

Munsch in the Morning

Gerald Wright

When Bob Munsch talks, people love to listen . . . especially children.

Whether he's telling stories to 300 kids in a Toronto library or 45 in Whitehorse, in the Yukon, they laugh when he laughs, cringe when he roars and clap when he sings.

He gets 250 invitations each year to tell stories to youngsters in almost every corner of Canada, but his job as Assistant Professor of Family Studies at University of Guelph keeps him from accepting more than about 40.

Teachers and librarians who can't get him to come in person have to be satisfied with reading from one of almost a million copies of his stories which have been printed in seven languages over the past four years.

Or, if they prefer, they can hear the stories on one of 7,000 Robert Munsch tapes or records which have been distributed since only last year.

Munsch is probably the world's best example of an author who came in by the back door, and it would be hard indeed to find one who is less conscious of his own talent.

He's one of nine children of a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, lawyer who entertained his family by telling them stories off the top of his head each night at bedtime. "I guess I'm just carrying on the family tradition," he says.

He began his university studies in anthropology, but took a part-time job in a day-care centre to finance his classes and learned to compose and tell stories to entertain the youngsters.

He may be one of the few successful authors in the world who never sat down with the intention of writing a story in his life.

"Every time I'm asked to tell stories I usually tell at least one right off the top of my head. Then if it catches on with the kids, I'll tell it again and again, trying to improve it each time I tell it."

Munsch told some of his stories hundreds of times without thinking of publishing one until about five years ago when colleagues at the University of Guelph suggested he try it.

He admits that nobody has been more surprised than he at the way his books — and recently his tapes and records — have set the world of children's imaginations on fire.

Munsch and his wife Ann each have identical educational qualifications and share one teaching job between them, alternating with each other as shift

workers would in a factory.

They teach in the University of Guelph's nursery school, operated on the campus for children aged 15 months to five years so students in the Family Studies program can learn on the job.

"Basically, we demonstrate for students in this course how to relate to kids," Munsch said. "I guess I'm one of the few assistant professors who wipes noses for a living."

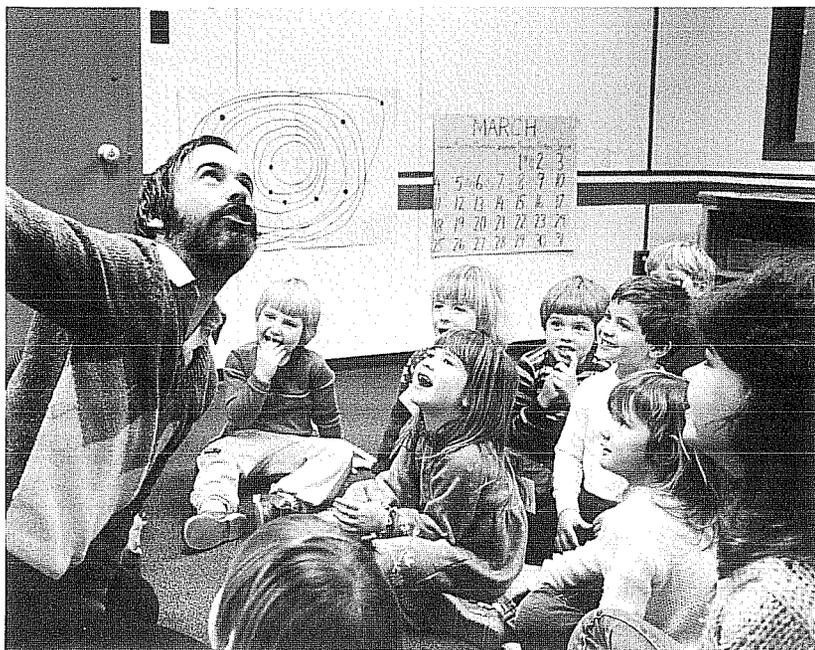
His shared-time job leaves him about two days a week to fill story-telling engagements or look after the publishing and taping of his stories.

The storyteller has his speaking engagements arranged for him by the Writers' Union of Canada and most of the engagements involve schools or large children's libraries.

Munsch admits his stories "are not very reality-based" and each has some elements reminiscent of the old-fashioned traditional fairy tales.

Some of his most popular titles include *Mud puddle*, *The paper bag princess*, *Blackberry jam*, *The boy in the drawer* and *Angela's airplane*.

Gerald Wright is a reporter for the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, and the above article and picture are reprinted courtesy of the *Record*.



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