

West Port Book Festival – You have been bugged...

✘ by Sonja Bettina Klein

Everyone has been on a bus at least once in their lives wondering what the person sitting behind was talking about on the phone. It is in the inquisitive nature of human beings to need to know. But what do you do when you can't find out what the story behind the fragments of the conversation is? You become a writer, and write a story about it.

“bugged” is a collaboration work of many authors that took part in a national experiment of turning eavesdropping into a story. On Saturday, some of these stories were presented at the West Port Book Festival in Peter Bell Books. “What have they been talking about?” was the main idea of the experiment which was used to spark the creativity of writers. Jo Bell, one of the instigators of the experiment and the book, led the hour of short stories and poems.

Famous poets such as Rob A. Mackenzie, Helen Addy and Lynsey May took the audience on to a journey through different writing styles and stories. Who would have thought that a simple sentence as “Got a pen, Bob?” could turn into a story that catches hold of the audience.

Although the ambulance outside on West Port and the cars passing by sometimes interrupted the presentation, the audience listened with rapt attention to the various readers.


One or two people in the audience took out their notebooks and scribbled down words while the poets read, and the idea of writing a story out of a single overheard sentence or communication seemed to interest everyone.

“Following the 1st of July 2010, the writers had 6 weeks to send in their stories and we had 6 weeks to get it published.”, says Bell. “It was a challenge, especially as I’m a poet and this story really required to be prose.”

“Many writers told us they don’t know what to write about. But we even had to turn down some stories in the end, and when I went online later to read up about these people I saw that we had turned down some of Britain’s best authors.”

“But we also wanted to give some writers a chance that hadn’t been published yet.”

Many of the stories were captured from everyday conversations, overheard in a café in Edinburgh itself, a statement turned into Chinese whisper and many more, often with a serious background.

The hour of prose and poetry left the audience feeling  slightly poetic, too. As Jo Bell commented:- “The streets are heaving with raw material for writers”.

