty-fourth street, it will make six hits in a row for Feuer and Martin, and will push modest, retiring Dan Cushman into the brightest of all spotlights as the man who put a North Central Montana Indian family smack-dab on Broadway.⁶

But behind the scenes, things were not going quite so well.

"That was a frustrating period of my life," Dan said.⁷

Part of his frustration stemmed from trying to get an eastern audience to understand the nuances of reservation life in Montana. The basic ingredients of the story were bound to confound a Broadway audience.

"I'll tell you what the problem was," Dan said. "You have an audience and the curtain goes up and (Louis speaks French). They say, 'What the hell is an Indian doing talking like a Frenchman?' Now you've got to stop the (show) cold in order to explain that."⁸

Dan's solution was to bring in a known French actor for the role of Louis, so that the audience could at least make that connection. He thought of Adolph

⁵Great Falls Tribune, 30 November 1958, 8.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

⁸Ibid.

Menjou, who had had a role in the movie Timberjack. He was French and would have fit the role of Louis perfectly, Dan thought. Feuer and Martin disagreed.

They also disagreed with other ideas he had.

“There was no use in getting me back there because they wouldn’t do anything I wanted them to do,” Dan said. “And I didn’t feel in the position to bring any pressure.”⁹

Feuer and Martin thought a better person to play the role of Louis was Dan himself. Dan admitted he had a good enough voice for the stage and knew he could pull off Louis’s French accent, but he declined the offer.¹⁰

Dan’s daughter credits his decision to his being somewhat shy and not entirely comfortable remaining away from his Great Falls home for the duration of the show.

“I think he got homesick,” Mimi said. “I think he kind of regrets now that he didn’t do it.”¹¹

Dan was not optimistic about the show either. Feuer and Martin never remedied to his satisfaction the problem posed by a French-speaking Indian. But after Dan had done what he could to help bolster the storyline, he tried not to dwell on what would happen to the show when it reached New York City. He and Betty did what they could to stay occupied.

“The chief thing we did was go out around Philadelphia to see who served the best lobster,” Dan said.

Dan’s children said Feuer and Martin did a lot to help Dan and Betty enjoy their stays in Philadelphia and New York City.¹²

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

¹²Ibid.

When the show reached New York City there were five additional preview performances allowing for a few last changes in accordance to audience reactions. On Dec. 22 the show premiered on Broadway in the Sam S. Shubert Theater.

Unfortunately, the premiere of the show coincided with a newspaper delivery man strike that caused New York City's nine daily papers to suspend publication.

When Dan and Betty returned home after the show's premiere, Dan, with guarded optimism, told the Great Falls Tribune how the show was received and the effect of the delivery man strike.

Cushman said that (despite the delivery man's strike) reviewers attended the opening and copies of their reviews were distributed for radio and television broadcasts.

"Two out of three reviews were favorable," Cushman said. "That is, while some features of the show were criticized, others were given warm praise."

...Cushman said he and the producers were surprised by the "rave" notices given the two big dance numbers. Some of the critics pronounced these the best things in the production. One of an Indian hoop dance adapted from a traditional ceremonial dance of the Koshari Indians of Southern Colorado. The other is a rodeo number in which the girls of the chorus line are "roped" by the chorus men....

The house has been sold out for 55 performances during the winter months, the tickets being taken by theater clubs in the metropolitan area. Thus the musical has a good start toward a long Broadway run.

"The show got a rave review in the Newark News, one of the New Jersey newspapers that is enjoying a big circulation boom during the New York delivery man's strike," Cushman said. "The producers believe they have a smash hit, and in view of their (five earlier hits), they should know a hit when they see one. But show business is like any other business. It's not what the producers think, or even what the reviewers think, but what the entertainment-seeking public thinks that counts...."¹³

A couple of days later a reviewer for the Wall Street Journal gave the production a good review with one exception.

¹³Great Falls Tribune, 26 December 1958, 8.

Whoop-up's pace is kept professionally fast by Mr. Feuer, who directed, and there are marks of first-rate showmanship all through it. Apparently the authors of the play's book (the two producers and Dan Cushman) became so carried away with their theatrical toys that they crammed too much in at the end, including an excellent but needless facsimile of a Greyhound bus.

Be that as it may, there's so much that is lively, original and entertaining in "Whoop-Up" that it may be considered one of Broadway's brighter ornaments for the Christmas season.¹⁴

Three days into the new year, the The New Yorker ran a major review. It was not so kind. The reviewer, Kenneth Tynan, said that the dance number where the chorus line girls were roped by the men "summed up the entire enterprise," meaning that Feuer and Martin were much too aggressive in their desire to win over the audience.

"In its determination to rivet us to our seats, the production lays enormous stress on noise," Tynan said. "What terrifies (the producers) is the possibility that we might, even for an instant, relax, since relaxation is notoriously the prelude to sleep."

Tynan said the show had its moments, a couple appealing songs found in its subplots, and some funny lines, such as those by Paul Ford's character "whose opinion of Indians is pre-Custer and who refers to them as 'our feathered friends.'"

But overall, Tynan found the production, both in its story and music, too much. "... (A) touch of inertia here and there would not have come amiss; it is an abrasive experience to listen to for two hours a work that seems to be perpetually on its way to a fire."¹⁵

A delayed review then came out in The New York Times, thanks to the end of the delivery man's strike. Brooks Atkinson shared Tynan's sentiment, and

¹⁴Ibid., 28 December 1958, 10.

¹⁵Kenneth Tynan, review of Whoop-Up, In The New Yorker, "Zis, Boom, and Bah," (3 January 1959): 50.

his words were reminiscent of some of the reviews of Stay Away, Joe. “Since (‘Whoop-Up’) is neither funny nor romantic, Mr. Feuer, in his capacity as director has stepped up the decibel count by way of compensation to the customers. The overture shakes the roof timbers. The singing rattles the windows.”¹⁶

“To judge by ‘Whoop-Up,’ the American Indian has the temperament of a Broadway reveler,” Atkinson said.

The supposed din of Whoop-Up did not appeal much more to the entertainment-seeking public, whom Dan noted would have the ultimate say. The production ran its course, but did not enjoy a prolonged stay on Broadway. After five hits in a row, the story of Stay Away, Joe proved to be Feuer and Martin’s stumbling block.

“It was a lousy play,” Dan said, as he looked back upon it all. “But it had some good music in it.”¹⁷

MGM would wrestle with the book for another decade before making the movie, Stay Away, Joe.

Dan’s kids said the disappointment of Whoop-Up doused Dan’s inner fire some. This change is hard to see as his production pace seemed undaunted immediately after his Broadway experience. But it is important to remember that those books that followed the Broadway production were all started, in one form or another, years before.

It is easy to forget the important lag time between when a writer starts the writing process and his work is finished. For instance, Dan set his heart to writing novels in the late-1940s, but his efforts were not fully realized until he saw

¹⁶Great Falls Tribune, 5 January 1959, 7.

¹⁷Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

a flurry of books published in the mid-1950s. So, what happened to him after Whoop-Up was the exact opposite.

It seems that after the show's run, Dan stopped conceiving ideas. Still, those already conceived would take him well into the 1960s and some of Dan's best writing was yet to come.

In the late 1950s, Dan's writing routine had changed a little when the family moved for one last time. Since 1954, the Cushmans had been living at 1305 First Avenue North, where Dan wrote in an attic office. Then In late 1957, Dan and Betty bought a two-story brick home at 1500 Fourth Avenue North. There, Dan hung his Branson Stevenson nude on the wall of a basement room and deemed it his writing office.

Dan continued to produce lighter fiction like clockwork as he became accustomed to his new environment. In 1958, Fawcett published his The Forbidden Land.

Then a more literary novel, another stemming from Dan's childhood memories, was released in the spring of 1959. With this book, Dan borrowed from memories he had of his teenage years in Big Sandy.

Dan described Goodbye Old Dry, published by Doubleday & Co., as "a satire on Wall Street." Parts of the story were conceived some 35 years before when Dan was a cub reporter for the Big Sandy Mountaineer and the Great Falls Tribune, but the actual writing of the novel can be traced back to 1954, when he tried to interest Meredith Wilson in a script that had potential as a Broadway musical.¹⁸

¹⁸Great Falls Tribune, 5 November 1978, 10.

In Goodbye Old Dry, Dan took three elements from Big Sandy's history during the 1920s at the height of Prohibition and wove them together to tell one story: the lagging farm economy, the bootlegging of whiskey, and Doc, the flamboyant scientist with whom Dan spent time as an adolescent.

"Everything in that book came from life," Dan said.¹⁹ The story was based on truth, "an incredible (time), really," he said. "It was all generated by the Prohibition. People lost respect for law and order."²⁰

The book's title can be seen as a play on words. "Dry" meaning both lack of moisture and lack of alcohol. Prohibition lasted fourteen years, spanning from 1919 to 1933. During this same time, farm communities such as Big Sandy experienced little precipitation.

In the novel, Dan explained the situation. "In 1921 most farmers didn't have enough (crop) to bother cutting. Even the best fields ran eight to nine bushels. In fact, so many farmers were trying to eke out a living by moonshining that it was a standard joke to ask how many *gallons* rather than how many bushels the fields were going."²¹

The other key ingredient to moonshine was sugar.

"(Bootleggers) found that they could make a very good variety, class of whiskey with a great big crock and a hundred pounds of sugar, water and yeast cake," Dan said. "That's all you needed, and an orange, if you wanted to throw that in, you know, or a can of peaches."

¹⁹Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

²⁰Ibid., 29 October 1997.

²¹Dan Cushman, Goodbye Old Dry (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959; reprint with title The Con Man, Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1960), 27 (page references are to The Con Man). This novel comes under a third title as well, The Muskrat Farm (Great Falls, Mont: Stay Away, Joe Publishers, 1978).

The method that the community members used to obtain the sugar is the crux of the novel. It involved brakemen who worked for the railroad that runs through the middle of Big Sandy. They knew that trains headed East sometimes had cars filled with one hundred-pound bags of sugar.

“A fellow with the railroad would stop down at the sand pit at the loading platform,” Dan said.

Men waiting there knew how to undo the seal on the cars door in way that it could be done up again so that it didn’t appear disturbed. The men stole only from cars going all the way to Chicago and then only took half the load of sugar from any given car.

“They’d leave the other half in so that the springs would give a little,” Dan said. “They were getting much more sugar than they ever needed. You could buy it for \$1 a hundred (weight).”

More than forty years later, Dan found evidence of these heists in his mother’s home in Big Sandy.

“My mother, on the day she died, still had some of that sugar up in the attic.”²²

Dan said sometimes cars were mistaken and the men broke into those carrying things such as tires or oatmeal. Usually the men had use for whatever they discovered, though.

One railroad freight agent, who was in on heists and sometimes used the depot’s freight room to store the stolen goods, had use for a pile of oatmeal they’d mistakenly opened the door on, Dan remembered.

“Wait a minute. Don’t seal that car back up,” the freight agent said. “I can use that oatmeal. I got a (milk) cow.”

²²Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

Dan laughed as he recalled the story.

“It had a lot of funny aspects. The happiest cow in Montana,” Dan said, chuckling.

The thievery was discovered after some time and detectives working for the railroad showed up in town. They checked stores for the invoices of all the sugar sitting on store shelves. Just as the detectives suspected, the storeowners had none.

“Practically everybody in town was involved in (the thievery) because they were buying the stuff,” Dan said. “(When the detectives) went down to Fort Benton and brought charges against this brakeman and this brakeman and so on, and this bootlegger and this bootlegger, (saying) they also sold to him and him—they named everybody in town.”

The judge in Fort Benton told the detectives that the prison could only hold about 400 inmates. There wasn’t enough room for all the people charged in the case, Dan said.

“We’d have to build a wall around the town,” the judge said.

No wall was built, but an engineer lost his job and the illegal activity came to a halt.²³

That wasn’t the only unusual activity going on in Big Sandy during those years. The community also, for a short time, was home to a muskrat farm, a business to make money off their pelts.

“It was an old feed stable and they built a big pool in the middle,” Dan said.

Doug Giebel said another uncle of his, one from his father’s side, was involved with the venture and his job was to stay with the muskrats at night.²⁴

²³Ibid.

Dan said that, unlike the whiskey business, the muskrat farm was short-lived. They wouldn't stay put. Though for a time a person could buy muskrat stock, an investment in the business.

Also during roughly the same time period, Big Sandy was home to Doc. Dan remembered him as a good-hearted person who loved an audience. Dan recalled one graduation when Doc was asked to speak and how he took full advantage of the opportunity.

"The person who should have been there got stuck down at Wolf Creek, where the road was muddy," Dan said. "So they said, 'Let's get Doc. He talks all the time.'"

"He was glad to do it," Dan said.

"I can remember his speech. The trouble was they couldn't get him to stop. He kept up for about an hour and a half," Dan said. "Yeah! (He went) on and on and on."

Doc, during this long-winded speech, told the crowd how after he received his final doctorate—the most impressive of all the numerous degrees he'd earned—he came out of the college hall and looked up to the night sky and saw a star.

"Here (I) was the greatest man in the world with the greatest education," Dan recalled Doc saying. "And (I) looked at that star and said, twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are!"

Dan laughed at the story and said, "It was absolutely preposterous, but he was going over like gangbusters. There were a few people like me—I was just a kid in high school who knew he was a damn blowhard. But I'd been riding around with him in the country, see. I had heard it all before."

²⁴Giebel, interview by author, 26 May 1998.

But Dan was serious when he said, “The funny thing was he was a damn good geologist. He claimed to be so many things that people would decide he was nothing. But they were wrong.”

“I learned a lot of geology from that guy,” Dan said. “You would generally think when a person is a fourflusher and an exhibitionist, you assume he doesn’t know anything. But he might be a damn smart fella. (That behavior) has nothing to do with his true intelligence. He had to know quite a bit or he wouldn’t have thrown (around) all that baloney.”²⁵

In Goodbye Old Dry, Dan finds a way to tie the train thievery and muskrat venture together. He gives a fictional character, “Dr. Charles Downey, Ph.D., Sc.D., and F.R.A.S.” and World War I veteran, a hand in it all. A teenager, sounding much like Dan in his youth, narrates the story, as he works at the local paper, the Concabula Harvester and is a correspondent for the Great Falls Tribune.

The novel opens with the teenager, Scoop, explaining about the boosterism that was present in the small town of Concabula, Montana. Scoop realizes the limitations boosterism creates for a unbiased news writer.

After doing enough hard news stories, he feels ready and compelled to do a feature piece for the Harvester regarding the poetry he’d seen as farmers write as they went bankrupt. The farmers wrote the poems on signs that they hung from their wagons and automobiles as they left the country. The young reporter calls it “The Poetry of Departure.”

Not many of the signs were gleaned from automobiles. Perhaps a man with money for gasoline was less embittered. I do, however, treasure one which was painted across the back of a departing Dort. It said:

²⁵Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

Goodbye
Old Dry

I worked until late at night on my feature story, choosing signs for their variety, and tying them together with what I believed to be some pretty damn piquant observations of my own, and next morning I had my finished copy at the *Harvester* office waiting to show it to the editor, Mr. Myron J. Turley, before mailing it away to Great Falls.

I should have known better. Turley was one of those old-time publishers, not yet quite extinct, who believed that the prime purpose of a newspaper was not to print the news but to promote the community. Just as an example, when the Farmer's State Bank closed its doors in June the word "failure" never appeared in the *Harvester*. Turley's story was headlined:

FARMER'S STATE BANK NOW
UNDERGOING A SHORT PERIOD
OF FINANCIAL READJUSTMENT

He seldom actually left news out of the paper. He didn't have to, he was a genius at finding a bright side to every eight ball. When a sheepherder on the Carlisle ranch was bitten by a rabid skunk, Turley played it big, extolling Concabula's medical services, which were able to provide the celebrated Pasteur treatment within a space of fifty-two hours. Then he kept rolling the next week with a story headlined

A BLESSING IN DISGUISE!
HYDROPHOBIC PURGE OF SKUNKS, WEASELS,
OTHER PREDATORY PESTS A MILLION-DOLLAR
BLESSING TO CONCABULA POULTRY FARMERS

This was the Myron J. Turley I expected to praise my feature story! I can see him now as he hurried in with his jerky walk, a small, thin man growing old, carrying an armload of mail from the morning train, and smoking his favorite cigar, a Pittsfield Cheroot, two for five cents. He saw my story and sat right down to read it, but he never got past the second paragraph. There he snapped it across the desk at me, leaned back in his swivel chair, and said:

"Young man, I want to give you a piece of advice: if you can't write something good about the country it's better not to write anything at all."²⁶

Given the weather and economics of late, Turley, as well as the rest of Concabula, is ready for any optimism that might show itself. When Dr. Charles Downey, Scoop's uncle, comes to town he appears to be their savior, one who is

²⁶Cushman, *Con Man*, 6-7.

ever humble but also fast-talking. The first chance he gets, Downey speaks to the Concabula Commercial Club about “interim measures to augment your economy” during the time of little precipitation and he receives much applause. For this scene, Dan borrowed from his memory the graduation when the real Doc went on and on.

“No—no, gentlemen. No, please. I feel already as one sailing under false colors. I am a scientist, yes. But I do not pretend to have all the answers. Once in my life, in my youthful arrogance, perhaps, I had been a candidate for some research fellowship. It had been awarded me. It was late at night. I recall so clearly stepping from the great hall of the university. It was spring, and above me stretched the starry sky. God’s great firmament. As I looked above, a single star caught my eye. It was the fixed star, Arcturus. I knew it by name. And other facts, things I had been taught—its distance from the sun, from the earth, its diameter and circumference, its density and the index of its brightness, and all of the various theories of its internal heat derived from the flux and flow of kinetic energy. Yes, I knew it all. So, looking at the star, I in my youthful arrogance twisted the well-known nursery poem and said:

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star
I know exactly what you are!

“But time went on. I served my research fellowship. I went on to other schools, the greatest of the universities, to Purdue, Case Institute, Oberlin, Swathmore, Michigan State College, Baywater Tech, the Sorbonne, Oxford University—years of trial and heartbreak, but always grasping for a little more and a little more of the unknown, and along the way I somehow earned my doctorates, my fellowships in the Royal Academy, and the highest awards that the academic world had to offer. At last, home again, I received the greatest honor of my life when, at the old university where I commenced my scientific career, with the greatest of the academic world on invitation I stood in my cap and gown and was awarded the degree Sc. D. cum laude for my work in the reconstruction and classification of *Pithecanthropus Antiquarius Pilbconus*, the man of primeval mists, which is generally acknowledged to form the long sought *missing link*, a reconstruction which my staff and I were able to accomplish although we had to work with only a frontal bone, the subauricular mandible, and three teeth.

“It had been a great night. Very late I was able to leave. But at last I was outside in the coolness, and above me spread the great, starry heavens. Then, suddenly, I realized that I was standing on the same great granite steps of the same hall of science I had left as a young graduate student

nine long years before. Instinctively, I looked above me, and there hung that same star. But that night I did not think of it as being Arcturus, in the constellation Boötes, in direct line with Ursa Major, its distance two hundred and thirty-four trillion miles from the sun, a star of the visual magnitude 2.146, gleaming from the central temperature of thirty-eight million degrees centigrade. No, those were not the things that came into my mind. Instead, standing under God's sky, with the plaudits of the great of the scientific world still ringing in my ears, I doffed my mortar-board and said:

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star
HOW I WONDER WHAT YOU ARE!”²⁷

Although Downey exhibits impressive knowledge whenever he speaks, it is, later in the story the community members of Concabula learn that the person whom they hoped would bring their economy around is an ex-convict.

Indeed, he spent a year in prison for two charges of “misrepresentation with the intent to defraud,” due to his association with some promoters of a “wildcat well” in Michigan who took liberties with stockholders’ money.²⁸ It was in prison that he’d finished a college program. A prison warden, who took a liking to Downey as everyone did, helped him attain not only his bachelor’s degree but also a doctorate’s degree.

With degrees under his belt, Downey arrived in Concabula overflowing with confidence, and soon ideas. The first idea he promotes is the “Concabula Vitamin Flour Mill Association.” This venture was to take advantage of the high protein wheat crops characteristic to nearby farms due to the hot sun and lack of moisture. It falls through about the same time his archenemy in town, a grocer whose fiancé Downey is pursuing, reveals his true history.

Downey is daunted briefly by this development but gets back on track after the community embraces him, with another “interim measure” that will help him recover money lost in the flour mill and help Concabula find prosperity. This

²⁷ibid., 33-34.

²⁸ibid., 19 and 110.

time it is the muskrat farm, an idea that comes to him in the middle of the night after a friend of his invents a muskrat trap. He wakes up disappointed in how slow he'd become in realizing a gold mine when he saw one.

"I must be nuts! I must be losing my touch. If every pair of those muskrats has a litter of eight, why, that means we'll go into the winter with a total of one thousand, and when the spring litter comes it will be a total of eighteen hundred. At four litters a year the total runs up to forty-two hundred, but wait! With autumn's kits having their own little families, by next July and the next spring kits in the fall—My God, have you ever stopped to figure this out?²⁹

Persuaded by Downey's theory—which was soundly supported by the slide rule, Encyclopedia Britannica and the rumored mounting muskrat population at the farm's pond—people begin to buy stock in "Western Peltries, Inc." Soon after that a "muskrat economy" comes into existence wherein people use "muskrat money" in their transactions.

In the background of the story there are a few individuals in the community who appear to be doing well, too well for the real economics of the time. Truth be known, they prosper from bootlegging. A key component of this business, of course, is the train heists. And while Downey is not involved in bootlegging or thievery, his friends are, the surplus of sugar and miscellaneous items from the bootleggers' activities provide a little boost to the fledgling muskrat economy that Downey fathered.

Prior to the inception of the muskrat farm, the bootleggers had simply peddled their extra goods at low prices in a shiftless friend's grocery store—one known to carry a great deal of one type of item. Once muskrat currency comes around, the grocer welcomes it on a whim. Although the bootlegging element aids the muskrat venture, the economy takes on a life of its own.

²⁹ibid., 120.

Downey describes “the dynamic dollar” as “based not on dead metal, forever inert in vaults beneath the ground, but the dollar which increases in value even as you carry it in your pocket, the dollar tied to the very fecundity of nature.”³⁰

At the zenith of the muskrat economy, the community nearly weans itself entirely from the U.S. treasury. Scoop, the narrator, writes:

It was really amazing how quickly people adapted their buying to the new economy. Only when some stranger came in was attention called to it. For example, a fellow drove in from Idaho on some very threadbare tires and, seeing the sign at Blackie Beeland’s offering Firestone Gum-dipped Cords at 6.95, he quickly stopped for what appeared to be the buy of a lifetime. However, when he went to pay for them he ran into trouble.

“What’s this?” asked Blackie, looking at the three ten-dollar bills.

“It’s money.”

“Oh, *United States* money. Well, I don’t know. This changes the picture. I took it for granted you were going to pay in muskrat money.’

“*Muskrat* money!”

“Yes,” said Blackie, and showed him some of the debentures.

“This is ridiculous. We’re in the United States, aren’t we? Well, I’m paying in United States currency.”

“I know, I know. You meant all right. But you see, these bills of yours are the old-fashioned, dead metal kind. Muskrat money is based on the abounding fecundity of nature. Of course, I’ll *accept* your money. It’s legal tender, and that’s the law of the land, but I can’t give you one hundred cents, muskrat. I couldn’t give you much more than fifty-two cents, muskrat. That leaves your tires costing you fifteen dollars each, same as in Great Falls. Total forty-five dollars. Plus tubes.”

