

In 2006, Bob Tyrrell received the Jim Douglas Publisher of the Year Award for British Columbia publishing, as coordinated by the Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia. At a reception held in Vancouver on April 6, he said:

“Those of you who know me at all have probably heard me use the expression “the luck of the Irish.” It’s an expression my father used, and one that I find useful to explain things from time to time, even though I’m only part Irish and several generations removed from the olde sod. I prefer to attribute my good fortune to my Irish ancestry and my passion for whiskey and flyfishing to my Scots blood. In any event it’s hard to ignore the good fortune that has come my way over the course of the growth and development of Orca Books. I’d like to share a few of Orca Bob’s luckier moments:

“Stumbling into the world publishing in the first place, not knowing my ass from paint, as I like to say, and surviving those first couple of years, was certainly as much luck as anything else. I cringe looking back at some of those early titles. But I suppose we all do that, don’t we.

“The sales end of the business was never my forte and I found it very difficult in those first couple of years, going into bookstores with my heart on my sleeve and a copy of *Island Pubbing* in my hand. I’ll never forget how fortunate I felt the day, -- it must have been in 1986-- when Alan MacDougall phoned to tell me that Stanton and MacDougall would represent Orca. That association has, of course, continued to this day, thanks to Kate Walker and her terrific staff at Walker & Company.

“All our stars must have been aligned in 1992 when *Waiting for the Whales* won the Governor General’s Award and Orca was named Publisher of the Year by the Canadian Booksellers Association. This was at a time when I was only vaguely aware that anyone east of the Rockies had even heard of Orca.

“I went to Toronto for CBA and the award presentation that June, feeling very much the hick from Hicksville. It’s kind of funny because today I have only one clear memory of that trip. Karl Seigler and I happened to be staying in the same hotel and I sat down with him for breakfast one morning. With very little preamble that I can recall and with the Teutonic frankness that we’ve all come to know and love, he said “What I can’t understand is why the hell they named you publisher of the year.”

All I could say was, luck of the Irish, I guess.

“But it was really those two events in 1992 – the G.G. and the CBA award—that set Orca on the path to becoming a children’s publisher; not a path I intentionally choose but one I feel very fortunate to have followed.

“I’ve certainly been more than a little lucky in terms of the people who’ve come to work at Orca. Back in the fall of 1990 – at a time when there were only two of us and work for four—I got a promising application from someone in Edmonton. The person had some experience in the industry but I wasn’t going to hire anyone sight unseen. So I phoned and she said she was

planning a trip to the coast anyway. It cost me lunch but Susan Adamson stayed with Orca for more than ten years and was a tremendously valuable colleague. She was also pretty good at keeping me in line whenever she thought I was getting too big for my britches.

“And then there’s Andrew Wooldridge, who we like to call “the shipper who refused to leave.” I guess it’s all about good luck and good timing.

Andrew worked as our part-time shipper while belatedly completing his degree at UVic. When he graduated, it just happened that once again I was short-staffed. Almost fourteen years later he’s associate publisher and deserves a good deal of the credit for the success of our US operations and especially the Soundings series... and thus for the award that you’re honouring us with tonight.

“Obviously, everyone on the staff shares in this award. I’m pleased to have Christine Toller, who tried to retire but missed us too much, Maureen Colgan, Melanie Jeffs, and Lynn O’Rourke here to celebrate with us tonight. The rest of the staff are, I hope, here in spirit. The quality and dedication of my staff constantly reminds me that there are advantages to being so far from the centre of the universe in Toronto.

The good ones don’t get poached.

“I’d also like to say that the involvement I’ve enjoyed in our various professional associations has been very rewarding and I’ve always felt that I took far more away from this work than I gave. For me the standard was set in those early days in the mid-80s when I would troop over from the island for ABPBC meetings, knowing absolutely nothing at all about publishing and finding this wonderful group of people willing to share their knowledge. It’s a wonderful industry that way. And out here in the west we’re particularly fortunate to have the benefit of the energy and experience of Margaret Reynolds, who somehow manages to keep this diverse group of eccentrics and misfits getting along more often than not.

“Finally I have to acknowledge some people who can’t be here tonight. My parents were tremendously supportive of Orca Books, especially during the early years when the company’s prospects were less-than-sterling. My mother told me from the time I was very young that, if I wanted to do something badly enough, I would do it. And my father was always there with his chequebook when I needed it and took a good deal of pleasure in being my silent partner.

“My wife Avril and my daughter Alex unfortunately could not be here tonight either. Both deserve enormous credit for not only putting up with me but also with the long hours and frequent travel that are such a part of my life. But those of you who have seen my two beautiful girls lately know full well why I will always feel I’ve been blessed with the luck of the Irish.

“Thank you all.”