

JOLLY OLDE BOOKSTORE

Terry A. Stillman

THEY HAIL FROM TWO different countries and two different generations, but Tom Jolly and son-in-law Brian Sword make the Jolly Olde Bookstore in Port Moody, British Columbia, a shared joy and obsession that has become a welcoming place to all booklovers.

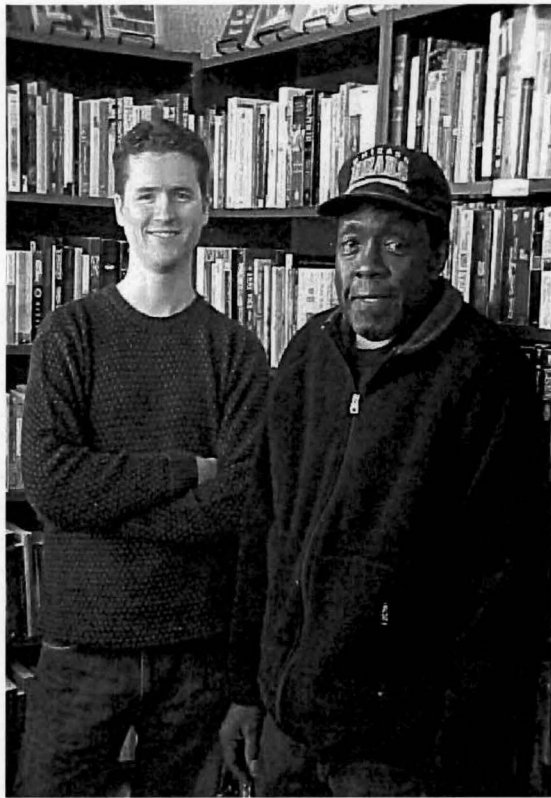
Tom Jolly grew up in Detroit, Michigan, did considerable travelling throughout the United States and Canada before settling in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia about thirty years ago. A machinist by trade, Tom was a reader and book collector for many years, often entertaining the thought of owning his own bookstore.

Brian Sword was born and raised in Timmins, Ontario, and lived and worked in the Toronto area before moving to Vancouver, B.C. about eight years ago. Schooled and trained for a film career, Brian was involved in TV and film production for several years and he still allots part of his time to that passion.

After meeting and marrying Tom's daughter, Brian came to know Tom and became acquainted with Tom's desire to open a bookstore. At first, after Tom finally made the decision to retire as a machinist and take the plunge, Brian's idea was to just help Tom get set up and get the bookstore operating smoothly. However, Brian says that it didn't take long before he realized that he couldn't let Tom make good on one of Brian's own dreams without participating in the project himself.

In September, 2003, the book-loving duo opened their bookstore in a quaint old yellow house at 2224A Clarke Street in Port Moody. Four small rooms were shelved and filled with books, and expectations were high. Looking back, Tom and Brian still treasure the good memories of those first few months in business.

People did come into their store and they did buy books, as well as compliment them on how good their bookstore looked. It wasn't too



long however until both men realized that sales weren't good enough and compliments didn't pay the bills.

They began to look for a way to extricate themselves from their situation. Fortunately, the answer was simple and nearby. Their landlord was part-owner of another building in Port Moody, a few blocks east on Clarke Street. The building was the last of a string of buildings with several small shops including an art gallery that would complement a bookstore. The main floor of the building became available, and negotiations for a move went quickly. In July, 2004, The Jolly Olde Bookstore opened in its second location. Here, there was much more walkby traffic, and impulse buying and sales went up exponentially.

By now, Tom and Brian had a better handle on what would sell in their store so their buying became more efficient as well. In fact, their buying went down because they realized that most of their general stock could be acquired by trading with their customers. This was a big boon to their cash flow. They still bought some books, of course, but just more selectively.

Almost from Day One, Brian started listing some books for sale on the Internet. Even Tom, a reluctant Internet participant, does his share of listing now and admits they couldn't operate without this adjunct to sales. Brian estimates that Internet sales are now about thirty per cent of the total. Like most other new booksellers of the last few years, Tom and Brian just jumped into the Internet aspect of the business, and don't have to adapt at some point as was the case with most older booksellers who conducted exclusive bricks-and-mortar businesses first.

Brian is happy to say that one advantage of their Internet listings is that it brings local customers into the store. A large percentage of Internet sales tend to be one-off transactions, people searching for a specific book who don't bother keeping up with your later offerings. But when it's a customer within driving distance of your store, he or she will gladly come in to pick up the book they found on the Internet, then most likely continue to visit your store.

One goal for the business is to actually increase the amount of the Internet sales, hopefully to the point where Internet sales will cover the store's overhead. Tom feels that street-level stores will continue to exist in the future... "that bookstore dream will never die." Brian feels that Internet bookselling will continue to grow as well, and that's fine,

because multi level selling in various avenues will be necessary in order to pay the bills. As Brian so aptly puts it: "It's tough if you're not maximizing your opportunities."

At present, the stock of The Jolly Olde Bookstore is general and about sixty/fifty paperback and hardcover. The only defined specialty is Black Culture, a section that many of the store's new customers are delightfully discovering. Brian hopes to add a Film Book section over the next year as well.

It's early in the game for Tom and Brian to have a stock of stories about odd customers or humorous anecdotes, but Brian does have one observation that he finds particularly amusing. He's often surprised how two different customers will take him to task over the price of a book, and it's often the same book. One person is adamant that the book is way overpriced. Another person remarks how inexpensive the book is. Both customers are upset with Brian and Tom for not pricing the book the way the customer thinks it should be priced. Of course, searching the book-matching services on the Internet doesn't really help either. There may be a hundred copies of the book listed for sale from \$10 up to \$100. When it comes right down to it, you can still only price a book at the price you think is fair. Then hope for a good customer on a good day.

Tom Jolly and Brian Sword are two different men with different styles and different demeanours. As in any partnership, Tom has customers that prefer to deal with him, and Brian has customers that feel a closer connection with him. That's a good thing; it gives their business a wider dimension. What these two men share, though, is a desire to buy and sell a lot of books and make their business grow. It was a dream, an idea, a reality, and now a hope for it to continue to succeed. And damn, it's great to still see such optimism in the book business!

The Jolly Olde Bookstore is located at 2419 Clarke St, Port Moody, B.C. (604) 939-1092. Open Mon.-Sat. 10am-6pm and Sun. Noon-4 pm.
Email: jollyoldebookstore@hotmail.com

Terry Stillman is a long-time B.C. bookseller specializing in Children's Books and Aviation. Visit his website at www.stillmanbooks.com