“Hold on. Where do I get some of this muskrat money?”³¹

Finally, one of Downey’s ideas appears to have taken flight. But then the railroad detectives come to town, looking to find out why their cars are showing up half empty. The unraveling that occurs in Concabula from that point on is probably not what most readers expect but is nicely orchestrated by Dan. Justice comes to those who deserve it.

³⁰ibid., 168.

³¹ibid., 170.

It might be the organization of Goodbye Old Dry that makes the story most impressive. The way in which Dan interwove the three separate elements of Big Sandy's history to tell the story of Concabula is not unlike Doc recreating the "missing link" from "a frontal bone, the subauricular mandible and three teeth." The story always maintains a certain believability meanwhile taking the reader to dizzying heights of ludicrousness.

In March 1959, The New York Times reviewed the novel and Samuel T. Williamson, impressed by the genius of Dr. Charles Hanford Downey, said, "On second thought, the word 'genius' ... really belongs to Dan Cushman's imagination. Here is a yarn likely to stiffen orthodox economists with horror, disturb the calm of commercial bankers, give pause to the Treasury of the United States and the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System."³²

Meanwhile the London Times had this to say: "The funniest! Few characters of fiction so convincingly presented. Mr. Cushman is not only a humorous writer, he is a very good writer, and his book is well written from every viewpoint."³³

But it was the Library Journal that said perhaps what Dan really wanted to hear. "Full of apt caricature, ebullient humor and an inventive plot, (this book) seems destined for Broadway as well as the waiting list of libraries."³⁴

Unfortunately, nobody showed any more interest in taking it to Broadway than Meredith Wilson had five years earlier. Regardless of the reviews, Dan never made much money from the book.

³²Samuel T. Williamson, review of Goodbye Old Dry, In New York Times Book Review (22 March 1959): 42.

³³Review of Goodbye Old Dry, In London Times Literary Supplement (4 December 1959): 705.

³⁴G.M. Gressley, review of Goodbye Old Dry, In Library Journal 84 (1 February 1959): 533.

"It never sold the way it should," Dan said.³⁵

³⁵Cushman, interview by author, 3 March 1999.

CHAPTER VIII

DUST, TRAFFIC, AND DEATH OF THE WESTERN

If a man does not make new acquaintance as he advances through life, he will soon find himself alone.
—Samuel Johnson.

As the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, Dan witnessed changes in society, in the publishing world, and, in turn, in his career. Most of these changes were disconcerting for Dan, and he became deliberate for a time with his social commentary.

Thanks to his involvement with Whoop-Up, he'd experienced however briefly, the lifestyles of Los Angeles and New York City and found that while he enjoyed show business people—like Feuer and Martin—and found Broadway fascinating, he was unimpressed overall with the big cities.

As he returned to his routine in Great Falls, he kept hearing how the town, as well as the rest of Montana, was missing out on prosperity enjoyed by other places around the country. He knew well such boosterism. He'd witnessed it all of his life, describing it in *Concabula*.

But this wasn't the Montana of the 1920s anymore, and Dan began to think people had better watch what they wished for. He liked Montana the way it was, without any newfound prosperity.

Part of his view stemmed from his recent move to his home at 1500 Fourth Avenue North, which sits on a corner lot along Fifteenth Street North.

However busy the street may have been when Dan and his family moved into the home, the traffic got worse when it became a primary route for cement trucks making runs from the College of Great Falls' campus being built across town. Dan, who already hated cars, grew tired of the noise and dust.

Dan's older kids remembered how the location of the home bothered him.

"All these concrete trucks started rumbling by there every day," Bob said. "He got in the (house) and realized the traffic was hell."

Besides Fifteenth Street, Dan also considered the Anaconda Copper Mining smelter and its smokestack not much more than a mile away, as compromising Great Falls' clean air and water.¹

Motivated by his neighborhood shortcomings, and perhaps recent travels, Dan, then 50, wrote a letter in June 1959 to the editor of the Great Falls Tribune. It was headlined "Population or Space. Which Will You Have?" The letter read:

The other day I saw by a news item in The Tribune that unless we adopt what was called a "positive image" for Montana, the state would in all likelihood experience only an 18 per cent growth in population during a 15-year period, instead of a 79 per cent growth like Arizona, where they do have such a "positive image," the imputation being that the folks in Arizona will thereupon be 61 per cent happier, more prosperous, and in other ways better off than we are.

The purveyor of this sinister warning was a fellow by the name of Gordon H. Platts, who is Montana's State Advertising Director.

The item did not specify with what enthusiasm Mr. Platt's pronouncement was received, but no doubt it was substantial, a fact which should carry some weight as he was speaking before the Great Falls Advertising Club in whose membership can be counted the very flower of our business manhood.

All joking aside, these are uncommonly bright fellows. And I mean our population boomers, too. When engaged in conversation they can be depended upon to have something worthwhile to say on almost any subject. When that subject is their home state, one can depend on them to extol its

¹Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

room and air, its pristine forests, absence of smog, clear streams almost, and those other qualities which remove it so tranquilly from the freeway and endless-suburb horror of Greater Los Angeles.

However, our partisans so often wish to improve it through increased population, and sometime it might be comforting if one of them would specify how he is going to have it both ways.

Some years back, as a representative of the Newspaper Guild, I was a weekly delegate to the Cascade County Trades & labor assembly which met at Carpenter's Hall. At that time [the early 1940s] the great pie in the chamber of commerce sky was an air base for Great Falls. Not even the Moslem paradise at its most opulent was going to compare with Great Falls once it got its air base.... At these meetings our then mayor was severely castigated for not practically commuting between here and Washington DC. in order to get us our air base.

It was understandable of course that the Building Trades would be strongly aroused, but the most steamed-up bundle of outrage, as I remember, was a little guy who worked at the (Anaconda Copper Mining) smelter. He owned no property, he rented his house, and it seemed to me that the only way he could come out on the deal financially would be to have one of the planes crash and kill him, provided he was insured.

It seems to me that lots of us are like that smelter worker, carried away by the sweet music of these bigger and better pipers, when really we have more to lose than to win.

I'll admit they sort of get to you. That term "positive image" is a beauty. Even when one suspects it might have been swiped from Norman Vincent Peale, it does something to you. Also those figures--79 per cent as opposed to 18 per cent. But is 79 per cent necessarily 4.4 times better than 18 per cent? Is 50,000 twice as good as 25,000? 100,000 twice as good as 50,000? and if so is two million twice as good as one million?

Hey, you mean this good stuff ain't gonna end noplac²?

Dan became fixated on the contradiction in people who wanted prosperity and growth to come to the place they already liked to live—a place defined by the absence of both. And he decided to address this in his next novel.

One of the people who must have seemed the epitome of this contradiction was his brother Beecher, business manager of the Great Falls Tribune, president of the Great Falls Advertising Club and possibly the one Dan referred to as "the very flower of our business manhood."

²Great Falls Tribune, 25 June 1959, 6.

He and Beecher had always been opposite, but this time Dan appeared the antithesis of his brother, a man bent on improving Great Falls' economic situation.

When Dan showed an interest in attending a meeting of the local Kiwanis Club, of which Beecher was the president and director, Beecher accommodated him. He took Dan to a number of meetings, perhaps thinking he'd finally become interested in the future of his community. Dan was instead collecting material for his satire.³

As Dan set out to write this satire, the death knell was sounding for Western novels. The heyday of the past ten years was coming to an end. Although Westerns persisted well into the 1960s, consumers made television their medium of choice.

"In 1958, Westerns comprised 11 percent of all works of fiction published in the United States," said Richard White, a Western history scholar. "In 1959 thirty prime time television shows, including eight of the ten most watched, were Westerns."⁴

Publishers began to whittle down their ranks of Western novelists. Dan remembered that when he got word, it was a heads-up kind of communication from one of the paperback houses he'd been writing for.

"They were fair to me," Dan said. "They were going to quit publishing Westerns and that included mine. One Western is like a Western, is a Western, is a Western, was the attitude they took. I thought it was a terrible thing for them to do."⁵

³Cushman, interview by author, 3 March 1999.

⁴Richard White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 613.

For a while Dan had one ace-in-the-hole enabling him to sell a few more pocketbooks. This was his editor Marc Jaffe, whom he'd been working with since about 1955. Sometime after 1960, Jaffe left Dell and found a job with Bantam Books, but continued to provide Dan an outlet for his lighter writing a few more years.

"He was a good friend of mine," Dan said. But Dan saw the risk in having an editor as a good friend. He realized that Jaffe would likely take whatever Dan wrote even if it wasn't any good. "He never turned (my work) down," Dan said.⁶

Of course, Dan wasn't the only writer in Great Falls who had a stake in Westerns. It was Norman Fox's only gig, and it had an impact on Robert McCaig, another writer who had a day job with the Montana Power Company but wrote Westerns in his spare time.

Like Dan, McCaig started out writing pulps, selling his first pulp work in 1948, but then moving on to full-fledged Westerns in the early 1950s. His first Western, Toll Mountain, came out in 1953. By 1960 he had published ten Westerns.⁷

Having mastered a craft no longer in demand, these three men stood like harness makers watching the first tractor chug over the hill.

But it wasn't just the Western that publishers were avoiding. Apparently they couldn't sell any Western fiction. Even Bud Guthrie, who'd been writing primarily short stories since 1956, felt pinched.⁸

If a people wanted to write about the West and sell it, they had to write nonfiction, it seemed, whether it be books or magazine articles. When the

⁵Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

⁶Ibid., 30 June 1998.

⁷Great Falls Tribune, 29 April 1982, 1A.

⁸Ibid., 7 April 1960, 12.

opportunity to write nonfiction presented itself, Guthrie, Fox and Dan latched onto it.

In early 1960 McGraw-Hill announced that Dan and Fox had contracted to write books for its nonfiction series about American trails, of which Bud Guthrie was the nominal editor. While Fox agreed to write about the Bozeman Trail, Dan's topic was the Old North Trail.

"Histories of American rivers have been done before, however spotty," Guthrie said at the time he, Fox and Dan conferred publicly. "I think this series on trails should bring an even better understanding of how the present settlement of the United States came about."

Guthrie imagined that after the series was complete, the trails would be known by current terminology, and modern-day travelers would know which trails they were using as they drove down highways and interstates. Trails that had already been assigned to other authors included the Boston Post Road, the Santa Fe Trail, the Mormon Trail, the Natchez Trace, the California Mission Trail, the Spanish Trail, and the Iroquois Trail.⁹

When Dan agreed to write the history of the Old North Trail, he took on a large project. This trail had at least 10,000 years of human use, serving among other things, as a main thoroughfare for the Blackfeet Indians before its modern-day uses. It would be a big project given those details alone. But Dan ended up making the project even larger and more encompassing.

He recognized, as did other experts, that the Old North Trail was merely small part of a larger migration route, ranging from Asia across what is now the Bering Strait to Alaska, along the Rocky Mountains to the plains of Texas. Many

⁹Ibid., 4 February 1960, 8.

experts believed then—and many do now—that this migration route has a history dating back 200 million years.¹⁰

Dan decided it his duty to explain all of this and came to call his book of history The Great North Trail.¹¹

It was his first historical writing, but it was something he said he'd wanted to do since his days as a teen-age correspondent. Dan's writing of The Great North Trail would spread over the next six years.¹²

Norman Fox wasn't known for his nonfiction either, but appeared equally ready to tackle the project. Unfortunately, little more than a month after conferring with Guthrie and Dan he died in his Great Falls home. Cancer killed him at 48. He had completed five chapters of his Bozeman Trail book.¹³

Dan lost one of his few close friends when Fox died. The close friendships Dan had stemmed almost entirely from the late 1930s and 1940s. Since he'd become a novelist it seemed his social life had ossified.

For more than fifteen years Great Falls had been home to some of Montana's best-known authors. But by 1960, Howard and Fox had died, and Mildred Walker no longer was part of the community, having headed east five years earlier after her husband died. Only Bud Guthrie remained in the community, but he, too, would soon leave.

¹⁰Cushman, North Trail, dust jacket.

¹¹Ibid., 5.

¹²Ibid., 372.

¹³Great Falls Tribune, 25 March 1960, 1.

As Great Falls slowly lost its writers, the prevailing winds in the state began pushing Montana's literati to Missoula. But it wasn't until the mid-1960s that the creative writing program at the University of Montana took off, when poet Richard Hugo took it over. As with many aspects of writing, there was a period of gathering. Ultimately, Guthrie became part of the Missoula scene.

Regardless of the literary winds of the time, Dan held steadfast. In the early 1960s, Dan made it clear he wasn't interested in being involved in Montana's shifting writing scene. This became apparent when Dan, Leslie Fiedler, H.G. Merriam and others participated in a panel discussion on writing in Missoula. Fiedler had arranged a party to follow the event and invited Dan. He declined and returned home immediately after the event.

His children remember it as a conscious move by Dan.

"We drove back, and we left Missoula at, like, 10 o'clock at night," Bob said. "It was a long drive."¹⁴

¹⁴Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

CHAPTER IX

BROTHERS IN KICKAPOO

I have found you an argument; I am not obliged to find you an understanding.

—Samuel Johnson.

Although hard times loomed on the horizon, Dan was in the middle of more than one literary endeavor at the time and his lighter fiction still hit the bookstores regularly.

While Dell published 1960 his book The Half Caste—an adventure story placed in the tropics—and another edition of Stay Away, Joe hit the bookstores the following year, Dan was busy writing the satire on boosterism he'd begun some time back.

Appleton-Century-Crofts had published his last literary novel, The Silver Mountain. Though he felt Appleton hadn't promoted the novel enough, he intended to sell them the satire originally titled "Kiwanis Crossing." But then somewhere along the line, Dan felt Appleton wasn't playing straight.

"The son-of-a-bitch took (Kiwanis Crossing) to Hollywood and was showing it around to see whether he could get any bids on it, see, before he bought it," Dan said. "This was dirty pool."¹

¹Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

Dan already had an agent in Hollywood by the name of H.N. Swanson and, perhaps, didn't like that the Appleton-Century man was bypassing the system Dan had arranged.²

"So I jerked the book out of there, maybe I made a fool of myself," Dan said, "and I sent it over to McGraw-Hill."

Dan's son Bob was in high school around the time his father was writing the book. He remembered Dan sending McGraw-Hill about one hundred pages of the book.

"They loved it and indicated they would buy it," Bob said.

But when Dan submitted the entire book, McGraw-Hill had a problem with the ending.

"They didn't like it," Bob recalled. "They were much happier with the revised version, which was in fact an improvement."

Then they asked for another change.

"As publication neared, McGraw-Hill's legal department became concerned that using the name Kiwanis in the title might lead the real Kiwanis Club to sue them," Bob recalled. "They prevailed upon Dan to change the title and not use Kiwanis name in the book. He settled on Kickapoo."³

In 1962, Brothers in Kickapoo finally hit bookstores.

The main character of this book is a middle-age insurance salesman named Williard T. Watney. Watney is a man of ideas intent on improving the condition of his hometown, Westboro, Michigan. He believes industry is the answer. But while Watney's presenting one of his ideas to fellow businessmen at a meeting of the local Kickapoo Club, a bombshell drops.

²Bob Cushman, email to author, 22 December 2000.

³Ibid.; Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

The club learns that a local writer, largely unknown in the community, had written a historical novel and Hollywood had purchased its movie rights for more than \$600,000. The author placed the novel's story in the country surrounding Westboro, and movie is expected to be one of the most expensive ever made.

A moment of disbelief is the only pause Watney takes before he realizes the boost the movie industry could provide Westboro if the producers chose to film the picture near the town. Watney befriends the novelist and then persuades the movie producers that filming near Westboro would preserve the story's authenticity.

Soon the town is bustling with activity and enjoying the employment and dollars brought by the movie industry. But Watney realizes that Westboro will be back to its original situation after the movie makers leave and decides to use the recognition to catch the eyes of big industry. He succeeds again.

When prosperity actually comes to Westboro, Watney begins to question what he has done. He realizes the Westboro he knew couldn't remain if his efforts succeed on the scale he intends. After considerable soul searching, he switches sides. No longer the purveyor of progress, he becomes a stalwart against it. But halting the progress he'd begun is more difficult than he thought.

Like Stay Away, Joe and Goodbye Old Dry, the story of Brothers in Kickapoo was greatly influenced by Dan's personal experiences, ones he'd had during his more than twenty years in Great Falls. But unlike the other books, the story isn't in Montana. I credit this to Dan not wanting to offend his community,

and perhaps he hoped a novel placed in the Great Lakes region wouldn't be affected by the late distaste for anything regarding the West.⁴

He said he felt capable of writing about Michigan based on his experiences there as a child. He always carried fond memories of Ann Arbor.

But Brothers in Kickapoo has nothing to do with the Michigan of his childhood. Rather, the book has potent social commentary stemming from Dan's adult life in Great Falls.

With the town's novelist, Dan admires individuality, which he'd always strove for in his own life. With the motion picture company, he scoffs at Hollywood and the money it throws around. With the show-biz characters, he relishes their unusual antics against the backdrop of the small town of Westboro. And with the boosters, he ridicules their elitism and false benevolence.

Dan sees it in simpler terms.

"It's a satire on the Kiwanis Club and local boosters and media," Dan said, "their folly of thinking that if a town's bigger, it's going to be better. That works only if you got the property to sell, you know."⁵

Like his book Stay Away, Joe, part of the storyline of Brothers in Kickapoo came from a conversation he many years before. This conversation came when he worked at the radio station and a coworker there told Dan about a booster club in Spokane, Wash., honoring a poet for his recent success.

The group had just sat down to eat, his coworker said and, "there were all the Rotarians and all the rest sitting at the banquet and the poet says, 'Excuse me for a minute.' And he went and took all of his stuff and sat down on the floor cross-legged."

⁴Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

⁵Ibid.

Dan's coworker thought the poet was a fool and did it only to draw attention to himself.

Dan thought otherwise.

"Don't you see what he was getting at?" Dan responded. "He had no association with these people. They didn't know him until his name was in the paper. They probably never read his stuff."

"It was perfectly plain what he was getting at," Dan said. "I'm of a different group than you are. We have nothing in common."

Dan created a similar banquet scene in his story. The successful novelist, Joseph Hart Vanway, sits next to a humorless, egotistical and condescending businessman, Berkland Sprague. The banquet is in honor of Vanway and the movie producers who had come to scout the town.

Sprague proves inept at holding a conversation of substance and Vanway, after trying somewhat to relate to the man, grows tired of the small talk; meanwhile Watney does his best to serve as a go-between for the two men.

"Wine?" a third waiter asked gently into each ear.

"Do you have some Mogen David?" asked Watney.

"I'm sorry, sir, all we have are the chablis, the burgundy, and the port for the fruit course. I can bring you the port."

"All right."

"Can't stand sour wine," (Sprague) confided in Vanway. "My wife would keel over dead if she saw me ordering a sweet wine with the main course."

Vanway asked for burgundy. Sprague shook his head that he would have nothing, only more warm water. Then he tested the dressing and the asparagus for their potency of seasoning. He scraped the dressing carefully to one side. He did not even glance at the *cigarillos au Russe*.

"Trouble with digestion?" asked Vanway.

"Don't like hot foods."

"Flatulence? Gas on stomach?"

"Little."

"Should stop eating in *chair*."

Sprague stared at him.

"That's a fact," said Vanway. "Too much blood runs to your feet. Causes half the stomach trouble in the country. Never heard of a Comanche suffering from ulcers, did you?"

"You know that might be something to think about?" said Watney.

"Always ought to eat crosslegged on the ground. Keeps blood flowing in an easy circuit through your stomach. Prevents hemorrhoids. Noticed it sitting here just now. Took by a terrible pain in the ass. Guess I'll go sit on the floor."

Slowly he got to his feet. People, all along the table, seeing him, thought he was going to speak. Instead, as everyone watched silent and fascinated, he placed the large plate of turkey and dressing on his left forearm, the dish of mashed potatoes in his left hand, his silverware on the bread and butter plate with the asparagus on top of it and all carefully in the crook of his left arm, a tremendous armload which he managed to balance with the help of his abdomen. He then put his water tumbler down in the dish of *cigarillos au Russe*, also his napkin, and picked this up in his right hand. Backing carefully, he pushed his chair out of the way with the calves of his legs, and reached the wall where he sat down on the floor with a jackknife bending at the knees, keeping his back rigid. There he slowly exhaled, as did half the men at the head table who were staring at him, and deposited the dinner on the floor around him, except for the plate of turkey and dressing which he decided to keep on his knees.⁶

Throughout the story Vanway displays unintentional individuality. And the unimpressed Kickapoos would never have seen Vanway as anything but a "beatnik" if he hadn't come by a bunch of cash.

In fact, Vanway's uniqueness initially causes Watney to think that he couldn't possibly have sold movie rights worth more than \$600,000. And he tries to convince his fellow boosters that Vanway's success must be an absurd joke.

"He wears a beard and goes riding around on one of those high, skinny English bikes. He wears a funny cap. A beret. Really he's harmless. Of course, it has a tragic side, too. He has a wife and two or three kids."⁷

More than once Vanway's lifestyle sounds a lot like Dan's, who'd taken to wearing a beret himself and walking with a cane around Great Falls.

⁶Dan Cushman, *Brothers in Kickapoo* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 116-117.

⁷Ibid., 16.

Besides Dan conversation with the coworker at the radio station, the movie production of Timberjack that came later in his life also influenced the story.

“They spent foolish millions on (Timberjack),” Dan said, “(on) things that did them no good.”⁸

With this in mind, Dan made the Hollywood crowd in Westboro demonstrate similar spending habits. In one scene the movie-makers need birchbark to preserve the authenticity of a canoe scene, but none can be secured near Westboro. After some searching, the problem was solved. Vanway tells Watney about it.

“We don’t need to worry about the birchbark. We found this outfit up in Ontario that manufactures novelty birch lampshades, souvenir plaques things like that. They’ll send it down by refrigerator truck, humidified.”

“Isn’t that expensive?” (Watney asked.)

“When you make *Ben Hur* you don’t worry about the price of chariots. The canoe scene was set for three-quarters of a million, but it’ll be graded upward.”

After Van was gone, Watney did some figuring, dividing \$750,000 by 65 and coming up with \$11,538.46 per canoe.

It was something to think about.⁹

And a third, more recent experience of Dan’s shows itself in Brothers in Kickapoo. This was the time he spent with Cy Feuer and Ernie Martin as they adapted Stay Away, Joe to the stage. With Whoop-Up, Dan had watched tempers flare and arguments ensue. But Dan created similar scenes in his novel, some of the movie-maker’s bickering proved too much for his editors at McGraw-Hill.

“They objected to certain words and I didn’t know what they meant,” Dan said. “(One person) said, ‘My God, Cushman, do you realize what those words

⁸Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

⁹Cushman, Kickapoo, 141.

mean?' I said, No, but I've worked with a couple Jewish producers who were yelling them at each other."

"(Feuer and Martin) both were Jewish and they would get to shouting at each other and shouting in Yiddish, so I just wrote it down. I didn't know what it meant. I knew it meant something Goddamn vile."¹⁰

In one of the book's scenes a young financier, Hub Gemmer, badgers the main movie producer, Koenig.

