

Publishing house is a hidden gem Carole

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Political satire, "Comrade Stalin's Baby Tooth," by Coast author Marina Sonkina was published by MW Books of Garden Bay, this Fall.
- Photo submitted



High on a hill in Garden Bay sits the home of MW Books, a new publishing house on the B.C. landscape that publishes fiction, non-fiction, poetry and children's stories.

Owner William Gelbart, an inventor and physicist who worked out of the University of British Columbia for years, began to notice that many valuable scientific magazines and technical articles were disappearing, so he started his own company to try to stem the loss.

Five years ago, he was visiting a friend in a care home in Vancouver and Sunshine Coast author Marina Sonkina was at the same facility visiting her father. The two met, Marina sent Gelbart a story from her book, Tractorina's Travels and Other Stories, and MW began publishing non-scientific material.

MW Book's authors, many of whom reside on the Sunshine Coast, are mostly refugees or immigrants to Canada.

"I admit I have a certain preference for writers whose first language is not English," Gelbart said.

"It's a heroic switch for writers to change to English, especially poets. And it's very difficult. It seems to make their work distilled to their very essence."

When asked how that is different from North American writing, Gelbart explained, "Many North American writers, especially the younger ones, want to put everything into one book. They are too profuse, it is too much. Some have great ideas, but are not great writers. I look for both, for quality."

Now that e-books have arrived, Gelbart is not sure if publishers will soon have any relevance. He said e-book sales now represent 30 per cent of all book sales.

"I like the feel of a book in my hands, the cover, the pages, the weight. As do many people. But traditional publishing is expensive," he said.

When you add up author's fee (usually 10 per cent of retail price) printing and binding costs, publicity, shipping, distribution and bookseller's cut, there is very little left over for the publisher. And publicity can be expensive with little results if you are new in the game and don't have the right contacts. Or any contacts at all. MW is practically unknown and considered brand new at five years old. Until a BC Book award or something similar is won, the small house will remain on the fringes.

"Of course I will continue," Gelbart said.

Sonkina's political satire, *Comrade Stalin's Baby Tooth*, was released this fall, and in the new year, MW will publish *Gold Mad*, by Roberts Creek author Michael Maser. Economy permitting, we will continue to see works from Sunshine Coast authors Heather Conn, Wlodzimierz Milewski, George Payerle and Jennifer Fraser, all represented by MW Books.

"I am adding my own money all the time," concluded Gelbart. "Publishing can't make me a living right now, it's a work of love."

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