

Talking book industry booms for Canadian entrepreneur

It is pleasant to relax in your favourite chair and enjoy a good book. It is even more pleasant when you do not have to turn the pages. Now, instead of reading, you can hear the exploits of *Smiley's People*, *Jane Eyre* and *Alice in Wonderland* courtesy of Listen for Pleasure Limited.

A small Downsview, Ontario firm, Listen for Pleasure, is the leader in the talking book industry in North America. But getting there was not easy. The company had to fight an uphill battle to market books on cassettes.

"The only reference to talking books prior to our arrival on the market had been 30 years of publicity from organizations like the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and the Library of Congress in the United States," says Terry Durkin, president of Listen for Pleasure. "We had to overcome the consumers' notion that talking books were something that only blind or handicapped people used."

The company seems to have done the job. Since beginning in 1980, the firm has sold almost a quarter of a million units at a suggested retail price of \$13.95 and increased the selection from 37 to 79 titles. "We expect to have 90 titles by the end of 1983," Mr. Durkin says.

"We hope to build up our drama section. Not only are dramatizations effective on tape but Shakespearian plays were designed to be performed in two to three hours, so that fits in with our two 90-minute cassettes."

The idea of selling abridged books on cassettes (running on average for 2.5 hours) was developed by a subsidiary of EMI Thorne Group in Britain. Mr. Durkin heard about EMI's cassettes through a request to his Library Sounds Systems Ltd., which supplies educational recordings to libraries and schools. "If it was selling in Britain, why not here?" says Mr. Durkin. "So I approached EMI, negotiated a deal and set up Listen for Pleasure as a separate company to handle the Canadian rights to the British cassettes."

Mr. Durkin's entrepreneurial drive spurred Listen for Pleasure to a larger role than a distributor of imports. Now he can stress the Canadian content of his product. "Even though the master tapes are recorded in Britain by British actors, we have contracted Ontario-based firms to do package design, printing, die-casting and tape reproduction."

His goal was to expand into the United States and prove to EMI that his company was capable of handling the entire North American market. "With the US entry, sales are growing rapidly," Mr. Durkin says. "Last year sales were divided evenly between Canada and the United States. This year our Canadian market hasn't changed but things are booming in the US — to the point that we expect 80 per cent of our product to be sold there."

"We kept our staff streamlined with six people at head office (Downsview) and sent five people to Lewiston, New York to set up an American link."

Durkin's staff look after inventory, promotions and finances. He has Canadian distributors to co-ordinate sales in each of the educational direct mail and retail markets, in addition to American distributors who operate in the same three markets.

With a growing market and working capital on hand, Listen for Pleasure hopes to sell 2 to 3 million units in North America by 1985. And if Terry Durkin has his way, the company will continue to expand its markets all over the world.

Research on spine called 'fantastic'

Two Montreal brain researchers have made startling discoveries they describe as "an essential first step" if regeneration of the spinal cord is to become a reality.

Dr. Peter Richardson and Dr. Michael Rasminsky of McGill University, Montreal, told the Canadian Paraplegic Foundation in Toronto that nerves of the central nervous system (CNS) will grow into a piece of peripheral nerve grafted to a damaged spinal cord.

(Peripheral nerves, such as nerves from arms or fingers, are known to regrow after injury, but brain and spinal cord nerves were thought not to regenerate.)

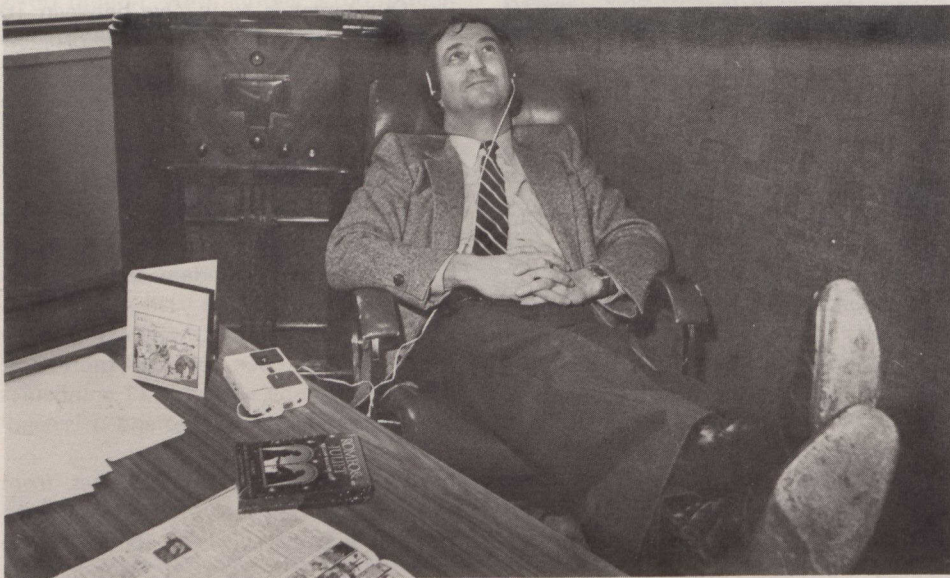
A "bypass" for a severed spinal cord is still far off — Dr. Rasminsky said the scientists do not know yet if the nerve fibres would function, or even continue to grow — if they are "plugged back into the CNS".

However, Dr. Charles Tator is greatly encouraged by their research. "Prior to this," he said, "we didn't know if the central nervous system had the potential to grow out into grafts. Unfortunately, it has not yet reached the stage where one would want to try it on a patient."

Dr. Tator is head of neurosurgery at Toronto's Sunnybrook Medical Centre and internationally known for his research and treatment of spinal cord injuries.

The Canadian Paraplegic Foundation was formed in 1981 to focus attention and research on spinal cord injury which affects an estimated 20 000 Canadians.

Dr. Rasminsky said grafts have been carried out on various parts of the brain in rats, including the cortex, the cerebellum (the part of the brain responsible for the fine tuning of physical movements) and the brainstem (responsible for autonomic functions, such as breathing).



Terry Durkin, president of Listen For Pleasure relaxes with a talking book. The abridged books are recorded on cassettes for easy listening.