"Yah, but you're behind schedule. And everything you do puts you further behind schedule. And one of these days the autumn rains will start. Do you hear me? The—"

"I hear you. Then why are you complaining about spending time and one half on the night shift?"

They were shouting face to face.

"We're headed for an overcall situation!"

"You talk economics to me? To Koenig, who goes around turning off electric lights with his own hands."

"Get rid of that redskin Tobacco Road!"

"This is a re-creation of our American heritage. Listen who invested money for the re-creation of our American heritage—Bernard Hensch. Is he arguing about a few miserable dollars when at stake—"

"A few miserable million?"

"You huckster! You parlayed lumber yard dealer! I have contempt for you!" Watney watched in disbelief while Koenig thrust out a very thick tongue and gave Hub Gemmer a wet Bronx cheer. "That is what I think of your ilk."

"And I'll tell you what I think of you...."

They were obviously coming to blows and Watney did not know what to do about it.

"Go away!" cried Koenig. "I wash my hands of you. Go back to making situation comedies for television."

"Give me the money I got sunk into this and I'll damn quick go."

"Take it. Take every cent. Go down in history as the man who destroyed Koenig's masterpiece."

The bout with Koenig seemed to settle Hub's nerves. He was more cheerful and relaxed on his drive back to town. He said no more about trying to recover his investment in the picture.¹¹

¹⁰Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

¹¹Cushman, *Kickapoo*, 158

The most poignant element in the story, though, is the booster club. Here Dan clearly pulled from his visits to the Kiwanis Club.

He makes Watney the quintessential club member. He is a man who needs acceptance and camaraderie. He is successful only so far as others think he is. And he deems it his job to bring progress and plenitude to Westboro. To achieve this he seeks out Gemmer, who is well regarded in the industry world.

“So you really think you got a potential industrial site out here, do you,” Hub said on the phone one morning.

“I do, I do!” Watney responded fervently.

“Okay, I’ve arranged for a couple of our directors to drop around and have a look. Now, when you see ‘em, give ‘em something solid. Tax breaks. Specifically, get your county to guarantee a continuance of the agricultural lands classification, no matter what improvements go on. Are you listening?”

“Ya, ya!”

“And roads, Guarantee ‘em the roads. Also a new bridge. Show ‘em that you got a town here that’s willing to grow. One that’s willing to make the first move toward expansion, and not wait to hang it around their necks.”

“Westboro on the march! Is that the picture?”

“That’s the picture.”

“Right! Will do, fella. Will get on it right this morning.”¹²

But not all of the community appreciates Watney’s efforts. The owner of the local hardware store, for instance, argues that Westboro was fine before the movie industry injected its dollars into the economy. Here, through the character Lorn Walker it sounds like Dan picked up where his guest editorial left off. (The following conversation also sounds like one he could have had with Beecher, if they ever had such conversations.)

“This would be a pretty damn good town if you fellows would just leave it alone. All you do with your hopped-up ideas is make trouble. If you don’t like this town, why in the hell don’t you move someplace else? Why don’t you move down to Maywood?”

¹²Ibid., 161.

(Watney replies) "I like this town. It's because I do like this town that I want to do something for it. My whole life is tied up in this town. And I'm not going to sit idly by and see it get left behind—"

"God damned picture company!"

"Yes, but that God Damned picture company, as you call it—"

"Uprooted Carmichael's best pasture. Dug trenches. Bulldozed his fields. Crash, bang!—right through his chicken set-up. Sawed down his woodlot—"

"They *bought* that farm! And paid fourteen thousand—"

"And I hear they bought a lot of other places, good farms, ruining them forever. Then they'll move out—"

"All you ever do is oppose! Just knock, knock, knock! You fall behind the times and expect the town to fall behind with you."

He caught himself. His heart was pounding and he was in a wild tremble from anger.

"Oh, you make my ass ache," said Lorn, and went back inside.¹³

Watney works hard to find a way to keep the good times rolling after the movie makers leave. And thanks to Hub, he baits the hook well enough that it begins to tempt big-time industry. Soon the word is that a chemical factory will be built outside of town.

This is good news, Watney thinks, but subconsciously something was bothering him. One night he has a dream in which he goes to visit his doctor but finds the doctor's office empty. The office was on the second floor of a six-story building, once Westboro's finest, but now abandoned thanks to progress. The building was empty, but the street below was busier than it had ever been and was littered with trash and dead animals.

(Watney) stood by the window. He could feel the passages of vehicles in the street below. His vision became exquisitely sharp, in focus. Dust hung in the room suspended, marking exact prisms of sunshine. Whence the dust? he thought. There were no muddy streets, no gravel, all had been paved. Yet there was dust. He marveled, and as he looked down on the rushing cars, someone tossed a Kleenex. The Kleenex was carried on an airstream into the gutter; there it rested briefly and lightly as a snowy lark and swirled into the street again, where, after a second of darting under cars, it became wheel-pressed in place. The thought then came to him of other things

¹³Ibid., 147.

tossed to the street, the cigarette stubs and empty packages, the Dixie cups, old Band-Aids, wilted corsages, sanitary napkins, half-pint milk cartons, apple cores, empty whisky bottles, beer cans, and even the bodies of cats run over and glued fast by their life juices, the poor, fleeing nocturnal beasts which had managed to escape the (maniac drivers) of the old Westboro, but had proved no match for the one-two-three-four punch of the new.

In his dream he kept seeing the Kleenex. From high above, like a camera angle on TV when the fellow is standing on the window ledge, and all the municipal facilities are mobilized in half an hour for the defeat of his purpose, he looked down on the Kleenex and saw it rise and wave to each car that passed over it. Soon it would be torn to bits, shredded to its fibres, and eventually, to the finest of film. And so everything else, bottles crushed and reduced to powder, beer cans flattened, polished across the pavement leaving brassy marks, the brassy marks worn free, lifted in the finest of vapor dust, by the car-car-car-car, car-car-car, day and night, until at last, kicked up, all remained air-borne, rising gently higher on the heat of exhausts, hanging in the sunlight without regard for gravity, a division microscopic, a mist of solids, fine as the dry floating tubercle bacillus described in his old hygiene book, molecular, passing like odor through the interstices of brick walls, the very pores of buildings, through closed windows weatherstripped, to hang, and delineate the sun's rays, or resting at last on the varnished sills and floors, to form a coating, uniform silvery gray, in bright illumination almost beautiful, like pulverulent mother-of-pearl, a dust of alabaster, bearing no hint of its heterogeneous origin, detritus of the living, the discarded Kleenex, the beer bottle, the cartons, packages, cigarette stubs, old sanitary napkins, corsages, Band-Aids, crushed ice-cream cones and the fragmented fur of flattened cats. Dust, dust, dust-of-the-road, he thought, but by God, and he seemed to be shouting at (one of his employees): "But, by God, this spells out progress! This is progress with a capital P!"

"Well, pee on progress!" answered (the man).¹⁴

Dan remembered writing this scene and smiled.

"(Watney) can see the dust and all of the things, 'the fragmented fur of flattened cats,' I remember was one of my terms," Dan said. "I had a lot of fun writing (that book)."

Dan easily could have been looking out the second-story window of his brick home at a busy day on Fifteenth Street when those passages came to him.

¹⁴Ibid., 191-192.

Whatever the case, it was the dreamscape's traffic, trash and dust that makes Watney second-guess his efforts. Then he has a second dream. It involves his own funeral where no one bothers to remember his name correctly—meaning that he may be forgotten as easily as Westboro's greatest landmark—and leaves him with no doubt that he wants Westboro to remain the same.

Ironically, once Watney tries to stop the progress, he finds himself facing a great financial opportunity. And in the course of these efforts, once he pits himself against the booster club, Watney learns not to depend on the acceptance of others.

When the story ends you can't help but feel uneasy with its conclusion. It is clear that Watney has bettered his own situation and has become less dependent on others. However, it is also clear in the book that progress cannot be stopped, even by the fervent booster who started it. The book has a certain Frankensteinian quality to it in this way.

But the book is far from somber, as satires must be. One of the best scenes of the book comes when the Westboro's boosters greet the movie-maker's plane as an authentic posse, astraddle horses and packing heavy six-guns.

Clearly Dan couldn't pass up the opportunity to recreate a scene similar to the "Go Western Day" that his friend Fiedler had considered absurd and he had come to pity¹⁵

In this scene, Dan puts on Watney, who is a member of the posse, a costume that could turn heads even on moonless Halloween night:

He was wearing a cream white sombrero, a vat-dyed orange nylon shirt with blue neckerchief tie, tight whipcord riding trousers with decorative gold

¹⁵Cushman, Silver Mountain, dust jacket.

and mother-of-pearl pocket buttons, and fancy cowboy boots with big flat heels for walking. On the shirt was a DEPUTY SHERIFF badge.¹⁶

When Watney arrives at the event he is supposed to be accompanied by the novelist Vanway. But Vanway, showing his ever-present good sense, didn't want anything to do with it and went boating instead. Watney thinks of an excuse to tell the rest of the posse, all of whom are in the spirit of the Western moment, even using their best cowboy lingo.

"Hi-yuh, Cap'n," said Watney.

"Where's this writin' ranny o' yours?"

"Vanway?"

"That's who ah mean. Ain't he fetchin' up a little bit far in the drag?"

"Ah got him staked out, Cap'n."

"You mean he ain't heah?"

"Ah'm savin' him fo' the banquet."

Otie considered this while his eyes became little, narrow slits against the sun. Although an ice cream dealer, he found time for riding almost every day, and owned several horses; he was big and browned and had all the sage-country mannerisms, and he could have passed for a real sheriff in a Western picture.

"You don't suppose," said Otie, "that he's hurt because we ain't elected him into the posse?"

"Doubt it. Don't strike me as being much of a joiner."

"Him in the posse with that hair and beard?" asked Art Savage, hitching up his six-gun. "Why, he'd make us look like a pack of damn fools."¹⁷

When Dan completed the book and sent it to McGraw-Hill, he was confident it was some of his best work, and with markets drying up, a well-received book would have put him more at ease.

"He really wanted to make a big score with a movie sale," Bob recalled.¹⁸

¹⁶Cushman, *Kickapoo*, 86.

¹⁷Cushman, *Kickapoo*, 89; See footnote 3 in Chapter X for the similarity this scene has with one Leslie Fiedler gave in his essay "The Montana Face." Obviously Fiedler's observation stuck with Dan.

¹⁸Bob Cushman, email to author, 22 December 2000.

Dan waited with high hopes for the novel to be released and this time he was not disappointed with the promotion of the novel. When the book was released, he was pleased with the response.

“The Herald Tribune actually used a whole page in advertising and reviews and that was in the daily edition,” Dan said. “Then they covered it in the Sunday edition. And the New York Times covered it real well.”¹⁹

Martin Levin, reviewing for the The New York Times, had this to say about the book:

There are a number of rare things in Dan Cushman’s Brothers in Kickapoo. There is a fresh rendering of life in a small American town-- authentic down to the texture of its lawns and the aromas of the coffee shop in the Dinwoodie Hotel. There is a well-filigreed story, extending the plausible into wildly comic reaches. And there is an original American culture hero, Williard T. Watney, “fifty two, five feet nine, 180 lbs, energetic and efficient,” a demon insurance salesman, a neo-Babbitt who harbors immortal longings beneath his bromides.”²⁰

Sinclair Lewis created George F. Babbitt for his novel Babbitt published in 1922. Watney is a neo-Babbitt in that he is a business man who conforms without thinking to prevailing middle-class standards.

Another reviewer found Dan’s book reminiscent of Lewis’s work, as well as that of Richard Bissell, award winning author of The Pajama Game known for his natural dialogue and appealing portrayal of the Midwestern life.

“At times, the novel offers bittersweet scenes of a Midwestern small town worthy of a 1960 Sinclair Lewis. Elsewhere (the novel) is Richard Bissell with literary finesse,” said A. P. Sable in the Library Journal.²¹

¹⁹Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

²⁰Martin Levin, review of Brothers in Kickapoo, In The New York Times Book Review (29 April 1962): 47.

²¹A.P. Sable, review of Brothers in Kickapoo, In Library Journal 87 (15 March 1962): 1149.

For a while it looked as though Brothers in Kickapoo could be a Book-of-the-Month club selection and Dan knew well what good fortune could come with that.

But the book made it to the club's final round and was not chosen.

Bob recalled Dan's disappointment, saying that Dan figured the book lost some of its punch when Kickapoo was substituted for Kiwanis. Dan felt readers may not have understood the inferred lampooning of the Kiwanis Club.

"Dan always felt that it would have been picked (by the club) if the title hadn't been changed," he said.²²

Dan was philosophical looking back at the book and its track record.

"This is the fate of the authors," he said. "Most of the best stuff is overlooked."²³

Ultimately the book did better in England, where the title was changed to Boomtown.

"It did all right for me, but it didn't make me rich," Dan said. "I still think that it would make a good movie."²⁴

Beecher was one reader who didn't mistake Dan's lampooning. Dan learned that he'd offended his brother with the book.

"Apparently my brother saw himself in one of the characters," Dan said. "I certainly didn't copy it after him, or didn't mean anything very serious. He told my sister one time, 'I'll never forgive him for writing that damn book,' but that was a figure of speech."²⁵

²²Bob Cushman, email to author, 22 December 2000.

²³Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

²⁴Ibid., 30 June 1998.

²⁵Ibid., 2 March 1998.

Dan didn't say that Beecher saw himself in Watney, but that most likely was the case.

About the same time Brothers in Kickapoo came out, Dan hosted a travel writer by the name of John D. Weaver. Weaver was touring Montana and writing an article for the magazine Holiday. On the day Dan showed Weaver around Great Falls, Dan impressed upon him an H.L. Mencken-type of disgruntlement and couldn't pass up the opportunity to drive home the point of his latest novel. Weaver included some of Dan's comments in his article that ran with the headline "A Fresh Look at Montana":

Putting itself forward as "Montana's largest and friendliest city" (pop. 55,357), Great Falls boasts a major Strategic Air Command base, a copper-and-zinc refinery, a brewery and five hydroelectric dams. At night along the tree-shaded residential streets, boosters dream of additional factories. Their dream is a nightmare to Dan Cushman... Dan, sporting a blue beret and swinging a cane, has planted his stocky figure firmly in the path of those who would cut down his forests, foul his air and poison his trout streams.

"The only thing we have is clean air and empty space, and they want to destroy it," Dan said over coffee one Sunday morning in the Rainbow Hotel.

Dan tilts not only at smokestacks, but also at the uniformity of dress and demeanor which is settling over the community. "A middle-class fear is creeping into our larger towns," he said, annoyed to find that his beret ("I wear it because I happen to be bald") and his cane ("I like the feel of the thing") have marked him on the streets of Great Falls as an eccentric. He was thinking of moving to a smaller town, where a Montanan could still exercise his inalienable right to be different.

In the early afternoon Dan and I strolled through the Charles M. Russell gallery. Dan suggested, in a voice for all to hear, that Charlie's paintings should be hanging in a saloon instead of this mausoleum. The reaction was what might be expected from the sudden introduction of a bust of Martin Luther into the Sistine Chapel. Charlie Russell, the cowboy who chronicled the last days of the Old West in paintings and bronzes, is Montana's folk hero...

"We have a piece of America here in Montana that is relatively untouched," Dan grumbled as we left the gallery. "I wish they'd leave it alone."²⁶

²⁶John D. Weaver, "A Fresh Look at Montana," Holiday, September 1962, Vol. 32, 66.

This wouldn't be the last Dan spoke of preserving Montana's remaining treasures, but he did quiet down about it for a number of years. He had other things going on, including some pocket books, another literary novel and the history of the "Great North Trail."

CHAPTER X

THE GRAND AND THE GLORIOUS AND HARD TIMES

No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.

—*Samuel Johnson.*

When Dan agreed to write about the Great North Trail, he essentially agreed to put in order a lifetime of research, which unofficially began a few years before he was a correspondent.

Dan's work wouldn't be the first time the trail received attention. In 1943, his friend Joe Howard wrote about the Old North Trail in High, Wide and Handsome. In his essay, "The Old North Trail," Howard told of the recent development of the Alcan Highway due to World War II and he juxtaposed modern times with ancient.

The white man of Europe and the brown man of Asia again have marched to battle along the Old North Trail. As Japan seized a foothold in the Aleutians, the white man—American and Canadian, but of European blood—hastened to build a military highway over a route upon which the Asiatics may have come into the New World in hunting and warrior bands thousands of years ago. It is the long sought Alaskan International Highway (the Alcan), now completed to Fairbanks on an inland route extending from the end of an old motor road at Fort St. John, British Columbia. East of Fort St. John this route leads six hundred miles to Edmonton...where it connects with a major Canadian highway south to the United States boundary at Sweet Grass, Montana.

Probably not more than 10,000 to 15,000 years ago the first of the Asiatics crossed the Bering Strait and pushed on into the interior of Alaska, rejoicing in their discovery of a land more hospitable than the bleak Siberian coast from which they had come. Said Ales Hrdlicka, curator of the National

Museum: "The chief deduction of American anthropology, in the substances of which all serious students concur, is that this continent was peopled essentially from northeastern Asia."¹

But Dan's awareness of the trail harkened back at least twenty years before Howard's discussion of it, and much of his knowledge came first hand from his days in Big Sandy.

As a boy he watched men come through town who were on their way back from seeking gold in the Klondike, most no richer than when they had left. Later he learned from his friend Doc that the Klondikers were simply the latest travelers using a route with a long, long history.

Although I was aware that a trail ran from Alberta north to the Klondike, and from Montana south to Texas, it never occurred to me that anything like a main passageway, a trail of the ages, existed until I went to work for an oil geologist whom I will call Dr. Downey....

At that time there was a great deal of wildcatting near Winifred (Mont.), and around the southeastern flanks of the Bear Paw Mountains. It was Doc who told me that the Bear Paws were particularly interesting to paleontologists, having in all ages formed a shore area of the Western seas. We searched out and located the dinosaur diggings of Edward Drinker Cope fifty years before. There was evidence, he said, that a shallow-water route, a chain of islands and shoals, existed 150 million years ago from Europe all the way to the Bear Paw and Rocky Mountain shores. Not only that, the most ancient of all land routes led down from Alaska. He connected for the first time in my mind the route of the Klondikers with the cattle trail from Texas.

From the high flanks of the Bear Paws one has what surely must be one of the most expansive views of the continent. Doc would drive to one of these vantage points where the Snowy Range, the Highwoods, Judiths, and Little Belt mountains were all at our feet, or so it seemed, lying like islands in the sea of Montana, and spend whole afternoons lecturing on the passageways of antiquity. I was enthralled.²

In addition to the days with Doc, Dan spent many hours with bulletins and monographs of the Geological Survey that Doc showed him how to retrieve

¹Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 322.

²Cushman, North Trail, 371.

for free from Washington, DC. These also proved useful for the book, as did the time he spent in Helena during his college years researching old newspapers.

But Dan was, to say the least, an unconventional historian, as his later explanation of sources showed.

“No doubt I could construct a gigantic bibliography, but not an honest one,” he wrote. “Bibliographies on the various areas of history covered by this work are available to students in any good library.”³

Dan does, however, list about thirty sources he turned to for “verification of facts” to help him fill out the portions he knew little about.⁴

In the course of researching and writing the book, McGraw-Hill brought Dan to New York City for a summer, giving him access to editors and resources. But Dan remembered doing as much sightseeing as he did writing that summer.

“They put me up down in the garment district at Hotel Americana, I think it was called,” Dan said. “It was a hell of a place. It’s tore down now, but they’d do anything to keep you there.”

Dan said this included giving away tickets to all the Broadway shows.

“I saw every show on Broadway,” Dan said. “Well, in the summertime you know most of them weren’t full.”

When Dan wasn’t seeing a show, he was logging miles around the city.

“I got to know New York pretty well, and I got to know it on foot,” Dan said. “I love to walk.”

Dan also got to know the book industry a little better, spending time with the editors at McGraw-Hill. He remembered one particular conversation he had

³Ibid., 372.

⁴Ibid., 371.

with an editor as they sat on the twenty-third story of a high-rise, overlooking the city.

“Cushman,” he said, “do you know how much of McGraw-Hill the entire trade department represents—gross?”

“No,” Dan replied.

“Three and a half percent.”

The trade department was where all the general interest books were dealt with, including the books like Dan’s. McGraw-Hill printed fiction for the prestige, Dan learned, and made the majority of its money from educational, scientific, or business literature.

He laughed as he remembered how insignificant three and a half percent made him feel.

“That’s how important we (novelists) are,” Dan said.

But just as Dan was leaving the city, his confidence got a boost. He was waiting at an airport for his flight home and noticed a long bookrack at one end of the terminal.

“I had paperback books from one end of that (rack) to the other on the top row,” he said with a smile. “It gives you quite a feeling of identity.”⁵

Evidence of Dan’s progress on the trail book came in October 1962 when Montana the Magazine of Western History ran a story of Dan’s titled “Monsters of the Judith.” Here Dan told about early dinosaur digging in Montana’s Judith River country, specifically the rivalry between two paleontologists, Edward Cope and Othniel Marsh. He delivered at least two more nonfiction articles on mining to the magazine over the next two years.

⁵Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

All of the articles are present in the trail book. They were, it seems, little nuggets of history Dan deemed worthy of greater discussion than the book would allow. Perhaps more importantly, it was a way for Dan to milk his book research for all it was worth.

The brief biography at the end of the third magazine article said Dan “invariably comes up with material which is informative, yet flows along so easily that the reader finds himself content and consumed” and described him as “one of Montana’s busiest writers of delightful fare ranging from history to fiction to commentary on the current scene.”⁶

In 1963 McGraw-Hill published its second Cushman novel, The Grand and the Glorious. As with Brothers in Kickapoo, it was set in Michigan.

Perhaps his recent description of a Michigan town in Brothers in Kickapoo conjured up childhood memories. Dan liked Michigan for many reasons but said that he especially liked hanging around Ann Arbor’s college campus and shared a memory of its impact on the town.

One day Dan, then about 10, ran into a classmate who was walking down the street carrying a bag.

“What have you got in the sack, Bill?” Dan remembered asking.

“A cat,” he replied.

“What are you going to do with him?”

“I’m going to take him up and sell him to the biology department. They give you a dollar for every cat.”

“What do they do with them?”

“I don’t know.”

⁶Dan Cushman, “Garnet: the Last Booming Gold Camp,” Montana: the Magazine of Western History, July 1964, 51.

Dan laughed. "That son-of-a-bitch. It was almost a catless town!"⁷

The story Dan tells in his novel The Grand and the Glorious does not possess this anecdote's morbidness, but it is telling of the time and place and ultimately has a dark element. Dan said the novel's story was inspired by a day his family spent in Lake City, Michigan.

"We went to a Fourth-of-July celebration with an airplane and balloon ascension and the whole thing," he said. "I just tried to (show in this book) all the things that would happen."⁸

In the novel, Dan creates an exceptional Fourth-of-July celebration in 1916 in the fictional town of Red Wing, Michigan. The year plays a more important role in the story than does the place. It was one of the last years that nineteenth century optimism defined the mood in America, as the narrator of the story recalls:

Whether one attributes it to the war, the automobile, the aeroplane, the end of the Western frontier, or national prohibition, or all of them, it can now be seen that in 1916 a whole way of life was running over the edge, but there was no hint of it on that Fourth of July night. It seemed then as if the old days were going on, only bigger and finer forever.⁹

The narrator of the story, a man recalling his youth, is reminiscent of the cub reporter in Goodbye Old Dry. Throughout the story, adults confide in this unassuming boy who remains nameless, giving him insight into the world around him.

