

Banff 2009—*from the other side of the podium*

In early November, 2009, I had the pleasure of speaking at the 16th Banff Mountain Book Festival—held in conjunction with the 34th Banff Mountain Film Festival—where I presented the story of well-known North Central BC outdoorsman, George Evanoff. George and I had attended the film festival several times in the 1990s, and it was at the 1998 book festival, just two weeks after George's death, that I received timely encouragement to undertake the work that he and I had tentatively discussed a month earlier. Thus began a decade-long project that came to fruition when Natural Heritage Books and Dundurn published *The Mountain Knows No Expert* in March 2009.

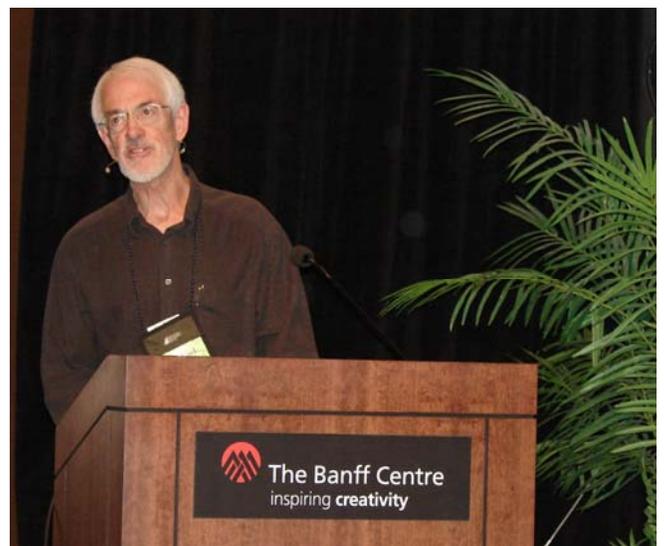


Donald Cameron Hall dining room provides a spectacular setting for the Banff book festival literary lunches

My quest to present George's story in Banff began last fall at the 2008 book festival, where I pitched the idea to event organizers. They told me that they would need to see an audition DVD before they would consider putting anyone on stage. That was a bit daunting, but a student in the College of New Caledonia's new media program, Kristi Newton, supported by two of her instructors,

Peter Maides (Cinema CNC) and Sean Siddals, filmed the book launch at Books & Company's *Art Space* in Prince George in April 2009 and produced a ten-minute film from this material. In May 2009 we submitted this film as the audition, and a few weeks later I received an invitation to present the work at Banff.

Fast forward to October, festival preparations were getting into high gear and organizers were working late into the evenings to bring things together. They chose a new format for the first day of the 2009 book festival, with biography as the underlying theme. I was allotted half an hour, which, after introductions and questions, left just 23 minutes for my talk. The day's program was choreographed to the minute, which meant that I would have to script and rehearse my presentation and cue the visuals to the words, instead of vice versa as I had done in earlier events. I went over my presentation during an overnight stop in Jasper, but as guests of the Banff Centre, we were kept busy from the moment we arrived with receptions and other activities on top of the regular program. Consequently, it was late at night when I did a final run-through in our Banff Centre accommodation. With helpful suggestions from my wife, Judy Lett, I was as ready as I was going to be, and I hoped that any rough edges would disappear with the

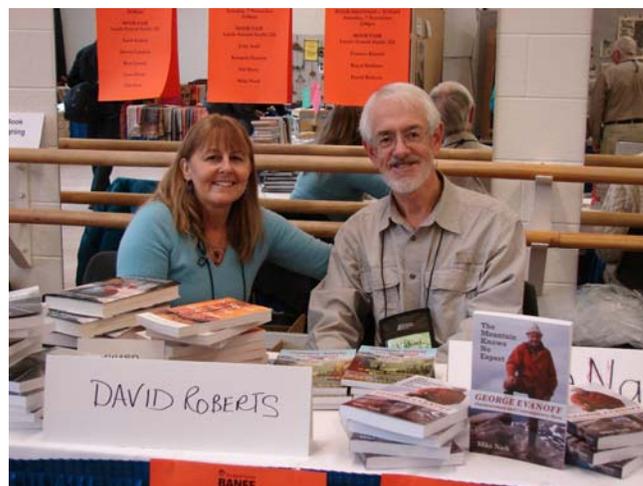


energy of a live audience. A high standard of professionalism was evident in the festival organization throughout the week, and the facilities, tech support, and technical rehearsal at Banff were great to work with. Far from being intimidating, these factors helped the presentation go well, from my perspective and from feedback received.



Later, following the morning intermission, I was on a panel discussing biography, autobiography and ghost-writing. In some ways this was more demanding than my presentation, but it afforded me a further venue to talk about the writing of the book and helped me to keep the focus of the earlier presentation on George. After these two stage appearances, I still had other book-signing venues during the book and film festivals, which provided yet more interesting opportunities to interact with other author-presenters.

The Mountain Knows No Expert – George Evanoff, Outdoorsman and Contemporary Hero (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2009) was named a finalist in the Mountain Literature category and was also one of twelve titles considered for the Canadian Rockies Award.



Mike Nash with Café Books' Joy McLean

The eventual winner of the Mountain Literature award was *Beyond the Mountain* by high altitude climber, Steve House, and I found myself sitting next to House on the biography panel.

Among many other interesting people at the combined book and film festivals this year were Ueli Steck, who soloed the north face of the Eiger in two hours and forty-seven minutes, and Royal Robbins, a legendary rock climber of the 1950s and 1960s who held his audience with stories of adventure from his youth, told from the perspective of wisdom gained through age.



The beautiful, but as ever challenging drive between Prince George and Banff in early November capped the week with a dramatic early-winter journey through the Rocky Mountains. The Icefield Parkway reflected its name with hundreds of kilometres of driving on ice; but the weather was kind, and the scenery was at its best — with new snow on all the peaks and lakes still open and blue.

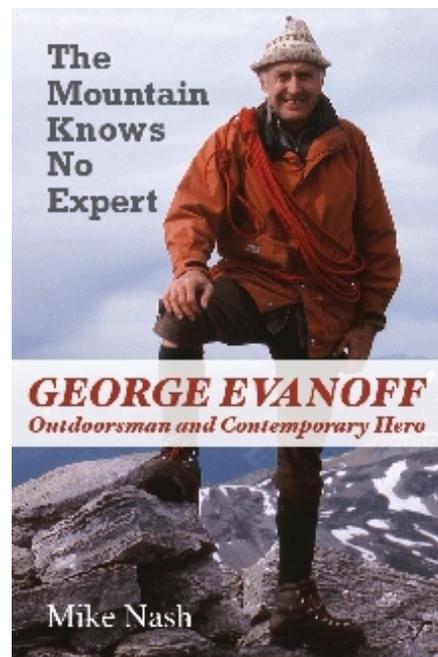


At one viewpoint stop, the stark grandeur was accentuated by fresh wolf and grizzly bear tracks in the morning's new snow, a fitting end it seemed to me, to an eleven-year journey. It was near this spot when returning from Banff in 1998 that a stranger, having ascertained in passing conversation what I had been doing, asked, "...are you a writer?" Giving voice to an idea that had been slowly taking form, but still surprising myself with the answer, I replied, "Yes."

*Mike Nash
November 2009.*

Photo Credits: Judy Lett and Mike Nash

Mike's presentation about the inspirational George Evanoff is available to clubs or other groups on request.



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