

Remarks made by Karl Siegler prior to presentation of Gray Campbell Award to Anvil Press in 2013:

It's my birthday today—as well as Howie White's—so I was absolutely thrilled when Margaret Reynolds [ABPBC executive director] ask me to present this year's winner of the Jim Douglas Publisher of the Year Award. I can't think of a better birthday present than the opportunity to present this award to my old friend Brian Kaufman.

There's been an apocryphal story about the origins of Anvil floating about in the industry for over two decades, and its most avid raconteur is none other than Brian Kaufman himself. His favorite part of the story starts with his trudge up the long steep staircase at the former Talon[books] offices on Cordova Street, at the top of which he encountered the company's most formidable employee of all time, Mary Schendlinger, whom he asked politely if he might have an interview with Karl Siegler about a possible job. “Karl Siegler is far too busy to see anyone about a job,” Mary announced with an imperious air only slightly tinged with sympathetic regret, sending Brian back down that long lonely staircase of frustrated ambition.

Back out on the street in East Vancouver, jobsite of the Heroines to whom he would later pay homage with the critically acclaimed book by Lincoln Clarkes, Brian Kaufman resolved that if he couldn't get a job at either Pulp, (which he'd already tried), or Talon, he'd bloody well start his own literary press! And the rest, as they say, is history. But it's a fascinating history, so it's worth a short commentary.

Three skills Brian acquired in his younger years were essential to developing the toolkit that makes Anvil the successful publisher it is today: the first was making deliveries and collecting accounts for his father's successful meat business; the second was a stint at a local print shop where he developed his fastidious eye for typographical design, (the only subject on which he has ever been known to raise his voice in the office—[I got that one from Tom Osborn]); and the third was his apprenticeship as a playwright.

Despite his former completely unfounded prejudices concerning the role of the petit bourgeoisie in our nation of hewers of wood and drawers of water, it didn't take long for Anvil's publisher to discover that the key to success in any business, including the book business, is to make the transition from the delivery of its goods to the subsequent collection of its accounts as efficient as possible. That's one of the two reasons why Anvil continues to thrive.

The second reason for Anvil's continuing success is that it knows, understands and focuses on its niche market extremely well—in this case, readers who couldn't give a damn about being either fashionably or politically correct in our increasingly urbanized global village, and are actually on the lookout for “strong words for a polite nation,” a byline that defines Anvil's uncompromising literary list-building as accurately as it does the editorial mission of the book publisher's progenitor: subTerrain magazine. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than Anvil's very first book: A Toilet Paper—a perfect

synthesis of strong subject matter and the polite location where so much of our reading activity actually takes place.

Don't laugh. I learned a great deal from this book, an excerpt from a doctoral dissertation in linguistics—the Indo-European roots of the four fundamental words it discusses, for example, and therefore their cultural antiquity, ubiquity and historicity that most dictionaries, interestingly enough, didn't begin to suppress until the oh-so-politically-correct nineteenth century of European colonialism. Another is the fact that Shakespeare, despite his reputation for ribaldry, was actually far more of a prude than Chaucer, the father of the English language.

And of course, let's not forget the old adage that the purpose of all great literature is to teach and delight. And the greatest delight Anvil's first literary publication has to offer is not the reader's utterly predictable tittering over the naughty words it contains, but its almost endless string of ever-more-clever puns on the fundamental subject so carefully crafted into its expository prose.

From such an auspicious beginning, Anvil has evolved into a cutting edge literary press, now publishing a dozen well reviewed, critically acclaimed, and often award winning titles annually in all genres, including even the occasional book by a foreign author, and is actually carving out an internationally recognizable brand for itself.

It must be said in conclusion that the edifying purity and daring of the publisher's mandate and literary list building has certainly attracted Anvil's share of loyal, dedicated and committed employees—most recently the author Jenn Farrell, who has left the press to pursue her budding career as a writer, and Karen Green, diligent scholar of religion and communications; now a partner in Anvil; and the current chair of the Literary Press Group of Canada.

So ladies and gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I wish to call upon Brian Kaufman to accept the Jim Douglas Award on behalf of Anvil Press!