Early in the story the narrator recalls what the day meant to people in 1916 and exactly what it has in store:

⁷Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

⁸Ibid., 31 January 1998.

⁹Dan Cushman, The Grand and the Glorious (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 188.

...The Fourth was a particularly big day at Red Wing. Franklin had its big days in September during the county fair, and it put on a July fourth celebration, too, but never anything to compete with ours which was always the biggest in the area. The Commercial Club claimed it was the biggest July Fourth celebration in western Michigan. In 1916 the club took a whole double page in the *Courier* stating that this was to be the biggest July Fourth in Red Wing history. Today such promotional promises are commonplace, but at the time they were read and *believed*. People came expecting to see the *biggest*, which meant bigger even than in 1899 when all the veterans of the Spanish American War paraded. The ad, which was in red, white and blue, listed the usual line-up of trotting races, the girls-under-twelve 50-yard dash, boys-under-fifteen three-legged race, and the fat man's race for cigars, which were always expected, and the usual oration by Judge Thaler, and the baseball game featuring the Rhinelanders of Bengsten and the Red Wing Warriors. As usual both teams were likely to be beefed up with players who had been released by teams down in the Three-eye league, and there would be a bowery dance that night, and the fireworks display. The bowery dance this year was to feature a box social for the relief of the Belgian Orphans, which was new, and the fireworks were to cost \$1,500 instead of \$1,000 as on the year before, but the real *coup* over the former Fourths was the booking, "at gigantic expense," of Oscar Viking, "The Viking of the Skies," in his celebrated exhibition of looped and inverted flight, including an attempt at the world's record in powerless volplaning from an altitude of 5,000 feet.¹⁰

There also was to be a race, no less than eight miles long, between an automobile and the airplane, reputed to be the "fastest 3-cylinder aeroplane on earth."

Besides all of this activity, it also proves to be a day full of politics and romance. A candidate for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives is courting the narrator's sister and his grandfather is trying to impress a young widow.

It is Grandfather, a flamboyant and self-confident man, who best embodies, and often spouts, the nineteenth century optimism. The future is promising, Grandfather tells the narrator and the young pilot, Oscar Viking:

"...O' course, these days, knowing what we do about nutrition, importance of raw, unskinned vegetables, roughage in the diet, etc., chronological age has become passé. I'm convinced that your generation is likely to see the average life span pushed to over a hundred. That is, it will

¹⁰Ibid., 15.

be for those who aren't too hide-bound to make use of the new nutritional discoveries."

He went on talking about how lucky we were, The Viking and I, to be young fellows living in such a time, with the world at the very threshold, and said even the war in Europe might end up to be a blessing in disguise, sweeping away the deadwood and feudalism, the bigotry and military enslavement.

"I tell you, war will have to end because it's already priced itself out of the market. Take those Big Berthas throwing ton-weights of shell 50 miles into the edge of Paris. War is proving itself so terrible that by the 1920's people won't even mention it as a feasible means of settling international disputes. With the education that's bound to come when these old orders have been uprooted, the people of this world are going to *arise and demand* an international court of law, and ill betide that flag waver who calls on 'em to go out and shoot at their neighbors. I predict that in the nineteen-and-twenties education and the human sciences will make such strides with the aid of the wireless, flying machine, etc., that moral and physical insecurity will be wiped off the face of the earth. *Knowledge* is power. Education will make the common man so smart he won't put up with fellows like Kaiser Bill. Why, the world you fellows have before you will make this seem like the dark ages in comparison."¹¹

Along with his optimism, Grandfather, a farmer far more devoted to hunting and fishing than growing crops, provides much of the book's entertainment ranging from his crafty pursuit of the young widow to an eventful race when he pits his new car against the young pilot's plane.

The overwhelmingly German blood in the neighboring community of Bengsten plays an important role in the story. At one point the narrator notes how wartime rumors would circulate in the near future.

(O)n that July Fourth we were still some months away from realizing that the Bengsten folks would chop off the hands of Red Cross nurses, carry babies out of burning farm homes on dripping bayonets, or horsewhip blondes in *Hearts of the World*. We thought of them only as a twice-a-year enemy who would lie, cheat, obstruct and move the bases around in order to win a ball game.¹²

¹¹Ibid., 63.

¹²Ibid., 109.

On this Fourth of July, Bengsteners had no reason to deflect attention from their heritage and spoke German for the most part:

...They had their own words for most of the positions, like *der stichler*, *der shwinger*, *der laufer*, etc. Even the colored fellows from Bengsten went around *Gott-in-himmeling* it and yelling what sounded like "*Laus schnell dein schlaum-zuken*," and "*Gehen-sie-heim, schmier-vinger*," when things weren't going so well. The latter I recall because they had a shortstop who would get furious and throw clods of dirt at the crowd when they got to yelling "*Schmier-vinger!*" at him.¹³

There is a good turnout at the annual game from both communities. Even though the Warriors have the home-field advantage, by the fourth inning the Rhinelanders are ahead three to zero, largely due to solid pitching by a Bengsten man named Lints.

The fifth, sixth and seventh innings passed with neither pitcher giving an inch, and that was all right with the Bengsteners because they had their three-run lead. Most of our crowd, even the ones who were maddest at (the umpire), had stopped yelling. Nobody left, however. They stayed, suffering it out, but with our men going down one, two, three, inning after inning, it seemed hopeless. Finally Grandfather got over near third base....

"Hey, stichler-flinger!" he would yell--*stichler*, or "flinger," being the Bengsten term for pitcher--"Hey stichler-flinger, hast du thrown dein sauerkraut ball?"

You went to ball games and heard people yelling the same old things like "He swings like a rusty gate," and at least Grandfather was different. Our crowd didn't have much to be happy about; they got to encouraging him and he carried on louder and louder. Then Lints walked our pitcher, Hupp Maguire. This was the first base runner we had had since almost the start of the game, and in all that time Lints had been able to use a full wind-up. But now he had to pitch from a set position in order to hold Hupp on first base. So he proceeded as follows:

1. Placed side of foot against slab.
2. Gripped ball and looked at it.
3. Pulled cap down and squinted into catcher's mit.
4. Expanded shoulders outward.
5. Pulled up pants.
6. Stretched.
7. Glanced at Hupp.
8. Wheeled.

¹³Ibid., 107.

9. Threw.

It took Grandfather about one pitch to see what the routine consisted of, and next time, just as Lints expanded his shoulders, he yelled, "Hey, stichler-flinger! Dein pants gefallen!" and Lints pulled up his pants. It was real funny, because he seemed to do it on account of what Grandfather said. Next time, when it happened again, people were waiting for it, and there was pandemonium.

Until then Lints had made no sign of knowing that Grandfather was even at the game. Now he got to looking at him. He would get to the shoulder stretch, but when Grandfather yelled "Hey, stichler-flinger!" he would stop. They would seem to be waiting each other out. But finally Lints would have to continue, Grandfather would yell "Dein pants gefallen," and he would pull up his pants. He never did associate the word "pants" with the "blind fleibers" which we all thought meant pants in German. However, the way people were laughing he knew that something was wrong. He must have thought his pants were ripped because twice, just after throwing, he turned to glance behind him. Next he took an extra-long stride so he could look underneath in case he had a rip in the crotch and his private parts were hanging out.

Of course this made it funnier than ever; people were just falling down from laughter, and Grandpa Stroble, who was a Civil War veteran, got to wetting his pants, and he couldn't stop, and couldn't stop, and some of the fellows had to wrap a blanket around him, but he wouldn't leave the ball game--he was afraid he'd miss something.¹⁴

Lints loses his composure due to the harassment and Red Wing wins by two.

That is not the only game in which Grandfather uses less than honorable means to prevail. His ways come in handy in game of romance as he competes with another man, the town's banker, for a young widow's affection.

It is the local banker and grocer A.B. Finreddy who escorts the widow, Maude Gibson, to the carnival in order to win her some prizes. Grandfather sees this and makes it his mission to one-up Finreddy at whatever contest the banker approaches. After beating Finreddy at the shooting gallery and egg throw, Grandfather notices a contest where you swing a sledge in an attempt to ring a bell.

¹⁴Ibid., 117-119.

Finreddy, preoccupied for a few moments as he frantically tries more contests to make up for his poor showing, doesn't notice Grandfather leave to speak with the carnival person in charge of the sledgehammer.

Grandfather knows the sledgehammer contest is rigged and persuades the operator to run the machine in his favor, as the narrator tells:

...I noticed that Grandfather had gone around to where a man had a ring-the-bell sledgehammer outfit. They talked for a while, and then, although I couldn't be certain, Grandfather seemed to be handing him some money. He didn't try the hammer, however. In fact, he walked around giving the contrivance a wide breath and came back from a different direction.

"Say, Amos, have you ever tried one of those contraptions?" he asked when they started out again, acting as if the hammer set-up had just come to his notice.

"Oh, no!" cried Maude, but once A.B. laid eyes on the thing nothing could stop him. He practically ran to get over and see what prizes they had to offer, and the fact was this fellow had the most beautiful prizes in the entire celebration, not kewpies only, but sofa pillows with pictures of lakes and mountains, and the most gorgeous silk bedspreads I had seen in my entire life. The operator, who wasn't a very big man, swung the hammer, and the weight ran up the track and made the bell ding, showing how it was done, explaining the secret was to hit the launcher exactly square, but A.B. said he was an old hand at this, having driven steel on the Ann Arbor railroad, and he took charge. He really was one of the most powerful men in the country. In those days a groceryman was always having to walk off with hundred-pound bags of sugar and flour, and A.B., to show his clerks who was the best man, would sometimes hoist two sacks, walk out to the loading platform with them, and drop them in a wagon.

So he took off his coat, telling Maude to pick out what she wanted, everything was to be clearly understood, he didn't want any arguments after he won it, and she chose a bedspread, and A.B. spit on his hands and came in with a one-step approach, swinging the hammer high and coming down with all his might, but the weight fell short by at least three feet.

The operator said better luck next time, that A.B. had done pretty well seeing it was his first swing, and did he want to try again. He did, of course, and he kept swinging and swinging, bringing the hammer down so hard I thought he was going to smash something, but the weight would never quite reach the bell.

Finally he was winded, and while he stood with his chest pulling air like a big bellows, Grandfather said, "Trouble is, Amos, you been shortening up your swing in order to put muscle into it. That only defeats your purpose. The secret is to bring the entire arc of the hammer's weight to an apex just exactly at the impelling point of that fulcrum."

They had quite a crowd, most of whom had followed over from the egg-throw, and they were all nodding their heads saying that Grandfather had a point, and A.B. ripped out a laugh and said maybe somebody else would like to demonstrate. So Grandfather swung the hammer in a big, beautiful, floating arc so it fell with just its own weight, and *bong!* the weight shot up on its track with so much speed that it actually rebounded from the bell. It was sensational.

"You win the bedspread, sir!" cried the operator.

But Grandfather said, "Oh, no. I didn't win it. I was swinging for my friend, Mr. Finreddy."

Several people applauded, and there was a general mutter of approbation, but A.B. didn't appreciate it at all.

"You're not swinging for me!" he yelled in a hoarse voice. He ripped the hammer from Grandfather's hands, and threw some money on the ground, seven or eight dollars. "I don't need anybody to swing for me. I'm perfectly able to win anything in this place by myself."

Then he charged with the hammer and gave the thing such a blow that his feet were actually lifted off the ground, but the weight didn't go anywhere. It went up only about two-thirds of the way.

"You're doing something to the track," A.B. yelled at the man. "You got a lever and you've got some way of stopping it."

The man claimed he didn't, that A.B. was perfectly welcome to examine it. He offered to stand at one side or the other side, just show him where, and that would prove there wasn't a lever. But A.B. stopped listening to him and came at the thing with another earth shaker.

"Son-of-a-bitch!" he would yell and drive that sledge. "Bastardly, contraption!" Finally he stopped backing off but merely stood there spread-legged, swinging from one spot, but by now the weight scarcely went higher than his head. It was no use. He was completely beaten out and so tired he let Maude pull him off to one side. You could hear him breathing through his nose, and finally Maude helped him with his cuffs, and he put his shirt tails in, and went over and picked up the money which hadn't been used up at 25 cents a whack.¹⁵

Dan said he got a kick out of writing this scene. Although he doesn't explicitly say how the carnival operator controlled the track, it is clear he must remain near the machine, as he "offered to stand to one side or the other."

"I figured for myself that they had an electromagnet in there or something like that," Dan said, "that stops it because it stops that thing very infinitesimally."

¹⁵Ibid., 139-142.

“That was one of the best scenes in the show,” Dan said. He laughed as he thought about Grandfather swinging the hammer so easily, saying “just dropped it like that and it went BONG!”

As with Brothers in Kickapoo, Dan said he had a lot of fun writing The Grand and the Glorious.¹⁶ On its dust jacket, the novel is described as “all very funny, very sentimental, a bit Rabelaisian and completely joyous entertainment.”¹⁷

Again Dan had high hopes when the book came out.

“During these years Dan tried to make everything he did attractive to Hollywood,” his son Bob recalled.

This was at least the third time Dan anticipated a call from someone wanting rights to the book, whether it be Hollywood or Broadway. Dan was again disappointed. The phone didn’t ring. Reviews did say that Dan succeeded in what he set out to do, and one mentioned it has the potential for becoming a musical.

The only complaint was that it might not be the book for someone who didn’t want to read about happy, carefree times, according to a reviewer for the Library Journal: “Dan Cushman has written another book suitable for a homey, happy musical. If one wants to experience that warm-glow-in-the-heart, this is it.”

Martin Levin of the The New York Times Book Review found the book to his liking. Levin had reviewed Brothers in Kickapoo the previous year.

“Dan Cushman is one of the few light novelists who has a way with Americana so right that he makes it sing,” Levin said, adding this book, “another

¹⁶ Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

¹⁷Cushman, Grand, dust jacket.

of Mr. Cushman's happy celebrations of small-town life, brings the social activity of Red Wing, Mich., to a delightful sizzle." ¹⁸

Levin was not the only one impressed. In the spring of 1964, the National Association of Independent Schools selected the book as one of the 10 best adult books of 1963 for pre-college readers. Also the Doubleday Family Reading Club selected the novel for its list of top novels.

The National Association of Independent Schools no longer makes such a selection, but in 1963 Dan found it quite an honor. In fact, he hoped McGraw-Hill would ship him East to receive the prize. He remembered talking to Harold McGraw, the publisher, hoping he would make the offer.

"I waited and waited and waited for him to invite me back at his expense, but that wasn't his idea at all," Dan said. "He wanted to go over and collect it."

Finally Dan told McGraw what he wanted to hear.

"Do you got a mohair tuxedo?" Dan asked him.

"I know where I can get one," he replied.

"You put that mohair tuxedo on and you go over there and get that prize. You make a speech."

He said, "I'll do it!"

Dan thought himself foolish for not receiving his own prize.

"It'd done me a lot more good if I'd gone there. And I would have liked to have met a couple people there."

Dan remembered Mrs. Roosevelt was going to be there and a number of foreign writers he read about." ¹⁹

¹⁸Martin Levin, review of The Grand and the Glorious, In The New York Times Book Review [clipping supplied to author without date]: 30.

¹⁹Cushman, interview by author, 31 January 1998.

It is telling of Dan's financial position that he couldn't afford to do something he would have enjoyed. The downward turn that his career had taken a few years back was catching up to him.

In the early 1960s his daughter, Mimi, was headed to college. She remembered how the good times were coming to an end, explaining that while he might have been receiving recognition and sometimes awards for the books he was writing, none were making him that much money.

When Brothers in Kickapoo missed being chosen as a book of the month "that broke the book, really," Mimi said. "We then had some hard times."²⁰

Bob was well into high school, Steve was about ten and Matt was about eight. Mimi and Bob noted the unfairness of the economic downturn with regard to Steve and Matt.

"We got the feast and they got the famine," Mimi said.²¹

Matt, the youngest of the family, agreed.

"We were poor, real poor," said Matt, who resides with Dan in Great Falls. He and his brother Steve take care of Dan and the business of Stay Away, Joe Publishers.²²

But Dan's financial situation was not completely due to how little money Dan's books made, the older children said.

"What made it hard for Dan, I don't think it was so much the amount of money he was making," Bob said. "It was the fear of having long-term debt."

When they moved from their home at 1305 First Avenue North to the brick home on Fifteenth Street, Dan and Betty planned to sell the First Avenue

²⁰Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

²¹Ibid.

²²Matt Cushman, Dan Cushman's son, interview by author, 30 June 1998, Great Falls, Montana.

home and put that money toward their new home. But after they moved nobody expressed immediate interest in buying their old home and they ended up renting it for a time.

“That was a real headache,” Bob said.

Dan made a mistake, Bob said, when he set the mortgage payment on his brick house at \$400 or \$500 a month. At the time, in early 1959, he could have set the payment as low as \$50 a month, Bob said. But Dan wouldn’t go for the more affordable payment.

“The notion of having long-term debt in a mortgage was just aberrant to him,” Bob said. The decision took a toll on Dan.

“He constantly worried about (the mortgage payment),” Bob said. “But it was a Depression Era thing about long-term debt. I think (that payment) worried him more than it needed to,” Bob said.

It worried Betty, too.

“Things changed, like mom went to work,” Mimi said, adding that Betty “felt like she had to work because there wasn’t any money coming in. She wanted to be able to pay for the grocery bills at Safeway.”²³

Up until the early 1960s, Betty had occasionally earned money on the side, including when she worked as an editorial assistant on a medical journal put out by the Deaconess Hospital in Great Falls in 1962.²⁴ But when it became clear there was going to be no windfalls coming their way soon, she found a part-time job as the bookkeeper for the St. Thomas Children’s Home.

²³Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

²⁴Great Falls Tribune, 17 February 1963, 10.

“Dan didn’t like this,” Mimi said, “that she’d gone to work. He did not consider this respectable that his wife would have to work. But mother was much happier because she was kind of bored at home.”²⁵

Although Dan was experiencing some of the hardest times of his life, he remained optimistic.

“As long as you are selling books you can feel optimistic,” Mimi said, “because any day you might get a call that you’ve sold a book to Hollywood or something wonderful like that.”²⁶

In 1965, Dan’s mother passed away at 88. Always an avid reader, she no doubt influenced Dan’s decision to write and watched as he grew from a small boy writing letters to his older brother with stories enclosed and working as a correspondent struggling to spell words, to become a well-known novelist who sometimes shocked her with the things he’d write.²⁷

Dan never forgot the support she offered when he got into trouble with the businessmen of Big Sandy when he wrote the watertower story. He dedicated his second Comanche John novel, The Ripper from Rawhide, to her.

Rose had been a widow since 1930 and was known for a fiery personality. She was always ready to argue politics with Dan, she being an outspoken Republican and Dan a Democrat.²⁸

Although she resided in Big Sandy most of her life, working as a matron of the girls’ dormitory at Big Sandy High School for a time, she died in Great Falls, having spent the last four years of her life in a rest home there.

²⁵Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Giebel, interview by author, 26 May 1998.

²⁸Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

The 1960s also brought another end—Dan’s last wave of new pocketbooks. In 1963 Bantam published three of them, Opium Flower, Adventures in Laos, and Four From Texas. None of these were very good and perhaps were reflective of the friendship Dan had with his editor at Bantam, Marc Jaffe.

Opium Flower was a James Bond-type story about a man trying to prevent opium from making its way into the United States from Laos. It may have been an attempt by Dan to deliver a foreign detective story since that was what paperback publishers said they wanted. The title of the second sounds as though it was born of the same research.

Four From Texas was nothing more than a Western movie script Dan was paid to flesh out. It showed what Dan was willing to do to earn a buck. Bad movies often are made from good books, but this is an example of a bad book made from a bad movie.

Dan knew this and joked, “Oscar Levant said the show was so bad he tried to make a citizen’s arrest of the cashier.”

Dan’s explanation for taking the project was simple.

“To get the money,” Dan said. “Somebody said anyone who writes but doesn’t write for money is numbskull.”²⁹

These were the last of Dan’s books published by Bantam. Around the same time Jaffe moved to Random House, a hardcover publisher with no use for Jaffe’s connection to pocketbook writers. As soon as Jaffe left, Bantam sent Dan back the last Western he’d been working on. They’d already paid him for the book, but no longer wanted it.

²⁹Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

“So, I got their money and I got the book too,” Dan said.³⁰ It would be more than thirty years before he would find another publisher for the book.

Still, Dan wasn't entirely finished with pocketbooks. In 1964 and later in 1967 Dan somewhat redeemed himself with his final two, North Fork to Hell and The Long Riders. Both were published by Fawcett and described by one critic as “stylistically superior, if conventionally plotted.”³¹

Dan quit paying his dues to the Western Writers Association around this time. He'd been one of its founders roughly a decade before and had earned one of its Spur Awards. But Dan said he didn't like what it had become.

“It had turned into a bunch of fans, which are boring,” he said.

The last convention he attended was in Helena.

“When I got down there, I think there was two writers of the forty there,” Dan said.³²

Dan had watched the pocketbook market disappear and tried to find other ways to bring home an income.

One thing he knew was that a market still existed for Stay Away, Joe, now more than 10 years old, however local or sporadic it might be. Under his original contract with the Viking Press, if he asked them to reprint the book and they didn't, the rights reverted to him.

So Dan requested a reprint. The man said no, but he wasn't too excited about Viking losing its control over the book.³³

³⁰Ibid., 30 June 1998.

³¹Martin Kich, “Dan Cushman.” Chap. in Western Novelists (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 160.

³²Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

³³Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999.

“They weren’t going to give it to me,” Dan said.

But Dan kept calling him.

“I would call him up at dinner time and he got kind of tired of it,” Dan said. Dan decided to bluff him by saying he’d have it published whether Viking did it or not.

“I decided I’d just print it myself and you’ll sue me and it will be in all the papers and it will advertise the book,” Dan told the man. “Did you ever think of that?”

“I struck him dumb,” Dan said. “He saw the possibility of that, that I would make Viking Press look like a bunch of tramps.”³⁴

The man must have realized the book wasn’t worth any trouble Dan might cause. In reality, Viking couldn’t make much money from it anymore.

By 1965, four publishers had printed the book, three times as a pocketbook. But it was that last of the hardcover editions printed by the Book-of-the-month Club that helped Dan get the book from Viking.³⁵

“What saved me was the Book-of-the-month Club overprinting it,” Dan said.

He guessed they overprinted by about 30,000. Whatever the number, the club then sold the surplus to a book buyer, and that person ended up selling the book for a cut-rate price, 75 cents a piece.

“(Viking’s) market had gone. They weren’t making a penny on the book,” Dan said. “So anyway, they gave it back to me.”³⁶

With the rights to the book, Dan became a publisher himself and named his business Stay Away, Joe Publishers.

³⁴Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

³⁵Ibid.; Great Falls Tribune, 30 April 1965.

³⁶Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998; Ibid, 25 January 1998.

The first time Dan published the book he used the same outfit Viking had, Colonial Press. He changed the book's cover, though. That shipment of books arrived in the spring of 1965. They were tough to read.

"The plates were worn out from reprinting it for the Book-of-the-month Club. They were awful," Dan said. "I got about 4,000 copies. God knows I'm glad I didn't get more because they were terrible. I was ashamed to sell them."³⁷

That was the only work Colonial Press did for Dan. He had another set of plates made from a mint copy of a first edition and had another printing place, the Edward Brothers in Ann Arbor, print the book from then on.

Dan's belief that the book was worth the trouble proved true.

"It sold to beat hell," Dan said. "It sold in South Dakota and Montana."

He said the book's popularity in these states is due to their Indian reservations.

"Well, one thing happened to me. Luck was on my side," he explained. "Somebody had an Indian educational seminar in Dillon. It was paid for by the U.S. Government. They let me know it was paid for by the U.S. Government and it wasn't going to cost them a cent.

"In other words, if ever there was an invitation to sell to a person without a discount, that was it. So I sold them 500 copies of the book, and they put a copy of that in everybody's kit. They were from all over Canada and as far as the Rio Grande. They were from all over America and they all went home with a copy of Stay Away, Joe. Everything worked for me. Then I got orders from schools."³⁸

In the years to come, Dan would arrange for another run of the book whenever his supply got low. In addition to selling them out of his home, he

³⁷Ibid., 25 January 1998.

³⁸Ibid.

always kept the local bookstores in stock and sometimes distributed copies around the state.

“I’d get enough to last me a couple years,” Dan said, but he was vague as to what this number was.³⁹

With Stay Away, Joe Publishers, Dan soon learned everything he could about publishing books.

“He enjoyed doing it,” Bob recalled,” and he jumped into the business, read all the appropriate texts and added the mechanics of publishing to the list of topics he would happily talk about.”⁴⁰

Stay Away Joe Publishers would also become the outlet for some of Dan’s other books, some that were previously published and others that were new material targeted at Montana readers.

³⁹Ibid., 30 June 1998. In one interview Dan said this number was somewhere between from 5,000 to 8,000.

⁴⁰Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999.

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT NORTH TRAIL AND OTHER NONFICTION

Composition is, for the most part, an effort of slow diligence and steady perseverance, to which the mind is dragged by necessity to resolution.

—Samuel Johnson.

While he scrambled during this time to make a buck, Dan also was finishing his history book The Great North Trail. This book didn't come easy, and before Dan was done, he and Bud Guthrie had a run-in.

"I got into a brouhaha with Bud over the thing," Dan said. "But it turned out all right."

Although Dan originally agreed to write one volume on the trail, McGraw-Hill later thought Dan should do two volumes, one of general interest and the other with a geological focus.

"Now when I got through, (the editors) didn't like what I had coming, and (Bud) suggested that I get Dorothy Johnson to collaborate with me."

Johnson was another successful Montana author who'd written short stories that were later adapted into movies such as The Hanging Tree.

"Not only won't I do it, if you try it, I'll get my attorney," Dan told Guthrie.

"That was just about my last conversation with Bud, though I (continued) to get letters from him. We ended friendly enough."¹

¹Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

Johnson later picked up Norman Fox's project and wrote The Bloody Bozeman, published by McGraw-Hill in 1971.

Dan rewrote the two volumes and combined them. He admitted the project was much better once it was all in one volume.²

In 1966, McGraw-Hill published Dan's The Great North Trail: America's Route of the Ages. His was the eighth volume of the "American Trails Series."

The book's summary read:

Montanan Dan Cushman tells the story of the Great North Trail with excitement and love. He sets the scene by giving—in thorough and exciting detail—the geological explanation for the birth of the Trail, its mountains and valleys; and briskly covering thousands of years of anthropology.

Next, Mr. Cushman embarks along the Trail with the fabulous Spaniard, Cabeza de Vaca, and Coronado's 1540 expedition that swept across the Rio del Fuerte, along the Yaqui and Sonora rivers to Zuni and Kansas. Mr. Cushman also recounts the French and English fur trade—a story full of silent men tracking the beaver through virgin forests—a story idyllic in its "noble savagery" and barbaric in its result, since it led to some of the ghastliest of Indian wars, those involving the Blackfeet.

With the nineteenth century the Great North Trail saga becomes one of gold and cattle—an epic of red-eyed greed and horny-handed brutality—that Mr. Cushman spins into memorable yarn (of the type he heard out in Montana as a boy). Last Chance Gulch springs to life with its gold dust, bawdy houses, saloons, and pioneering folk....Billy the Kid and Henry Plummer; Print Olive the toughest cattleman ever to come up the trail; the Blood Chief Calf Shirt, the booziest Indian of all; "Cattle Kate," the first woman ever lynched...; the participants of the Johnson County War—all reassume their shooting places on the stage. Mr. Cushman writes with a marvelous feel for the quirks of history: he speaks of the delicacy called "Son-of-a-bitch-in-a-sack"; of Mr. Laumeister's extraordinary camels...; of how Fort McKenzie was lost for the sake of a pig. And he brings his pungent story down into our own century with the great Klondike Gold Rush that crested in 1898 and spilled into the 1900's; the whiskey runners of Prohibition; and finally and much more soberly, the Alcan Highway.³

²Ibid.

³Cushman, North Trail, dust jacket.

This summary brings to mind Dan's description of Joe Howard's approach to High, Wide and Handsome, "a snatch of history here and a snatch of history there, and it was the most interesting thing he could put together."⁴

Dan respected Howard for a lot of reasons, and I think he must have had Howard's technique of telling history in mind when he decided how to write about the Great North Trail. Unfortunately, Dan couldn't pull it off as Howard did. While Dan's book is a good read, it wasn't successful as Howard's was.

The basic parameters of the book—telling the 200 million-year history of nearly half of the North American continent within 400 pages—makes it not surprising that Dan couldn't pull it off. Such a history would be hard for any writer, and this was Dan's first book of history.

Dan's tendency to deviate from the book's purpose in order to provide interesting anecdotes cost the book. This is especially true in the last third of the book when Dan offers tidbits that he appeared to glean from conversations he'd had with old-timers.

One such example is his description of the businesses that greeted the last wave of homesteaders coming to file on the remaining unsettled portions of the Great North Trail. Here Dan borrows anecdotes from his hometown:

(A) proprietor of the historic old Spokane Hotel in Big Sandy, hired a roustabout to meet all trains with a luggage cart, instructing him to call out "Spokane Hotel, best hotel in the city, no place for a lady." Settlers found other establishments typically Western. Mrs. O.C. Tingley on entering the family saloon and finding no bartender, no money in the till, and all the chairs filled with nonspending sodbusters waiting to "get landed," attempted to clear the place by firing three times through the floor with a .45-caliber Colt pistol, and received an unexpected dividend when the cellar trapdoor flew open, and the pale and shaken bartender pushed a sack of money into her hands, saying it had been her husband's idea and not his own to empty the till and hide out each time he observed her approach.⁵

⁴Cushman, interview by author, 22 February 1998.

⁵Cushman, North Trail, 354.

Some of the gems Dan couldn't pass up weren't from Montana. One tale describes Alaska during the gold rush days. Dan tells of "Soapy Smith's telegraph company in Skagway, which had no wire strung but nevertheless accepted messages to anywhere on earth for a basic \$5, and always had an answer back, collect, within an hour."⁶

These humorous tales, however, are not representative of the majority of the book. Dan does provide hard-hitting and useful history. But even his history leaves the reader wondering if the book's title isn't a misnomer. A more accurate title for the book might have been the "Great North Trails" or the "Great Migration Route." Dan never really delivers a Great North Trail with a beginning, middle and end. Instead, he offers up a series of independent trails that, when pulled together can be loosely considered one big trail.

There is a leap a reader has to make with Dan's book, a leap he would have done well to admit in the beginning.

This is not to say the book wasn't successful. As reviews came out it was clear some critics liked Dan's style. A review in Best Sellers, by G.E. Grauel, said Dan's book was a great addition to the series:

The American Trails Series has become...one of the most distinguished collections of Americana in recent publishing history. Dan Cushman, moreover, by reason of boyhood origins, schooling...training as a journalist and geologist, and fictional reporting of the Western locale...stands in relation to the Northwest as Frank Dobie did to the Southwest. Marriage was inevitable and the offspring is hard to beat for authenticity of local color, anecdotal variety and general reading interest.... The book improves as it reports the [Trail] in the era of the white man.... Fully half of the book goes to roughly [the] last 150 years, and the whole epic comes grippingly to life.... One reaches the end with a measure of regret at both the closing of the story and the loss of an era.⁷

⁶Ibid., 336.

⁷G. E. Grauel, review of The Great North Trail, In Best Seller List 26 (1 April 1966): 3.

Another review, by R. H. Dillon for the Library Journal, was laudatory in a similar way with the exception of noting one problem:

How in the world did Dan Cushman establish control over so many good, and different, yarns? The only thing wrong with this interesting and, at times fascinating, volume is its title. Or, better, its frame of reference. For there just isn't any Great North Trail, at least not since American Indians stopped trudging it to Mexico from the Bering Straits. Wherever he can, Mr. Cushman has tied together north and south trending trails into this great highway in time. The result is an embarrassment of riches, in terms of stories.... His best, perhaps, is of the bitter rivalry of the first fossil hunters out West. Recommended for all Western Americana collections.⁸

But one reviewer for Choice tore not only into Dan's style, but also his research techniques:

[The author] blends geology and gunmen, explorers and Eskimos, cattle barons and claim jumpers, and politics and paleontology as if they were all equally significant. Whatever element of novelty exists in this approach is lost through factual error and the tendency to sacrifice the thesis for humor or dramatic episode. Cleverly written from secondary sources and from "Sunday supplement histories," the book belongs in libraries that attempt to collect all Western Americana or can indulge the widest tastes of their readers.⁹

And another review in Americana Historical Review noted that "the book's theme is conceptually unsound" since "historically there was no 'great north trail,'" and went on to say the book is of little use to "any responsible historian" due to Dan's disregard for the basic practices in documentation.¹⁰

Regardless of the criticism of the book, one positive, unofficial review seemed to make up for it, pleasing Dan more than all else.

⁸R.H. Dillon, review of The Great North Trail, In Library Journal 90 (1 November 1965): 4774.

⁹Review of The Great North Trail, In Choice 3 (October 1966): 710.

¹⁰M. B. Sherwood, review of The Great North Trail, In American Historical Review 72 (Oct. 1966): 302.

“I knew somebody had been buying the book down at the Book and Gift Shop (in Great Falls) in quite flattering numbers,” Dan said. “He’d buy eight or ten (at a time), and they were expensive.”

Some time later, Dan learned that the head of Montana’s Geological Survey had been buying the book, forking over almost \$8 a piece.

“He said he’d been there for twenty years and that was the best book about Montana Geology that he’d read,” Dan said.¹¹

Even though Dan considers the book some of his best work, at the time it hit bookstores he did not try to hide his distaste for the restraints of nonfiction. He told the Great Falls Tribune that he’d been working on the book “off and on” for the past six years, and he described it as “drudgery.”

He predicted it would be his last major work outside the field of fiction.¹²

Three years later the Great Falls Tribune reported the book had sold 90,000 copies.¹³

However disenchanted Dan was with the direction Great Falls was taking in the late 1950s, the feelings increased in the 1960s with his view becoming more global.

It is evident at the end of the Great North Trail where he describes modern man at the current rate and direction, doomed to destruction. The book’s final sentences read:

¹¹Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

¹²Great Falls Tribune, 20 March 1966, 20.

¹³*Ibid.*, 2 February 1969, 17.

...Because (our modern age) is ultimately suicidal, it bids to be of shorter duration than those based on geology. A future paleontological intelligence, should one exist, would no doubt discover the biological revolution of the Age of Man and correlate it with the radioactive and chlorinated residues of the rocks. Geologists have trouble dating the systems of geology of one continent with those of another. The poison blanket (pollution due to modern living), thin and uniform throughout all the world, should be invaluable for dating every cape, mountain, plain and ocean deep to this moment in time.¹⁴

But Dan hadn't finished trying to enlighten his fellow man in the dangers provided by parts of modernity. He made at least one more effort the winter following the Great North Trail's release, when he took up a local pollution issue and wrote an article for the Los Angeles Times WEST Magazine.

Under the headline "...and now, Blight in the Big Sky," Dan wrote of the recent developments on a controversial defluorination phosphate plant in Deer Lodge Valley.

Dan said the private plant manufactured a phosphate additive for stock feed and thanks to his training as a geologist, he told exactly how it was manufactured and the problems arising from the process.

The plant was built in Deer Lodge Valley, Dan said, after Butte residents ran it out of their backyard. Butte, a town known to have tolerated an arsenic haze in its old days, couldn't handle the plant's pollution, Dan said.

The Deer Lodge Valley, just around the corner from Butte, was equally as rich in phosphate. So, after the plant made promises to do everything it could to minimize its pollution, the Deer Lodge Valley civic leaders, "seeking industrial development to create new jobs and broaden the base of taxation," according to Dan, welcomed the plant to their community with its operation starting in 1963.

¹⁴Cushman, North Trail, 368.

But little time passed before fumes carrying highly poisonous fluoride permeated the valley and its residents, specifically the town of Garrison, realized why Butte didn't want the plant. Dan wrote:

On August 12, 1963, Garrison, population 100, found itself inundated by dust and fumes. Eyes burned and asthmatic symptoms were everywhere. Even auto finishes suffered. School started, and the classes found themselves driven to temporary quarters on the side of the building farthest from the new industry. The dairy farmer who had sold land to the plant found his cows bleary and drying up. Slowly the fumes spread to wider areas.....¹⁵

At the time of Dan's article in the winter of 1967, the town of Garrison, despite attempts to shut down the plant, still suffered the pollution. They hoped, Dan said, that a recent change in governors might lead to tougher pollution laws, which would bring an end to the phosphate plant.

This type of industrial development was what had worried Dan for at least the last eight years. Toward the end of the article he again warned that new industry was not the answer to Montana's problems.

Newspapers, civic clubs, the Montana Power Co., and others have long sought industry for Montana, but remoteness, tough freight rates and fixed cost of being the coldest state outside of Alaska have frustrated them. "New Industry" for Montana has been said over and over until it has been accepted as an absolute of desirability, just as communism is an absolute evil. It has become a litany of sorts wherein the words "new industry" requires the orthodox response: "to create new jobs and broaden the tax base."

Statistics indicate industry does not lower taxes but increases them as workers come in from the outside; but this God-is-dead sort of talk doesn't get far with the faithful. A more realistic progress might be achieved by striving for increased land yields....¹⁶

Deer Lodge Valley's real wealth is its grass, Dan said, and he pointed out that tourism, Montana's third most profitable industry at the time, depended on Montana's clean air and water.

¹⁵Dan Cushman, "...and now, Blight in the Big Sky," Los Angeles Times West Magazine, 16 April 1967, 18.

¹⁶Ibid., 21.

Whether or not he knew this would be his last public attempt at discouraging further development of “stench-belching” plants under the Big Sky, there was a hint of resignation in Dan’s voice as he concluded the article, noting eastern Montana, “undismayed by the land barbarisms wreaked elsewhere,” will soon be home to strip mining of coal.

And the last paragraph of the article was not unlike that of Dan’s Trail book. He used dark and unsettling sarcasm to show his contempt for those calling for new industry at any price:

Yes, incredible as it may seem to those living under the oily veil of Los Angeles, or the Staten Islanders in that foul yellow drift from New Jersey, some of us up here in the Big Sky Country are envious. Even with humans multiplying so rapidly as to raise the very isotherms of the globe with the heat of their bodies, there are quite a number of us in the open lands who despair at being left out of it. We want to belong. The way things have been going we feel inferior and bush league.¹⁷

The contempt in these lines might be lost on a reader who does not realize that the thing Dan despised most after pollution was a joiner.

While Dan appears to have eased up on social commentary after the article, he continued in the late 1960s to find ways to sell his writing. A few months after the article ran, Dan self-published his second book, Dan Cushman’s Cow-Country Cookbook.

This remains a cookbook like no other. The back cover reads: “This is a book of authentic pioneer Western recipes. Nothing has been altered to fit the modern conveniences. No short cuts, no substitutions, no allowance for the faint of heart.”

¹⁷Ibid.

Here's part of one recipe that would seem simple by its title, but the ingredient list alone would stagger any modern-day cook looking to prepare dinner for the family:

BEEF BARBECUE

Whole steer
2 pounds salt

1/2 pound pepper
2 pounds lard

As packers cut steers down the backbone into "sides" the steer will have to be specially handled and hung in one piece. Save the hide but have the hair removed. When the steer has been properly aged, mount whole on a steel bar or pipe which will serve as a spit. The spit should be at least twice as long as the animal. The steer should be laid on its back and the spit placed down the abdominal cavity. Take time to find the center of balance. If it is mounted so one side is thirty or forty pounds heavier than the other, controlling it during the turning and roasting will be difficult.¹⁸

The recipe continues for almost another four pages.

Not all of the cookbook's recipes are this gargantuan or primitive. The historical background Dan provides throughout the book's 159 pages makes it useful to a student of history. And Dan intended it that way. When he started putting it together some seven years before, he planned to produce a "reliable source of Americana."¹⁹

Some portions of the book Dan collected when he was a correspondent for the Great Falls Tribune in the form of a feature piece that never ran. Here and there throughout the book, a Big Sandy old-timer makes an appearance.

Dan gleaned other parts of the book from his research on the Trail book. Dan had searched for information in libraries from Texas to Canada. It was in

¹⁸Dan Cushman's Cow Country Cook Book (Great Falls, Mont.: Stay Away Joe, Publishers, 1967), 62.

¹⁹Great Falls Tribune, 7 June 1967, 7.

Canada that he found one particular gold mine, a cookbook the Hudson Bay Company gave its fur hunters as they trudged off into the wilderness.²⁰

As much as this book is telling of the frontier and pioneers, it is also evidence of Dan again milking his research for all it was worth. The cookbook's dust jacket describes the early day cook as "MASTERS OF THE BARBECUE— Not by choice but necessity."

That last phrase also applied to Dan at the time. It was probably not by choice but necessity that he'd find as many ways as possible to make money off his research. And as Dan wouldn't have a new book published for another five years (even then it would be self-published) his writing opportunities were indeed as limited as a pioneer's kitchen.

²⁰Ibid.; Cushman, interview by author, 3 March 1999.

CHAPTER XII

BOOK REVIEWING, ELVIS, AND SELF-PUBLISHING

Every author does not write for every reader....
—Samuel Johnson.

Dan had secured himself a small, supplemental income when he started publishing and selling Stay Away, Joe. He also had some money coming in from other reprints. All of his hardcover novels, with the exception of The Grand and the Glorious, were released as paperbacks, and many of his pocketbooks saw a second printing and some a third or more.

Whatever it amounted to, it apparently wasn't enough to support his family. In 1967 Mimi and Bob were plenty old enough to fend for themselves, but Dan and Betty still had to care for Steve and Matt, both just entering their teenage years.

Fortunately, Dan had established himself as a book reviewer for the The New York Times. He didn't remember exactly how he hooked up with the paper. He said maybe it was something he drummed up during his time in New York City. He does remember it was a godsend.

"They fed me for about, close as I can figure, twelve to thirteen years when I was without a market," Dan said. "I would write a review a week for them."

Dan had learned from Joe Howard more than twenty years before that the The New York Times paid their reviewers better than other review mediums did.¹

The paper paid Dan \$110 per review, sometimes a little more. Now and then Dan did a review for another publication but the payment he received always disappointed him.

“I reviewed one book for the Saturday Review,” he said. “They paid me \$35 for it. The New York Times would have paid me \$120.”

At first the paper sent him children’s books to review, but when there wasn’t enough of those to keep him busy, they sent him books regarding the West. After a while he was reviewing all kinds of books, he said.

Dan found reviewing to be a fine way to make a living. His reviews were printed in the daily edition of the paper in the middle of the week, he said, if they weren’t part of a special edition.

“I liked reviewing,” he said. “I tried to give them their money’s worth.”

He never sugarcoated his criticism, he said, and wouldn’t review a book he’d read with a bias. When the paper sent him a Louis L’Amour Western, Dan refused to review it, saying, “No. He’s put me out of business.”²

L’Amour was one of the few Western writers who never lost his market. Dan took it personally that Bantam hadn’t cut L’Amour loose like they had him.

With that exception, Dan enjoyed reading and reviewing books about the West. His keen eye for detail and cache of reference books enabled him to catch errors other reviews might have missed. One particular anachronism he recognized in 1967, he never forgot.

¹Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

²Ibid.

“This poor devil left himself wide open, and it was a pretty good book too,” Dan said.³

The book, Faces of the Frontier, by Lorence F. Bjorkland, was targeted at readers from 9 to 12 years old. Dan’s review read:

This is a handsome, generous book, sort of an album of the early West. Featured are 54 typical Western types—the Indian, the cowboy, the train robber, etc—with descriptions of each. It was just my rotten luck, however, to open the book to page 72, where the Grader is described as a big red-faced Irishman driving a team of bay Percherons hitched to a fresno scraper, pushing through the Union Pacific. Now I happen to know that the Union Pacific was completed in 1869, while the fresno scraper was first put on the market by Fresno Agricultural Works, Fresno Calif., in 1882; while a quick glance at Phil Strong’s “Horses and Americans” confirmed my hunch that the Percheron was a mighty fancy horse for those parts and times, having indeed arrived as far west as Iowa only in the early 1870s. Hence it’s not quite splitting hairs to say the research wasn’t all it should be. But forgetting our grader and leafing on, one is struck by the fact that these are not so much the characters of the Old West, Mr. Bjorkland is, however, a first-rate illustrator. The drawings are all that could be desired.⁴

Dan’s writing style in his reviews is not unlike that found in his Kaufman ads many years before. His voice is disarmingly friendly, a little on the folksy side (“gosh all whillakers, fellows, you don’t know what to expect”), and consistently authoritative (“contains little hackneyed material”), especially on the books about the West.⁵

Although he felt at home reviewing Western books, Dan recalled how reviewing children’s books made him realize their value.

³Ibid., 30 June 1998.

⁴Dan Cushman, review of Faces of the Frontier, by Lorence F. Bjorklund, In The New York Times Book Review (5 November 1967), Sec VII Part 2, [page number not available].

⁵Dan Cushman, review of The Wind Blew Free: Tales of Young Westerners, by Gene Jones, In The New York Times Book Review (7 May 1967), Sec VII Part 2, [page number not available].

“Children’s books are very important to bookstores,” he said. “And a person should never forget one strange thing: Children’s books are not written for children; they’re written for parents who buy for children.”

“I learned that when there was a book called “Rascal,” about a tame raccoon, and it was tremendously popular. I (went) down to the bookstore and (the book seller said) ‘Oh, it’s great, just selling as fast as we can get them in.’ I went to the library, talked to the librarian in the children’s area. I said, ‘What about Rascal?’”

“Oh, no.” she said. “We have a couple copies and they go out once in a while, but they’re never read.”

“It was written for parents,” Dan concluded.

One thing Dan especially enjoyed about reviewing was replying to an author’s complaint about a review. The paper ran the complaint and the reviewer’s reply in the same column, with the reviewer’s reply last.

“(A writer) was very foolish to ever complain about a review because the review medium, like the The New York Times or whatever it is, doesn’t want him to win,” Dan said. “They want their reviewer to win.”

He described the way he handled complaints.

“What you do is (say), I agree with him there, I understand how he feels, your heart just goes out to him because you know how he feels, you’ve had people do this to you,” Dan said with great compassion in his voice. “But on the other hand...then you just take his pants off!”

“And there’s nothing he can do about it. Don’t kid yourself that the review medium wants him to win,” Dan reiterated. “They want (the reviewer) to win.”⁶

⁶Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

“If you are going to answer (an author’s complaint) you always want to be funny because you’ve got an angry man and a funny man, and the angry man always looks bad.”

Hence, Dan advised authors to think it over before complaining about a review.

“Never, never, NEVER, angrily attack what is a pretty good review,” he said.⁷

As Dan settled in to the quiet life of reviewing, Stay Away, Joe took center stage one last time. MGM had been trying to write a script for its movie for eight years. Writing this script proved as hard as adapting it to Broadway. But this time Dan wasn’t involved.

Roughly a year before the movie was released, Dan commented on MGM’s struggles.

“It’s defeated everyone,” he said. “They think it’s a funny book. I think now the way to do it would be to handle it as a tragedy and let the laughs come where they may.”⁸

As it turned out, MGM took the book in an entirely different direction. MGM producers decided to make Elvis Presley the star of the show as the incorrigible Joe whose last name became Lightcloud. If the script writers ever had any intention of preserving Dan’s story, they forgot about it once Elvis appeared on the set. From that point on, questions such as how to explain an Indian with a French accent no longer existed. It became an Elvis-fest.

⁷Ibid., 30 June 1998.

⁸Great Falls Tribune, 7 June 1967, 7.

The ads for the movie read: “Elvis goes West...and the West goes wild (and that’s no Sitting Bull!).”⁹

“All (the movie) did was zero in on Joe, not leave him for the entire thing,” Dan said. “That was (their) way of settling it.”¹⁰

Variety predicted it would be Elvis’s biggest money maker ever.

In hindsight, it was clear the movie was doomed from the moment Elvis became Joe. Just as the scriptwriters had struggled with Dan’s book, Elvis struggled as an actor. Although he had largely defined the 1950s, he was an anachronism in the 1960s. But Elvis was hopeful with the prospect of portraying Joe Lightcloud. He saw the character as “a wheeler-dealer who’s always promoting something,” and an anti-hero, just the role he needed to become more 60s-like.

So, after the movie producers banked on Elvis and Elvis banked on them, all were disappointed.¹¹

When the movie came out, reviewers characterized it as little more than a series of fistfights. Dan perhaps first gained knowledge of what the movie was like in a letter to the Great Falls Tribune. A former Great Falls woman who’d moved to Glendale, Calif., attended a preview of the movie and came out with mixed emotions—”shame, embarrassment and anger.”

She said:

When I first read Dan Cushman’s book, I found it full of humor, gentle but hilarious. I felt it close to my heart because I had grown up in that country.

But this movie! I slunk down in my seat after the first opening scene....

⁹Peter Harry Brown and Pat H. Broeske, Down at the End of Lonely Street: The Life and Death of Elvis Presley (New York: Dutton, 1997), 452.

¹⁰Cushman, interview by author, 25 January 1998.

¹¹Brown and Broeske, Lonely Street, 326.

How Mr. Cushman feels about the movie I don't know, but he could not have had much to say about the screen play.¹²

A friend who'd seen it in Denver warned Dan, "it will only cause you pain." But Dan did not appear all that bothered by the reports that the movie was a flop, and when a reporter for the Great Falls Tribune, asked how he felt about it, he was philosophical.

"No book can be transferred to the screen and remain the same. They are two different mediums," Dan said, adding that anyone who goes to a movie to look for the book is a damned fool.

"The only reason I sold the story for the movie was for money. You know—"Render unto Caesar...? Well, this is Caesar's," Dan said.

"What the hell!" he continued. "It'll probably turn out to be a movie kin to those TV things everybody's watching—'Beverly Hillbillies,' 'Petticoat Junction,' 'Greenacres'—and I might come up smelling like a rose. If not, maybe I can find a friendly badger hole down along the Marias (River)."¹³

Northeast of the Marias, at Rocky Boy, a lot of folks were disappointed with Elvis, not to mention the fact that the movie was filmed in the Southwest.

Alan Sorensen, a Havre Daily News editor and reporter who covers the Rocky Boy's Reservation, remembers his father took him to see the movie the first night it came to Havre, Montana, which is about twenty miles from the reservation.

I was a young teenager at the time. The Havre Theater was full of Indians from Rocky Boy and the surrounding area. I didn't see any of my (Havre) friends from school. Dad and I sat in the middle of a row about two-thirds of the way back from the screen.

When the show started and they showed the cattle drive at the junction in the road and the mountains in the background, I thought for sure they were at the Laredo turnoff to Rocky Boy. The next thing we knew, the

¹²Great Falls Tribune, 24 April 1968, 6.

¹³*Ibid.*, 25 April 1968, 24.

characters were all wearing turquoise and were in Phoenix, Ariz. There was a moment of silence and then the place erupted in pandemonium. Everyone was throwing popcorn and candy at the screen and yelling. My dad, who never seemed to lose his temper, became just as hostile toward the screen as everyone else. But after the brief blow up, most of the people stayed and watched the rest of the show.

I seem to recall, though, that every time Elvis tried to sing, a chorus of boos went up until the end of the song.

Everyone seemed to have a good time showing their displeasure. We were not an angry crowd. And most of those who stayed, I think, left the theater smiling. We seemed to share a renewed sense of belonging, even if it was to something as fleeting as a movie theater crowd that shared a single dislike of a picture.¹⁴

Regardless that the movie was disappointing to many, Elvis did help Dan sell more Stay Away, Joe books. Bantam issued another paperback edition that coincided with the movie's release, relieving Dan of any pressure to publish his own editions of the book for a while.

Dan liked to recall that sudden run on paperbacks in the following years by saying, "By Golly, Elvis sold books!"¹⁵

Although Dan had now seen Stay Away, Joe make it to Broadway and the big screen, the book had not yet run its full course. Since the book was first published, it had become a cult icon. A wide array of authors, both of nonfiction and fiction, would offhandedly mention the book over the next thirty years. Thanks to their remarks, interest in the book continued and so did requests for it.

In 1969, Sioux Indian Vine Deloria, Jr., at the time an Indian activist and author, referred to Stay Away, Joe in his book Custer Died For Your Sins: an Indian Manifesto, which became a bestseller.

Deloria had known of the book since its first publication and had found that, as he put it, "every Indian that I was associated with seemed to know it. I

¹⁴ Alan Sorensen, Havre Daily News editor and reporter, email to author, 6 May 2001.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9 June 1994, 1A.

have heard frequent references by Indians to incidents in the book and so have assumed that it is a classic at least to Indians.”¹⁶

Deloria said the book offered “a humorous but accurate idea of the problems caused by the intersection of two ways of life.”

In his manifesto, Deloria described the problems modern-day Indians face, what the problems resulted from, and what the future held for Indians and Indian affairs. While doing all this, Deloria pointed readers to Stay Away, Joe for a better understanding of modern reservation life. Deloria said the book showed “the intangible sense of reality that pervades the Indian people.”¹⁷

Dan appreciated Deloria’s assessment of his book, and thereafter included some of his words on the dust jacket of Stay Away, Joe.

The late 1960s brought changes to Dan’s life that subsequently caused him to develop a new routine that he would maintain for roughly the next fifteen years.

In 1968 Dan, now nearing 60, lost his friend Msgr. Donovan—priest, educator, author, civic worker and weightlifter. Msgr. Donovan died unexpectedly at a luncheon when he suffered a heart attack. He was 59. Dan often had stopped and visited with Donovan on his daily walks, just as he had with Norman Fox.

No longer having multiple friends to visit, Dan’s social world narrowed to one close friend, Jim Bulger, the physician. Dan still saw a great deal of Bulger and spent quite a bit of time at his house, just a few blocks from his own.

¹⁶Peter G. Beidler, “The Popularity of Dan Cushman’s Stay Away, Joe Among American Indians,” Arizona Quarterly, 33 (1977): 217.

¹⁷Vine Deloria, Jr., Custer Died for Your Sins, (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 23.

As Dan's friends became fewer, the distance he covered on his walks increased. Dan still walked downtown and stopped in at the library. But now he struck off earlier in the day, becoming a daily sight at the post office where he'd check the mailbox of Stay Away, Joe Publishers and sometimes mail books. After going downtown, Dan would head east on the railroad tracks that followed the Missouri River (now a developed walkway known as the River's Edge Trail). He'd often walk to Giant Springs State Park, sometimes going all the way to Rainbow Dam, making his jaunt upwards of eight miles.

Bob said Dan was always on the lookout for different things as he walked.

"He'd collect stray golf balls around the municipal golf course, find scrap metal he would later go out and salvage with his truck, photograph wild flowers and dig mushrooms only he would eat," Bob recalled.¹⁸

If anyone thought Dan was finished as an author with the advent of the 1970s, it wasn't him. He was far from giving up on his career. When asked what he was doing in his basement writing office, Dan said that in addition to his book reviews, he was writing a book about mining in Montana and the Copper Kings of Butte.

In an interview with a Great Falls Tribune reporter around this time, Dan pointed out that very few people made their living like he did—solely from writing.

Dan said that of the 2,600 members of the Authors League—practically all of the country's freelance writers at the time—less than fifty earned a major portion of their income writing fiction and nonfiction. And of those fifty, only twenty made a very good living.

¹⁸Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999.

It had become common for authors to hold day jobs such as a university positions, and this fact was lowering the value of writing, Dan said.

“The contracts offered today are for less than when I started to write,” he said. “They are much worse.”

It was clear that Dan was proud that, even with his markets dwindling, he hadn't sold out. He likely could have found a position at the college in Great Falls. At the same time, he admitted that he depended a great deal on reprints of his old books, and described this as his “back log.”

“It's like an insurance man, who writes renewals on his policies,” Dan explained. “These reprints are my renewals.”¹⁹

In 1972, Dan restocked his supply of Stay Away, Joe books like never before. He got hold of the surplus Bantam put out four years earlier. They could be his, he was told, if he paid the shipping freight. He didn't know how many were left but was more than a little surprised when 24 skids showed up.

The cache, which took up a good portion of his garage, lasted years. He said he started selling them for 35 cents, but fetched \$1.25 for them before the supply ran out.²⁰

Dan's current literary agent, Jon Tuska, looks back at these years of Dan's career and shakes his head. He credits Dan's situation to a combination of factors—the publishing industry becoming cool to the Western and some unfortunate book deals.

Changing publishers had allowed Dan to always take his writing in a new direction, never having to, as he put it, “chew my own gum twice.”²¹

¹⁹Great Falls Tribune, 7 January 1968, tab 2.

²⁰Cushman, interview by author, 3 March 1999; Great Falls Tribune, 9 June 1994, 1A.

²¹Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

But Tuska pointed out that it made tenuous the relationships Dan had with his publishers. Perhaps if Dan had been more loyal, he wouldn't have been cut loose so easily and left to his own devices, Tuska said. Then perhaps Dan's production, especially of Westerns, wouldn't have declined so drastically.

"Because he wasn't being encouraged, he stopped," Tuska said.

And maybe he wouldn't have had to start publishing his own books.

"What else could he do?" Tuska said. "It was pathetic."²²

Undoubtedly he would have preferred not having to publish his own books, but it wasn't necessarily an onus for Dan. He believed in himself as an author.

"He needed the money and the market was there," Bob recalled. "But if (his friend) Jim Bulger had printed his own books, he would have sneered."²³

In 1973, after a long period of drought, Dan self-published the book he'd mentioned years before. Montana—The Gold Frontier was the culmination of twenty-five years of research, Dan said. He hoped weekend prospectors would find useful the book filled with information about rocks and minerals. But it is more than an amateur's guide.

One account of the book read: "Take a selection of miners, record their battles against geography, Indians, secessionists-minded Mormons, the weather and one another, throw in a pinch of geology and a touch of humor and you have the ingredients of Dan Cushman's new book...."²⁴

Dan was proud that he wrote, edited and published this work, calling it "his own book." Betty's role was especially important in this book, as she not only

²²Tuska, interview by author, June 1998.

²³Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999.

²⁴Great Falls Tribune, 18 November 1973, 10.

helped edit it, but also calculated each line of the book using an early-day computer.

“It was a very involved operation,” Bob said.²⁵

Dan distributed Montana—The Gold Frontier around the state, and said the Dillon area especially liked the book. A bookstore there bought a couple hundred copies of the book.

“Maybe it wasn’t as good as I thought,” Dan said, “but it sold to beat hell.”²⁶

Dan followed with another self-published book two years later. It was a memoir of sorts. Plenty of Room and Air told of his family during the teens when they lived in Box Elder, Zurich and Havre.

The book is a collection of stories—likely the best Dan could remember from ages 2 to 10—comprising, as Dan described it, a “fast-moving, funny, incident rich account of the homestead days in Montana.”²⁷

Among the subjects in the 260-page book are his family, horse trading and prohibition. And similar to The Grand and the Glorious, he tells about the effect World War I had on small Montana communities. The Cushmans lived in the Hi-Line town of Zurich alongside the Great Northern Railroad when the pressures of the war began to take a toll:

It was just a regular peaceful, quiet day, not a thing stirring. If a dog barked away out past the cemetery the whole town would hear it. It was so quiet Huttinger, the depot agent, would swing his telegraph arm to the open window, and then go and sit in the privy 50 yards away and be able to read any message that clicked in on the sounder. That’s where he was, and what he heard roused him in a hurry. It was a warning to all points along the line

²⁵Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

²⁶Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

²⁷Cushman, Plenty, dust jacket.

that an extra gang had taken over a work train; the gang, 100 strong, was composed of Austrians and Bulgarians, both allies of Germany; they were flying the Austrian and Bulgarian flags; they were armed to the teeth, and people attempting to approach the train were being fired upon....

Everybody in Zurich was out looking for the train. I was there, too, on the railroad track watching for smoke, but Mama rushed over and got me.

Bulgarians were even worse than Germans. We had a Serbian working on the section gang who had lost five brothers in the Balkan war, and what *he* said about Bulgarians! He said they'd go through a village and slaughter everybody in it.

"Oh, wouldn't they make short work of *you*. Those Bulgarians!" said Mama.

Then a message came that the work train had already passed through. It had gone through Zurich during the night and none of us realized what a close call we'd had. It was now reported to be at Matador Siding, shipping point for the Matador Cattle Co., six miles east of Harlem, which meant 18 miles east of Zurich.

Harlem heard this at the same time as Zurich, so the resident deputy sheriff got some men together and went down to Matador on a speeder and two handcars. Sure enough. There was the work train, all quiet. Everybody seemed to be sitting around in the shade. Cautious approach, no ambush. A search of the train yielded two old side-hammer shotguns. The gang proved to be Greek, not Bulgarian. There were flags on the cars, one the flag of Greece and one the flag of the United States. Greece was our ally. There'd been shooting, all right. A cook's helper had been hunting and killed a duck. The duck was confiscated. The deputy didn't return empty handed. He took the cook's helper into custody, transported him to Harlem, where he was fined \$10 for hunting out of season. So ended the Austro-Bulgarian invasion of June 1917.²⁸

This book, like all those he self-published, was distributed locally. Dan had written the stories knowing that residents of northcentral Montana would be the primary buyers of the book. Of course, he always welcomed mail orders.

A reader finds some of Dan's best writing in this book. Granted, it is nonfiction deserving a disclaimer. Dan once described the embellishment of stories based on fact as "the natural expansion of a good story, the evolution of fiction after fact, romance which flowers with distance." That well fits this book.

²⁸Ibid., 192-194.

Dan's nephew, Doug Giebel, remembered his mother, Fern, reading the book. She was a longtime teacher in Big Sandy.

"My mother was always a little bit chagrined with Plenty of Room and Air," Doug said, saying Fern's response to a number of stories was, "Oh, it didn't happen that way."

"Of course, there's artistic license in every story Dan may tell you," Doug said.²⁹

And similar to his time as a correspondent, Dan again pissed off some locals.

"You be surprised the toes you step on with a book like that," Dan said.³⁰

Dan didn't say exactly what kind of hell he caught regarding the book, but he did point to one anecdote that some readers found annoying.

It was about supposed draft dodging, more or less, that occurred at the onset of the war. In the story Dan recalls how a local handbill size "newspaper," The Blaine County Slacker, attacked local men who had avoided going to war and questioned their loyalty. At the time "slacker" was the label put on anyone suspected to be a German sympathizer and the purpose of the "newspaper" was to tell everyone who in the community who this might be and how they were dodging their duties as soldiers.

Dan recalled reading the account after the "newspaper" had been passed around by all the adults. As this excerpt tells it, Dan saw the paper's criticism of the men as would any true 8-year-old patriot would during wartime:

This was even bigger than getting Germans down on their knees kissing the flag, or the senior class at Chinook High burning their German books. I think that was the first time I truly realized what a good thing it was that Mama had roused me out of bed and made me go to school, even on those

²⁹Giebel, interview by author, 26 May 1998.

³⁰Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

mornings when I claimed to be sick; that literacy, as they said, was the first requirement of a free and democratic society.³¹

In writing this account Dan propagated the likely inaccurate account of the “newspaper” and someone, Dan didn’t say who, didn’t like that this history was dredged up. But beyond the minor offense or two, Dan enjoyed a good response to this book, especially in the areas he wrote about.

“It sold to beat hell in Havre,” he said. People there bought boxes full of them and sent them out as Christmas presents. “I’m sure I sold more than a thousand,” he said.³²

Among the book’s fans was Dan’s family.

“It was fun when he wrote that because we found out a lot of things about our grandparents that we had never known,” Mimi said. One of the things the kids hadn’t known about was that Dan Sr. and Rose had both gone to college, meeting at the Ferris Institute at Big Rapids, Michigan.³³

Somewhere along the line the British Press reported that Plenty of Room and Air was a bestseller. Dan didn’t understand what gauge brought on this praise, but called up McGraw-Hill and said, “you’re missing something here.”

But McGraw-Hill wasn’t interested.³⁴

Three years later Dan self-published one more book, The Muskrat Farm. It was Goodbye Old Dry with a new title. This was the third title for this novel as Fawcett had published a pocketbook edition known as The Con Man in 1960.

³¹Cushman, Plenty, 214.

³²Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

³³Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

³⁴Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

Dan decided to publish his own edition of the book because when the earlier editions were distributed only 100 to 150 copies were sold in Montana. Dan also felt the book never sold as well as it should have, especially in light of the reviews it received.

“I wanted to reprint it with the reviews on it, see,” Dan said.³⁵

The Muskrat Farm was the last new title Dan self-published, making five books the sum total of Stay Away, Joe Publishers.

³⁵Ibid., 2 March 1999.

CHAPTER XIII

CONSISTENCIES AND LOSSES

There is nothing more dreadful to an author than neglect, compared with which reproach, hatred and opposition are names of happiness.

—Samuel Johnson.

While Dan spent his time during these years self-publishing and book reviewing, now and then he'd still hear noteworthy praise for Stay Away, Joe.

One form of praise came when the Rocky Boy's tribal council asked Dan if they could name a new building on the reservation the "Stay Away, Joe Recreation Center." Dan talked them out of it. That was good indication to Dan that the Rocky Boy Indians still thought highly of his book, then two decades old.¹

In the second half of the 1970s, a number of publications also praised the book. Jay Gurian told of Dan's work in the conclusion of his book Western American Writing: Tradition and Promise, published in 1975. In Gurian's words:

A whole new side of western writing emerges with this unpretentious masterpiece. In the past it was possible to live with and laugh at the absurdities of such whites in the West as Mark Twain's acquaintances, or Cat Ballou's friend Kid Shaleen. Since *Stay Away, Joe* it has become possible to live with and laugh at the absurdity of Indian life in the same way, as part of the larger absurdity, not as racist patronization.²

¹Beidler, "Popularity of Stay Away, Joe," 216.

²Jay Gurian, Western American Writing: Tradition and Promise (Deland, Fla.:Everett/Edwards, 1975), 140.

The book's popularity was not a simple matter in such politically correct times. Gurian says the book, while being a favorite of Indians, is not always easily understood or embraced by non-Indians (as was the case with the book reviewers on the East Coast more than twenty years before.) In Gurian's words:

Those qualities, which make it a favorite of Indians, make it less "real" or compelling to non-Indians. It is difficult to non-Indians to relate politically to a work, which pokes fun at nearly every one of its Indian characters. Where are the agonies of the oppressed? If one laughs too easily at the illogic by which Louis Champlain rationalizes the dishonesty of his son Big Joe, then one may be patronizing a primitive. Does one's amusement at Mama insisting on a porcelain toilet to impress white guests—when there is no running water in the house—smack of racism? The ethnic politics of the time would be better satisfied if Dan Cushman had projected a consistent image of Indians overwhelmed by white pressures, rather than Indians having a hell of a good time. They ought to appear tragically self-destructive (the manner of *House Made of Dawn*) or alienated (the manner of *When Legends Die*.) But the unremitting of joy of life that saturates *Stay Away, Joe* makes no apologies for Louis Champlain's foolishness, his son's rascality, their friends' violence, infidelity, drunkenness. Not a shred of "message" mars the vitality of this novel...and its lack of self-consciousness makes it the finest rendition of Indian world view so far published.³

Two years later an English professor, Peter Beidler, discussed the book again along similar lines. Beidler published in the Arizona Quarterly a 25-page essay titled, "The Popularity of Dan Cushman's *Stay Away, Joe* Among American Indians."

In the essay's beginning, Beidler offers why he pursued this subject:

The unprecedented degree of approval of American Indians for this novel is rather surprising for several reasons. For one thing, Dan Cushman...is a white man who, as he puts it, "never made the slightest effort to learn about Indians".... For another thing, the main character in the book, Joe Champlain, a Cree-Assiniboine Indian, is scarcely the sort of character we might expect other Indians to feel proud of as a "typical" young Indian. He is a selfish, lazy, beer-guzzling, girl-chasing, cows-rustling, car-stealing freeloader who, despite his services as a Marine in two foreign wars, shows himself in the novel to be something of a cowardly bully. Why

³ibid., 137.

is so unlikely a book, about so unlikely a character, written by so unlikely an author, so popular among Indian readers?⁴

Beidler concludes the book's popularity is due to three factors, "it is realistic in its portrayal of Indians; ...Joe, has, in spite of everything, certain qualities which tend to make him "heroic" to Indians; and Joe would be familiar to members of many tribes as a modern-day representation of the 'trickster' figure already well known to them in their own native mythologies and folklores."⁵

Beidler focuses on each adult member of the Champlain family—Louis, Annie, Grandpere, Mary, Joe—in the course of his analysis and discusses how they fit Native American personality types defined by anthropologists.

Joe's popularity, Beidler finds, is largely due to the fact that "he is able to beat the white man at his own game *without becoming a white man in the process.*"⁶ Besides that, Beidler says, Joe is good at many things that plains Indians traditionally deem respectable: "fighting, riding horses, hunting and raiding."⁷

If Beidler was right with any of his analysis, obviously it was about Joe's appeal to the Indian readers. Dan saw more than one Indian man conceitedly claim to be the inspiration of the character Joe.

As Dan's writing appeared everlasting, other important parts of his life were not. In 1978 and 1979 he suffered two losses: the first was the death of his brother Beecher at age 76; the second was Betty's death. She died from pancreatic cancer at 62.

⁴Beidler, "Popularity of Stay Away, Joe," 217.

⁵Ibid., 218.

⁶Ibid., 230

⁷Ibid., 233.

Dan and Betty had been married for almost forty years, seen good times and not-so-good times, and through the course of it raised four children. Before she passed away, she'd seen her daughter married and her sons reach adulthood. Matt, the youngest was 24 when she died.

All that Betty did for Dan can't be adequately told. In addition to being wife and mother, she was his secretary, editor, business partner and one of the few constants in his life. His children admit Dan's personality does not always make him easy to live with. This was especially true as his career took a downturn in the second half of their marriage, when she started working part-time for the St. Thomas Children's Home.

Up until the 1960s, Dan rarely complained about living in Great Falls. However, when the tough times set in, Betty listened as Dan talked about moving to another town. For a time, Dan thought they should move to southwestern Montana, say, Boulder, Anaconda, Butte, Pony or Whitehall. This, of course, was the stomping-grounds of his youth.

Betty didn't like the sound of this. She wasn't against moving so much as the places Dan offered didn't appeal to her.⁸ And Dan probably wouldn't have moved even if Betty had been willing. It was just a convenient gripe at the time, according his children.

Steve and Matt, more familiar with the second half of their parents' marriage than the first, know well of Dan's discontent. They said that what was perhaps hardest on Betty was Dan's distaste for going out. As he grew older he became more of a homebody. He didn't like to eat out and didn't like to travel far, if at all. These were two things Betty would have enjoyed.

If they went anywhere, he wanted to be in his home that night.

⁸Bob Cushman, email to author, 16 March 1999.

“It’s kind of like a phobia,” Steve said, “like someone not wanting to get into an elevator.”⁹

They said that drove Betty crazy.

Still, Dan and Betty did well together and he was proud of her talents and accomplishments, as no doubt she was of his. Dan missed Betty greatly. But the full impact of her death on him wouldn’t become evident for another six or seven years.

Dan’s life didn’t change a great deal in the years immediately following Betty’s death. He continued to write and walk and read. He remained a common sight in town, often headed toward the library with a beret or Tam o’ Shanter on his head and a cane in his hand.

He did stop reviewing for the The New York Times, though. He couldn’t recall exactly what brought an end to this arrangement, but said it was the newspaper’s decision, not his.

In 1984, Dan saw another Great Falls author fall from the ranks. Robert McCaig, Montana Power Co. employee and writer of Westerns, died at 74. McCaig had chalked up more than twenty books, most Westerns. Like Dan, he started out writing for pulps, then graduated to novels. Unlike Dan he always remained loyal to the Western Writers of America, serving as its president and director at each at least once.

McCaig said a short time before his death that if you write in your spare time, you have no spare time.¹⁰

⁹Steve Cushman and Matt Cushman, Dan Cushman’s sons, interview by author, 3 March 1999, Great Falls, Mont.

¹⁰Great Falls Tribune, 37 April 1982, 1.

Of course this did not apply to Dan. No longer reviewing, Dan decided to revive a Western he had written some time before. In 1984, a small New York outfit, Walker & Co., published his book Rusty Irons.

Dan said he didn't self-publish this book because its target audience ranged far beyond his back yard.

"I have no way of distributing a book like this," he said.¹¹

"This book was basically something I tried to sell to Hollywood," Dan said, adding he wanted to title the book "Rob Roy of the Plains" because the story parallels Sir Walter Scott's tale of Rob Roy.¹² The book also shares similarities with his second hard-cover novel Badlands Justice.

Rusty Irons did not receive noteworthy praise or sales, possibly because it didn't quite fit in any category. As Dan put it, "It's not a trade Western. It's a character story about a western family."

Dan added that the market for Westerns was still "terrible." At the time, Walker & Co. was one of two publishers in America that still put out Westerns in hardcover.¹³

After more than a decade without a market, Dan admitted in the early 1980s that it was "awfully hard to make it in this business."¹⁴

After Rusty Irons, Dan went through a twelve-year dry spell. And it was then, fresh out of books and with time to really ponder Betty's absence, that her death finally caught up to him.

¹¹Ibid., 23 September 1984, 1E.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 23 February 1981, 10A

In 1985, Dan began to fade. Steve and Matt noticed he was not his usual self and Steve took him to see a physician. But Dan, then 76, checked out fine. The physician said he couldn't find anything wrong with Dan.

But something was not right. Dan stopped eating, or chose to eat only oranges for weeks at a time. He seemed to have one crisis after another, whether it was home maintenance or a problem with his car. The biggest sign that something was not right was that he stopped his daily walks.

Eventually Dan was diagnosed with depression. The doctor said it was probably caused by Betty's absence.¹⁵

Mimi compared Dan's condition to something she'd seen in the movie Little Big Man.

"You know how the old Indian Chief goes out and he's decided its time to die?" Mimi asked. "And they get out there and they sing the chants and they do things and he says, 'Well, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.' Dan kind of pulled that kind of thing, I think," she said.

"I always kid him, he was like that old Indian and it just didn't work out."¹⁶

Dan remembered that it surprised him as much as anyone.

"I was laid up for about a year and a half. If someone tells you that's not a condition...", he trailed off.

A bright spot during that time occurred when a visitor from Brigham Young University came to talk to Dan about his work. He told Dan that original copies of The Silver Mountain went for \$200. Dan liked hearing that.

"He was a nice fella and it was nice to talk to someone," Dan said.¹⁷

¹⁵Cushman, interview by author, 3 March 1999.

¹⁶Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

¹⁷Cushman, interview by author, 3 March 1999.

Dan's family says that a lack of audience may have contributed to his state of mind during that time. He'd never been one to socialize or promote himself a great deal, but throughout the years he had spoken at library functions and things such as that. Betty had always encouraged this.

Without her there, Dan had nothing to stop him from becoming a true recluse. Just as he'd habitually walked daily for forty years, he decided to habitually stay in his home for the rest of his life.

"After her death, he just had nobody who could get him to get out and socialize," Mimi said. "So, for the past twenty years he's been huddled up there in his house."¹⁸

Steve and Matt know he'd be better off if he'd get out now and then, "But he just doesn't want to."¹⁹

There was another unfortunate development for Dan in the mid-1980s. Stay Away, Joe suffered crucial criticism for the first time in Montana. The Missoula community had come to define Montana's literati and in its circles writers said Stay Away, Joe wasn't all it was cracked up to be, calling it inaccurate and untrue.

Long before this time, Missoula had eclipsed the literary reputation Great Falls had back in the 1940s and 1950s, when Guthrie, Howard and Schemm walked its streets.

Missoula's literary legacy dates back to the 1920s. But it wasn't until poet Richard Hugo took over the The University of Montana's creative writing program in the 1960s that the town became known as a hub for writers.

¹⁸Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

¹⁹Steve Cushman and Matt Cushman, interview by author, 3 March 1999.

In fact, some people now consider it the literary capital of the entire country. An article in the French magazine Le Point said, “A coup d’etat has taken place in the in the literary world.... Forget New York, Los Angeles or Chicago, the new literary capital of the United States is called henceforth Missoula....”

Writer Fred Haefele cited this proclamation when he described the Missoula community for the magazine American Heritage. Haefele said the French have a point.

“..[I]t’s certainly true (Missoula’s) traffic in literati exceeds that of cities many times its size. Some of the most famous American writers of the late twentieth century—Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, James Lee Burke, Ian Frazier, James Welch, and Annie Dillard—have come to Missoula to teach or to live, or just to sport and socialize....”

As Haefele sees it, two books helped put Missoula on the literary map: A River Runs Through It, by Norman MacLean; and The Last Best Place: A Montana Anthology, edited by Annick Smith and William Kittredge.²⁰

It was when The Last Best Place was put together that some writers’ unfavorable perceptions of Stay Away, Joe became clear.

The anthology developed when Kittredge, The University of Montana’s prose equivalent to Richard Hugo, and Smith, decided to gather the very best of Montana’s literature in one book. Completion of the project was scheduled to coincide with the state’s bicentennial in 1989.

Kittredge and Smith created an editorial board and filled its seats with five additional scholars and writers. The editors were overwhelmed when they began to gather the state’s best writing.

²⁰Fred Haefele, “Missoula,” American Heritage, October 1999, 96.

“The task proved greater than anyone had dreamed,” Kittredge and Smith said after it was complete. “Each editor was responsible for researching at least one of eight chronologically organized chapters.”²¹

As material mounted, the editors would convene and help each other decide what was worthy of inclusion and what was not. The compiling, selecting and editing spread over four years. The book was published in 1988.

It was more than 1,100 pages long, and its editors said, “The Last Best Place is not the first anthology of Montana writing, and it will not be the last. But if we had done our work well it will be definitive for a while.”²²

Stay Away, Joe was not included in it. The book, having made it to Broadway and Hollywood and maintained a market for more than thirty years, didn’t make the cut for an anthology possessing the “very best” of Montana’s literature.

But Dan’s work was not overlooked entirely. The editors provided an excerpt from Plenty of Room and Air in the anthology’s chapter “Remembering the Agricultural Frontier.”

Whether the absence of Stay Away, Joe was glaring for many people, one had to wonder how the editors could have missed a book that so many people identified with, work that Indians and whites alike held up as capturing “the intersection of two ways of life.”

Surely an excerpt from a book described as an “unpretentious masterpiece,” “the finest rendition of Indian world view so far published,” and “the favorite among Indian people,” was worthy of inclusion. Perhaps in the chapter “Modern Montana Literature.”

²¹Kittredge and Smith, Last Best Place, xvii.

²²Ibid., xviii.

It wasn't as though they couldn't provide more than one example of Dan's work. That was done in the case of other authors.

It turned out that an excerpt from the book was put forth, but Blackfeet novelist and poet James Welch, who was part of the book's editorial board, said the book was an unfair stereotype of Indians.²³

Welch was familiar with the book. He grew up on the Hi-Line not far from the country Dan used as the book's setting. He'd read it once, many years before, and he said he hadn't liked it then either. Ironically, some critics place Dan's book alongside Welch's Winter in the Blood, published in 1974, when citing the few novels showing "desultory and desperate" life in modern-day Montana.²⁴

Welch doesn't see it that way and he told me why.

"I hope in Winter in the Blood and The Death of Jim Loney, my second novel, that even though these guys were kind of derelict types, I get inside their minds so that one might understand why they became this way through a course of the novel," Welch said.

"I don't think Stay Away, Joe does that. I don't think it gives you a real insight to the psychological working of the people, so that when they come out this way they can understand it."

As far as the book's widespread popularity among Indian readers, Welch said it was due to a lack of understanding.

"I think the more educated Indian people get, the more they understand that book is an insult to them. I think a lot of people pick it up and think that it is a

²³Great Falls Tribune, 17 April 1998, 1A.

²⁴Kich, "Dan Cushman," 168.

good read. It's humorous in places and it mentions (local businesses). I think a lot of Indian people respond to the familiarity of the setting. People like to have their country written about," Welch said.

"Indians are so uncritical about the way they are portrayed, it's amazing," he said.

"I thought (Dan) portrayed the Indian people, the family and so on, as fools," Welch said. "And, if I remember correctly, when they get the herd of cattle—I haven't read it in so long, it was a herd of cattle with a bull?—and to celebrate they kill the bull. That is just a total farce. Indians aren't that stupid and I think it implies Indians are that stupid.

"Throughout the years I've been asked, 'What do you think of Stay Away, Joe?' I just have this stock thing: I just didn't like it. I thought it was a parody of Indians. I thought it was insulting, untrue," Welch said.²⁵

Welch wasn't the first one to feel that way. That was pretty much how reviewers in the East had viewed the book when it first was published. But the recent criticism surprised Dan.

"Perhaps younger people don't want their ideals clouded," he said.²⁶

Of course, Stay Away, Joe remains popular on the Hi-Line on and off the reservations and will remain so for many years.

Alan Sorensen, with the Havre Daily News, offered a non-reservation view of the book and his reason why the book hits home in the Havre area:

I don't think things have changed completely. I know some families similar to the Champlains. I know some old timers at Rocky Boy who while away their time (like Louis does in the novel) making artistic curios of one type or another.

There are a lot of Marys at Rocky Boy—smart, articulate, attractive

²⁵James Welch, interview by author, 1 June 1998.

²⁶Cushman, interview by author, 3 March 1999.

women who work hard and are extremely dependable. I think like most people, they can be put off their course by emotional trauma.

The younger boys (in the novel) are very real. I see their types every time I go to powwow. They have fun and are comfortable being children, but also abide by the family rules and do their chores....

I think the story is very real. I delivered beer for 18 years up and down the Hi-Line and people really do act like that around here. I've seen bars change hands in poker games.²⁷

Sorensen took issue with the common notion that Joe is the hero of the book and noted another important aspect to Dan's story.

I think the hero (of the novel) is the family unit. It is robust with a deep character despite the flimsy facade it tries to put up for the respectable white woman from Helena. And I'm glad that Cushman made reference to the law that barred Indians from bars. Too many people are unaware of that part of our history. It's there in his book as another embarrassment to the white community.²⁸

Regardless of how whites and Indians on the Hi-Line view Dan's book, it likely will be criticism from people such as Welch that determines the novel's fate. If, in fact, scholars and writers of the West look upon the book as did the editorial board of the The Last Best Place, over time it could result in oblivion for Dan.

The 1980s, however, did not end on that note. Other attention to Dan provided more positive moments. One small bright spot came when a historian contacted Dan about something he'd written.

In 1989, Dave Walter of the Montana Historical Society wanted to know about a poem Dan had included in his 1957 novel about turn-of-the-century politics in Montana, The Old Copper Collar. Walter thought it might be an old Butte song.

Here's the poem:

²⁷Alan Sorensen, email to author, 6 May 2001.

²⁸ibid.

*Oh, me old copper collar
It makes me heart so proud;
When I'm wearing me copper collar
I stand out in the crowd;
Throughout the land there's none so grand,
I want you all to see
This beautiful copper collar
That the company's gave to me!*

The poem was referring to the Anaconda Copper Mining Company and the pride that it brought some people. Walter wanted to know where Dan had learned of it, probably hoping to find a way to credit it to Butte's already colorful history.

Dan enjoyed this curiosity and confusion immensely because he had written the poem.

In a letter he wrote back to the society Dan explained: "It was written by me as a lead piece for my novel of the same name in the hopes of inspiring some lyricist to do a musical version."

It seems Dan was pleased that although he hadn't inspired a lyricist, he had at least sounded authentic enough to confuse a historian. He closed the letter with, "Sorry to have led you astray...but rather flattered by what must be some sort of success."²⁹

Dan must have been cheered, too, when novelist and screenplay writer Elmore Leonard bolstered somewhat the faltering reputation of Stay Away, Joe. Leonard made an off-hand reference to the book in his 1990 novel Get Shorty. One of the characters in the novel talks briefly of Elvis: "You know he made over thirty pictures and the only one I saw was *Stay Away, Joe* ? A wonderful book they completely fucked up."³⁰

²⁹Dan Cushman, to Dave Walter, Montana Historical Society, 7 December 1989. Courtesy of Montana Historical Society, Helena, Mont.

³⁰Elmore Leonard, Get Shorty (New York: Delecorte Press, 1990), 95.

This was a less than official critique, to be sure, but thanks to Leonard, Dan sold a few more books.³¹

Around this same time, Jon Tuska of the Golden West Literary Agency in Portland, Oregon, called Dan to say that he wanted to represent his work.

Tuska saw a new opportunity for some of Dan's pulp writing. He wanted to help Dan republish it in book form and Dan agreed to work with him. Tuska also saw the potential for a couple of Dan's pulp novella's to be published as full-fledged Westerns. There also was the possibility of reprinting some of Dan's better-known books.³²

Tuska had come to know Dan ten years earlier when he was working on a book titled Encyclopedia of Frontier and Western Fiction, which contains a short account of Dan and his writing career. Although MCA had represented Dan before Tuska, Dan hadn't really depended on an agent since his first one had led him astray in the early 1950s with Stay Away, Joe.

Tuska represents other authors similar to Dan, often older with roots in the traditional Western. The Golden West Literary Agency, according to Tuska, sells 80 percent of the Western fiction currently sold worldwide.

It took some time to get the publishing in order. Meanwhile, another of Dan's contemporaries passed away. Bud Guthrie died in 1991 at his home near Choteau. When the press asked Dan to provide a few words about Bud, Dan characterized his writing as deceptive in that he made it appear easy, but said that Bud's competence was frightening.³³

³¹ Great Falls Tribune, 17 April 1998.

³² Tuska, interview by author, June 1998.

³³ Great Falls Tribune, 27 April 1991.

In 1994 Dan's drought was coming to an end. Another edition of Tall Wyoming was selling worldwide thanks to Tuska. That was followed by the publication of a book containing six of Dan's best pulp stories. Sagebrush Large Print Westerns published Voyageurs of the Midnight Sun in 1995. Around that same time, Tuska also lined up a reprinting of Montana Here I Be!.

A year later Dan had two new books released. Five Star Westerns published In Alaska with Shipwreck Kelly and Valley of Two Thousand Smokes.

Tuska described Five Star Westerns as "extremely successful." He noted that there is a demand for good Western writing in places around the world from Africa to Australia.

However, In Alaska with Shipwreck Kelly and Valley of Two Thousand Smokes are not among Dan's best work. In both these cases Tuska had encouraged Dan to lengthen pulp novellas that were too short to be published as Westerns.

Dan's children admit the attempt at turning novellas into full-fledged books "didn't work out very well."³⁴ With In Alaska with Shipwreck Kelly, the better of the two, Dan added a new beginning. With Valley of Two Thousand Smokes, he had planned to add much more, but it just didn't happen.³⁵

That wasn't the end of Dan's resurgence. Tuska saw more opportunities for Dan's work. He was particularly excited about publishing the Western that Bantam had sent back to Dan after his editor and friend Marc Jaffe left.

Then Dan suffered a life-threatening setback. He got an infection in tissue that surrounded a wire that led from his pacemaker to his chest. He'd had

³⁴Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

³⁵ibid.

the pacemaker for four or five years at the time. He tried to treat it himself, but only made it worse.

Dan doesn't always communicate his condition very well, his children said, and has been known to try to treat himself.

One day in April 1996, Steve and Matt found Dan collapsed in the basement at the foot of the stairs. They thought he'd lost footing and fell. They raced him to the hospital and it turned out the infection had led to the fall.

He stayed in the hospital for a month or so. Fortunately, he'd suffered no injuries from the fall. But the doctor said that if Dan had gone three or four more days, the infection would have killed him.

"We really thought we were going to lose him then," Mimi said. "But you know, he's pretty tough."³⁶

Dan's children credit his longevity and resilience to all the miles he logged walking. After he'd recovered, Dan doubted whether he could successfully battle another such incident.

"My next illness will probably be my last," he said, showing no emotion.³⁷

Around the mid-1990s, Dan lost two more people he was close to.

In 1995, Dan's last remaining good friend, Jim Bulger, had passed away. Bulger was 81 when he died of Parkinson's disease. Bulger and Dan hadn't seen much of each other in recent times, but in years before they had spent many hours in conversation about literature.

Then in May 1996, around the time Dan was in the hospital, his sister Fern passed away. She had lived to be 97.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

CHAPTER XIV

GODDAMNIT, SKUNKED AGAIN!

*The natural flights of the human mind are not from
pleasure to pleasure but from hope to hope.*
—Samuel Johnson.

About six months after Dan's infection, he learned that he would be honored with an award from Gov. Marc Racicot for his contribution to the state's humanities. It was a big day for Dan. The ceremony took place on the University of Great Falls campus with Dan in attendance.

There was skepticism as to how well he would deliver his speech. After all, he was 87, had just been at death's door and had scarcely been out of his home in years. But the night proved a great success.

He stood behind the podium in a Great Falls theater and said thanks. He gave a humorous ten-minute account of his career, from his childhood writings to his career as a novelist. He spoke of his teenage days as a newspaper correspondent, writing for radio after college and then for the pulps. Summing up his career, he said his greatest contribution is Stay Away, Joe.

"That's the only thing I'll be remembered for, if anything," he said.

He described the book as "right and wrong turned inside out," and concluded by saying, "I've written quite a few other stories and most all of them

are controversial in some manner and have no real answer anymore than Joe did.”¹

His family was proud of his performance. They enjoyed seeing him out again and saw that he enjoyed it as well. Once again, he had an audience.

“All these people came up (afterward) and wanted him to autograph their books,” Dan’s nephew Doug said. “He became 20 years younger. The stimulation, the center of attention, the spotlight, the ‘we like your writing, we appreciate it, will you please sign this.’”²

Roughly a year after receiving the award, Dan then suffered congestive heart failure. It occurred around Thanksgiving 1997. His children said it wasn’t clear whether Dan had suffered a heart attack, but his heart was racing at a phenomenal rate.

Dan had been wrong. His next illness was not his last.

In 1998, Dan was honored again, this time by Friends of the Mansfield Library in Missoula. Dan received the H.G. Merriam Award for his distinguished contributions to Montana literature. Guthrie, Walker and Welch, among others, were past recipients of the award. Dan did not make a personal appearance, as he didn’t feel up to traveling the 150 miles. Bob received the award for him.

Dan didn’t believe those honoring him had their hearts in it. He said the recent governor’s award probably caused some people in Missoula to feel obligated to remember him.

“They gave like you give a wisdom tooth to a dentist,” he said.³

Although he sounded a little ungrateful, he was right. Other than announcing his name for the award and some words from Bob about Dan, his

¹Montana Committee for the Humanities Awards, videocassette.

²Giebel, interview by author, 26 May 1998.

³Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

name was not spoken again that night. And there was barely mention of what he'd written.

It probably didn't help that in the days preceding the banquet, there was more criticism of Stay Away, Joe. In the Great Falls Tribune, poet Ripley Schemm called the book "a very funny dirty trick."

Schemm is the daughter of Mildred Walker Schemm who had first informed Dan in the early 1950s that Viking was considering publishing the book.

"There is a group of writers in the state who will always be offended by (the book)," Ripley Schemm said. "I hated it because it was such a stereotype of Indian people."⁴

In the Missoulian, Bill Bevis, English professor at The University of Montana and one of the editors of The Last Best Place, said, "Opinions about it are divided."

"(The book) treads a thin line," Bevis said. "It's humor, and humor is really tricky in these politically correct times."⁵

Instead of treading a thin line, those at the banquet chose not to tread at all.

Dan's family believes that some of the book's critics either don't understand it or haven't read it. That appears to be the case when many critics describe how the character of Joe portrays Indians.

"Joe might be the protagonist," Mimi said. "but Joe is not the hero of the book. Louis is the hero of the book."

⁴Great Falls Tribune, 17 April 1998.

⁵Missoulian, 19 April 1998, E2.

Bob made the point that people today can't appreciate what the book did when it was first released.

"The problem is, I think, that people now have really forgotten that when Stay Away, Joe came out, it demolished the stereotype of the noble savage," Bob said. "People wanted to believe that Indians were something out of Fenimore Cooper maybe."⁶

Another problem readers might have with the book is the fact that Dan is not an Indian, but wrote about them.

"If a Native American had written the book it would be (held up) as a masterpiece of insight," said Dan's nephew Doug.⁷

John Mitchell Jr., the student at Rocky Boy's Stone Child College who described Stay Away, Joe as "a very true book," made a similar comment. He understood how some people might imagine that the book is disrespectful, but he said that's risk a writer belonging to a dominant society takes when writing about a minority.

He said Indians write about whites all the time. And he offered an inconsistency he's noticed: "We can talk bad about other folks but they can't talk bad about us."

But Mitchell said "disrespect" is too strong of word for anything found in Stay Away, Joe and that there'd be no controversy had an Indian wrote it. He wishes one had.

"(Cushman) was honest about things," Mitchell said.⁸

⁶Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, 23 April 1998.

⁷Giebel, interview by author, 26 May 1998.

⁸John Mitchell Jr., interview by author, 3 May 2001.

At the time of the H.G. Merriam Award, Dan wasn't worried too much about the fate of Stay Away, Joe. He was too preoccupied with a new western of his that was just coming out in book stores.⁹ This was the Western that Bantam had sent back to him thirty years before.

Unless he's got another manuscript tucked away somewhere, Blood On the Saddle, another Five Star Western lined up by Tuska, will be his last book. If it is, it's an appropriate note on which to end his career. It's perhaps the most ambiguous Western Dan ever wrote, and reads like an Old West episode of the current TV show Law and Order.

It is a courtroom drama that takes place just as Montana is making the transition from a territory to a state. Its main character, Billy Buttons, is accused of killing John Gannaway, a man in charge of the Omaha & Montana Cattle Company. The company had been trying to expand, including onto the Buttons Ranch.

In a typical Western, the plot would be simple. The cattle company would take the role of a villain, and the Buttons family—Billy, his brother and mother—would play the victims. It isn't that simple though. Billy Buttons is anything but a victim. He isn't even a good person.

You have to know Billy. One time Billy shot the weathervane off the top of the Mountdouglass House. That might have been high spirits, but he'd been having some trouble with R.L. Flescher who was the manager. He came around and paid for it afterward. Billy would always pay his damages. It was just when he got that extra considerate tone....¹⁰

Billy pleads not guilty to the charges against him. But there are witnesses who say they saw Billy deliberately shoot and kill Gannaway at point-blank range.

⁹Cushman, interview by author, 20 June 1998.

¹⁰Dan Cushman, Blood on the Saddle (Unity, Maine: Five Star, 1998), 95.

..."Anyhow, Gannaway rode down toward the old freight station and met with Billy. They just sat there. I didn't dream there was anything wrong. Then I thought Gannaway was turning to ride back, but instead of that there was a shot. It took about two seconds for the sound to come."

"Did you see the gun? (the prosecuting attorney asked.)

"Yes, I saw it. A six-shooter. I saw the smoke come out of it. It might not have been smoke. But I saw *something* before the sound came. Then the bang came. It was the first I knew Gannaway'd been shot.

"And then?"

"He fell off his horse. The horse wheeled, and he sort of pitched off, shoulder first. I knew he was dead."

"How did you know he was dead?"

"He didn't put his arms out like a live man would. He just went head and shoulder first."

"And Buttons?"

"He just...nothing. Just seemed as cool as could be."

"Did he examine the fallen man?"

"Not especially. He just turned his horse, seemed to look at us more'n anything."

"How long?"

"Half a minute. It might have seemed longer than it was."

"Mister Rapf!" (the prosecuting attorney) shouted.

He looked startled.

Pointing to the defendant, (the attorney) asked: "And is that the man you saw fire the shot and then coolly ride away?"

"Yes, that's him."¹¹

With a mountain of evidence against him and a colored past, Billy doesn't stand a chance. The one thing he has going for him is an outstanding attorney, Thomas F. Boe.

"There goes the best god-damn' criminal lawyer in the territory, or any territory.... I heard him plead the Mixler shotgun murder case in Butte two years ago, where that woman shot her husband and brother-in-law. He had grown men crying like babies. You never can tell what he might do. He always hits 'em with the unexpected. Take that rape case down in Wyoming when he defended C.W. Shurkley's son. He was accused of raping that girl in the sleeping coach. They had him dead to rights, and the whole country was down on that kid, and I'll be damned but Boe got him off! I hear it cost old Shurkley three thousand dollars, fees and everything else."¹²

¹¹Ibid., 155.

¹²Ibid., 60.

Boe doesn't let Billy down. Boe gets to the jury, or at least one of its members, using the unexpected, and they find Billy not guilty. The hitch at the end of the book is that Billy is, in fact, guilty. At least that's what he tells his younger brother.

"But you didn't shoot him?"

"The hell I didn't! You should have heard him. 'Good old Billy! We've been friends for donkey year, Billy.' That son-of-a-bitch. I told him... 'Here I am. Settle it like a man.' 'I haven't got a gun, Billy. You wouldn't shoot an unarmed man, Billy.' I said... 'John, the hell I wouldn't.' And I shot him. I shot that son-of-a-bitch. I shot him right in front of his chosen audience. And now I've run it down their throats. I've rammed it up their hypocritical asses."¹³

After the trial, Billy decides he won't last long if he stays in the country. The cattle company would hunt him down sooner or later. He decides Alaska sounds better. But before he can get out of town, he kills another man. This time it's a crooked undersheriff who was going to kill Billy. Billy doesn't worry about Old West formalities and gets the drop on the man, shooting him in the back.

That's the way the story ends, with Billy guilty of two murders, heading off to Alaska.

Dan admitted it's not the ending some people wanted.

He said Bantam had it on its lists for four or five years, but every time Jaffe tried to arrange its publishing, other editors at Bantam canceled it. When Tuska took it on, he didn't want to publish the book with such an ending.

"I put him on the wire, too," Dan said. "He couldn't dare take it and he couldn't turn it down. He tortured himself for a couple years and then finally printed it. I told him, 'Good God, you've got the greatest thing in the world. You've got a controversial book.'"

"But your book can't be controversial if no people read it," Dan admitted. "And I don't know if any will."

¹³Ibid., 308.

Dan understands that the hero of the book might not be very popular.

“He’s a rather selfish sort of man, but a superior one,” Dan said. “I think he’s bored with most of the people around home, head-and-shoulders above them, you know. He’s the smartest guy in the room. That’s the only thing he’s got going for him, (besides) the best lawyer he can find.”

“(Tuska) wanted him to be not guilty because that’s the conventional way of writing,” Dan said. “I don’t write conventional books. (Tuska) wants all of his books to end with the hero not guilty, the hero a hero.”¹⁴

“I don’t like heroes. I don’t believe in them. Lincoln was a hero,” Dan said with contempt. “All the while he was delivering the Gettysburg Address the Union Army was destroying the Sioux people.”

Dan commenced with an imitation of Lincoln’s speech.

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal,” Dan said. “Except for the blacks, except for the indentured servants, except for the Indians...”

“You see? It’s baloney,” Dan laughed hard and ended up coughing and wheezing. After he got his breath back he continued.

“And that there is regarded as a great speech. It’s a piece of horseshit!” He laughed again, then said, “What it had was great rhythm, you know. Nobody had to use his mind to listen to that.”¹⁵

Dan knows that many readers who seek the traditional Western might be disturbed, or disappointed, by Blood On the Saddle.

¹⁴Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

¹⁵Ibid., 2 March 1999.

"I figured it was a pretty fair book," Dan said. "The thing I thought was good about it, and the reason people will keep reading it, is that they can't imagine how he's gonna get out of it. They know he's got something up his sleeve."¹⁶

Although Blood On the Saddle probably marks the end of any fresh material from Dan, Tuska has helped line up reprinting for at least ten more of Dan's better-known books, including The Old Copper Collar, Jewel of the Java Sea, Timberjack, Badlands Justice, The Ripper From Rawhide, and a book containing some of Dan's pulp work, The Pecos Kid Returns.

Steve and Matt said these reprints have been good medicine for Dan.

"It gives him something to look forward to," Steve said.¹⁷

Matt said that one daily habit Dan has maintained throughout the years is to check the mail for royalty checks. His routine is to open the front door and reach his arm around into the mailbox hanging on the outside wall, just beside the door.

Now and then he finds a check. But when he doesn't, Matt and Steve know it.

"Goddamnit, skunked again!" Dan says.¹⁸

It seems if anything will keep bringing royalties, it will be his comedy. That was his forte and where he put his greatest effort. But Dan noted that comedy is fickle.

¹⁶Ibid., 30 June 1998.

¹⁷ Steve Cushman and Matt Cushman, interview by author, 20 June 1998.

¹⁸Ibid.

“Comedy, more than tragedy or anything else, is a creature of its time. What’s funny to one generation is not funny to another,” he said. “It depends upon whether or not it refers to human development in all societies.”

What about his comedy, say Stay Away, Joe?

“I can always hope. Huckleberry Finn is as funny as ever,” he said with a chuckle, “if you don’t mind me equating myself with class.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Cushman, interview by author, 29 October 1997.

CHAPTER XV

ON WRITING

Advice, as it always gives a temporary appearance of superiority, can never be (welcome), even when it is most necessary or most judicious.
—Samuel Johnson.

Throughout the years, people occasionally asked Dan how he approached writing and what he thought it took to be successful. He gave relatively little advice considering he devoted a lifetime to the craft. Of course, he was never one to claim he had mastered it and therefore he was probably uneasy in giving direction to others.

At one Great Falls library function in 1981, Dan gave a talk that he titled “How to Write a Book and Get It Published.” He admitted that he’d titled his talk with this only because it was catchy and what interested people. Then he said with a laugh, “I’d like to hear what I have to say myself.”

At that event, Dan told his listeners how he approached editors with manuscripts. Dan concluded that day by saying, “It’s awfully hard to make it in this business.”¹

Much advice that Dan gave to people over the years may not be original with him, but what he offered and the way he said it—always matter-of-factly and often with a humorous twist—reflects his personality.

¹Great Falls Tribune, 23 February 1981, 10A.

One of the most important ways to become a good writer, Dan said, was to read books that are well written.

“Don’t read Cushman, read Gibbon,” Dan said. “He’ll teach you how to write paragraphs.”

“If a person really wants to become a writer, you take a book like [Edward Gibbon’s] The Decline and Fall and read it out loud. And then read it out loud again,” Dan said.

Dan warned not to be afraid of serious literature like Gibbon’s work.

“If you take it with an attitude that this is a highbrow book and it’s hard to understand, it will be,” he said. “Just read it.”²

Beyond reading habits, Dan emphasized the importance of ignoring discouragement by others.

“The only thing for a writer to do is trust himself, get all the good advice he can, and then go do what he pleases.”³

Dan never forgot the advice he learned as a teenager from a manual for writing short stories that his father ordered for him.

“...(W)rite about the most familiar thing in the most familiar way. A story should be an excursion into the familiar,” he said.⁴

Still, Dan believes the writer’s duty is to examine closely the world in which he lives, taking nothing at face value.

“We think of people being black and white, but they are really very complex,” he said. “The very complexity of people is part of being a writer. You find that complexity and make use of it.”⁵

²Cushman, interview by author, 2 March 1999.

³Great Falls Tribune, 6 May 1968, 8.

⁴*Ibid.*, 7 January 1968, tab 2.

⁵*Ibid.*, 6 May 1968, 8.

A writer will not find inspiration at institutions, instead, this will come from less formal places, Dan said.

“I feel that the best place for a novelist to improve his art is not in a library or a in a seat of learning, but in his nearest bus terminal, sitting and listening to the sounds of his country,” he said.⁶

He also felt that certain notions about how the craft should be practiced unnecessarily hinder many writers.

“I write by ear and feel,” he said. “Too many writers are preoccupied with the sterile mechanics of the symbol and the form, and too little with the antics of human beings.”⁷

Dan advised being hard-nosed when rewriting.

“Generally speaking, you write 35,000 words and cut it to 25,000 and you’ll end up with a better story,” he said. “You very seldom will cut what’s integral to the story.”⁸

Dan also advised to not be afraid of not hitting a home run.

“There’s nothing anyone forgets sooner than a flop,” he said. “You can write 50 and if 49 are flops, they’ll only remember the winner. That’s where we’ve got it over doctors. If he flubs once, they’ll forget a lifetime of service and only remember that he did in old Pete.”⁹

When success does come to a writer, it probably is due to people identifying with the characters in the story.

⁶S.V. Keenan, “WLB Biography,” (April 1960), 619.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Cushman, interview by author, 30 June 1998.

⁹Great Falls Tribune, 7 January 1968, tab 2.

“A writer knows he’s really made it when someone says to him of one of his characters, ‘My father sounded just like that,’” Dan said. “He feels the writer has said something for him. It’s the triumph of identification,”¹⁰

Dan pointed out that there is more than one way to success, but some are inherently harder than others.

“If the author is to write what he wants, he’s going to have to starve until he makes a name. A lot of writers will work in Hollywood for six months, then take their bundle of boodle and disappear into the hinterlands to do their serious writing. If they’re not willing to do this Hollywood routine, with the movie and television writing and other menial things, they’ll have a tough road.”¹¹

Dan also saw that the writing of a story is sometimes the most rewarding part of the process.

“Publication is ever the death of dreams,” he said.¹²

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Gale Research Company, Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series (Detroit: Gale Research Company), “Dan Cushman 1909-,” Vol. 18, 109.

EPILOGUE

*A man had rather have a hundred lies told of him
than one truth which he does not wish should be told.
—Samuel Johnson.*

In the summer of 1997, I asked a book dealer selling new and used books in Havre if he had any copies of Stay Away, Joe.

I expected the dealer to look thoughtfully around his half-hazard, dusty stacks before answering. Instead, he quickly responded, “No, nobody ever lets go of that book, especially around Havre.”

I had gone to the bookstore seeking Stay Away, Joe because I wanted to give it to a friend who had shown an interest in the Hi-Line, my home. This book would help my friend appreciate, I thought, the culture of the area, one greatly affected by the interaction between white people and Indians.

I asked the book dealer where I might find a copy. The man said that Dan published them himself and sold them from his home in Great Falls. All of this surprised me, but I mostly was surprised he was still alive.

On my next trip to Great Falls I sought out Dan’s doorstep. I banged on the door of his two-story, brick home knowing only that he had to be pretty old. Dan appeared, looking all of 88. I told him I was interested in buying a copy of Stay Away, Joe, and without hesitation he welcomed me in. Obviously this was pretty routine, I thought. As he rounded up a copy he said that his sons usually dealt with customers, but neither was home.

We talked a little and he made me aware of his other self-published books that he'd be happy to sell me. I agreed to buy a handful of his other books, along with a small stack of Stay Away, Joe.

As he was signing them I couldn't help but ask if any part of Stay Away, Joe had really occurred.

"No, it was just something I thought up," he replied.

I would later discover that this was his short answer.

My time with him that day was brief, but I figured I'd likely drop in on him again. Before I did, I decided to make him the subject of this thesis.

A little research revealed that he was unplowed ground. This was a good sign. It also showed that he had written a lot more books than those he'd mentioned. Another good sign.

But as I tried to come up with a rough sketch of his career at the library, I went away with more questions than answers.

Information about Dan often conflicted or was hard to believe. I found information that he was born in Marion, Michigan, and in Osceola, Michigan. One account said he grew up on the Rocky Boy's Reservation, another said near it. According to another account, he'd lived in sixteen towns in his first sixteen years. Not only that, he'd racked up quite a list of careers before settling down as a novelist: "assistant to a wildcatter," "a cowboy," "a prospector," "a newspaperman," "a radio announcer," and "a pulp fiction writer." He also appeared to have a science degree earned in Missoula.

The first real stumbling block I encountered was when I read that he'd written more than fifty books, but at the time I could only come up with thirty-five. That was counting one book more than once because it was published under two names.

Looking back, I realize those inconsistencies made the process of researching and reporting more interesting than it would have been otherwise. Had everything jibed, I would have missed out on many small triumphs.

When I returned to Dan's home to conduct my first official interview, I had a long list of questions, more than I could possibly ask in one sitting. So I returned eight more times over the course of about eighteen months.

With the first interview, I told Dan what I was doing. He said he didn't think he was worth it, but added with a smile, "You can lie about me as much as you want, but don't start telling the truth."¹

At the second official interview, ten days later, he didn't recall who I was. That didn't surprise him.

"I can remember things from a long time ago," he said, "but I can't remember what I did yesterday."²

Despite the hours we spent together, Dan never learned my name. He was always willing to talk, though. I would show up, sit down, try to spur him in a fresh direction, and then sit back and listen.

Often times we covered the same ground twice. There is some ground we never covered. As it turns out, he did have a long list of things he'd done as a young man, with the exception of being a cowboy.

At the end of our last interview he said, "I hope you are getting what you want from me. I really don't know why you're here."

"I'm writing my thesis about you," I said.

"Well, if I'd have known that I would have romanticized it more."³

¹Cushman, interview by author, 19 October, 1997.

²ibid., 29 October, 1997.

³ibid., 3 March 1999.

I knew well by that time that Dan didn't have it in him to romanticize his life. Occasionally exaggerate, maybe, but when it came to talking about himself and his career, he was sooner self-effacing.

During the time I interviewed Dan, I was on a heavy diet of his books. I didn't read all of them because, the truth is, some aren't worth reading. But I read all of his best books and a large portion of the mediocre ones.

I also spoke with Dan's family, which essentially is his four children and his nephew. I had hoped to talk to Dan's friends, but found none alive.

One moment of the interviewing stands out in my mind. I was talking to his daughter, Mimi, about Stay Away, Joe and she said, "Dan saw Grandpere as being a prophet, sort of."⁴

Grandpere, of course, is Louis Champlain's 105-year-old full-blooded Cree grandfather. In the story, Grandpere—who is just a wisp of the tall, broad and muscular man he once was—is most often in the background. When he speaks, what he says is usually pretty somber and apocalyptic. Grandpere wants the old days to return, days before Ford skunkwagons, Philco devilboxes, and Monkey-Ward blankets—when the buffalo roamed the high plains and Indians were not yet plagued by white men and their barbed wire.

Grandpere had a role in Louis's decision to butcher one heifer for the sake of the celebration of his good fortune.

Grandpere had come to the door and stood supporting himself with both hands folded over the knob of his walking stick.

"*Watche!*" he said in a croaking voice, failing to get above the racket of the radio. He cursed it and swung his stick back and forth trying to bat off its dial. "*Watche!*" turn off the devilbox! *Watche*, I, Chief Two Smokes, will talk!"

Grandpere was in a great temper when he referred to himself as Chief Two Smokes. His stick had turned the dial enough to muffle the ratchet beat of Roy Acuff and his Smoky Mountain Boys. He said, "Once, in old days, my father, he had four Sioux scalps, he came back from great hunt.

⁴Bob Cushman and Mimi Iverson, interview by author, 23 April 1998.

All alone he shoot and drag home two buffalo. *Watche!* It was spring, with the wet snow still on the ground, and hunger had walked the village so that some men had died and some had boiled and eaten their teepees. But now what did this chief, my father, do with his buffalo? Did he eat them himself like a white man and leave his friends to starve? No. He called out, 'Come, and we will all forget together the hunger of the cold moons.' Ay-ya! It was better in the old days.⁵

Grandpere is also a great fan of Joe, seeing in him the chiefs of the past. When Joe comes home from Korea he gives Grandpere a scalp, fulfilling a promise that Joe made when he was going off to war.

"You are a chief!" said Grandpere. "You have taken coup on the Communists."⁶

Ironically, however much Grandpere cusses the Philco devilbox, he is a devoted listener to Edward R. Murrow's radio talk shows. And oddly enough, he finds comfort in Murrow's predictions that the white man will use the atomic bomb again, like he had to end World War II.

Here Grandpere again speaks in great temper and Louis debates his predictions:

"Grandpere live plenty long. See all white men, devilbox, skunkwagon come. See all white men go too. Pretty soon all white men die. Boom! Like devilbox say. Boom! Boom! All white men blown up by bomb." He hopped around, driving his stick to the ground, saying, "Boom! Boom! Blow all white men up like devilbox say. Big bomb kill all white men off, blow 'em up. No house, out in teepee, out in cave, white men die. Boom! Injun live yet, you savvy? Maybe some day great herd buffalo come back."

"No, Gran'pere. You should stay away from the house and not listen to Edward R. Murrow on the damn radio. By gare, those bomb she's cost twenty million dollaire, you think they will drop one on Big Springs, hey?"⁷

When Mimi pointed out Dan's use of Grandpere, it made her comment about seeing Dan as the old Indian in the movie Little Big Man all the more

⁵Cushman, Stay Away, 28-29.

⁶Ibid., 59.

⁷Ibid., 51.

understandable. It also went along with his buying a home in Phillipsburg so that his family would have a safe place to go to if another world war came around and gives insight to the manner in which Dan concluded his book The Great North Trail.

For all these reasons, I've come to see Grandpere as the one character Dan most honestly spoke his mind through, sometime simply in jest, but not always. Ironically, Dan has come to have a role that is not unlike that of an old Indian who speaks of things so long gone, few can relate.

With that said, I will close with my favorite Cushman passage. It comes at the end of Stay Away, Joe when the Champlains have arrived at the annual fair. The fair is an important and much anticipated event for the family largely because it provides them a chance to catch up with old friends. Here Grandpere finds his friends and begins to talk:

Grandpere...found a gathering of elderly men, among whom, with great age and dignity, he sat in the place of honor. A tarp was thrown over the rear wheel of Walkingbird's wagon, to reflect the heat of the fire against his back. With his scalp on the stick to gesture with, Grandpere made a long talk about the good old days; and he talked about the new days too, for he had been a long time around and he had seen things come and go, and only a fool or a white man thought that things could be fixed up just so to last forever, and someday all this would go too, cattle, plow, barbwire, roads, railroad—everything go, and then the buffalo would come back again. At this juncture there was a skeptical murmur as if someone wanted to change the subject, but Grandpere struck the dirt with his stick and went on talking, telling how on the devilbox he had heard it spoken only the last week before that the Crees across the border in Canada were again hunting buffalo; the government had found so many on its lands that there was no grass left. And now pretty soon the big bomb would start falling, boom! Boom! Yes, the white man's own devilbox had told him so. Edward R. Murrow himself had said, "Everybody back to the caves."

"White man don't live long in cave," said Grandpere. "No more factory for make penicillin, pretty soon white men die. No more big town like Havre to buy wheat, buy beef. No factory for build skunkwagon. No skunkwagon, no use for roads. No factory build barbwire. Boom! Big bomb blow 'em all up. Horses come back, buffalo come back, good country again." He looked around, slowly turning his head, the fire making the thinnest of glints across

his sunken eyes. "Me, Chief Two Smokes, live long time, see plenty, see things come, see things go."

He was finished then, and there was a silence, unbroken even by the young men who had gathered around intending to laugh among themselves but instead moved uncomfortably and pulled their mackinaw jackets more tightly against the wind that blew down from Canada across the high prairies of the Milk River, with the promise of winter—the strong cold, *noot' akutawin keskawin*, as the old men said, feeling in it the primeval urge of their people, the struggle against a bleak land that might well go on after all the gadgets of the new order had been swept away—and just for a moment there was no such comfort in the shine of the automobiles parked around as there was in the comfort of the fire.⁸

⁸ibid., 217-219.

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¹Dan Cushman's books, book reviews and magazine articles appear in chronological order. All other sources are arranged in alphabetical order.

²This novel is has been published under three titles. The other two are The Con Man (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1960; any page referencing refers to it); and The Muskrat Farm (Great Falls, Mont.: Stay Away, Joe Publishers, 1978).

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