

Millie Gray chats to the Edinburgh Reporter about her latest book



Acclaimed Leith author Millie Gray's eagerly awaited book, 'Moving On' was published in October and the inspirational 82-year-old 'Arts Champion for Older People in Scotland' has kindly taken time out from her busy schedule to chat to the Edinburgh Reporter about her upbringing which inspired her literary success.

Remarkably, Millie who recently earned a prestigious award in West Lothian for inspiring people with mental health problems to engage with the arts, only wrote her first book at the age of 75.

Local company Black and White Publishing quickly spotted her talent and since then, Millie has written one book each year, to the delight of her growing army of fans throughout the world.

Her first book, 'In a Class of Their Own' tells the story of one family's life in Leith through the dark and difficult years of the Second World War.

Based on her real-life wartime experiences the book recreates the atmosphere of the time with all the hardships and struggles as well as the fun and humour of everyday life.

'Moving On' continues to follow the Anderson family as they strive to wrestle with the ups and downs of life in peacetime Britain.

As local politician Johnny Anderson prepares for a life in politics promising to fight for a fairer society and to serve

the constituents of the large new housing developments of the extensive Granton area, his daughter Kitty falls in love with a dashing young Canadian doctor.

When he betrays her she vows to devote the rest of her life to the service of others but as the years pass, a regular prison visit becomes the highlight of her life.

Millie told the Edinburgh Reporter: "I was born at 33 Admiralty Street in Leith which was a slum and had actually been condemned in the 1920s but was only demolished in 1952 and my granny was still living there at that time.

"Forty people stayed in the tenement and shared the same toilet but we managed to get a corporation house in Restalrig and we thought we had arrived as we had a bathroom and lavatory to ourselves.

"I started to write books when I was 75 and have written roughly one per year since. My first book was called 'In a class of their own' however if anyone decides to read my books they should start with '18 Couper Street' which is a prequel and sets the scene.

"All my books have achieved great success in Scottish libraries. The age group of the people who read my books belong to a library culture and don't bother if a comma is in the wrong place.

"Last year, my books were taken out over 40,000 times, in fact there is always a waiting list but I am aware that others who have bought the books have sent them all around the world to relatives in the USA and Australia.

"They are all situated in Leith and are based on truth, incorporating real stories which are woven around fictional characters.

"Moving On' deals with the political upheaval in the aftermath

of WWII including the introduction of the Welfare State and the National Health Service and how people moved on. Everyone thought that life would be easy but it doesn't work out like that.

"The main character is Kittie Anderson, a strong woman who became a staff nurse who looks to have found the love of her life.

"I think it is important for people to see the extent of that world, the conditions that people lived in and how people struggled to get employment, struggled to get holiday pay or reduced hours. Lots of people worked hard to bring up families in tough circumstances.

"Education was seen as a chance to get out and for a better life and better housing.

"We have come a long way in only three generations. Nowadays children on the whole have enough food but if you go through generations there is a different understanding of poverty. Today people who don't have a computer might be considered poor.

"I think it is important to remember that part of their history and that it was a struggle."

Millie's books so far include : In a class of their own, In a league of their own, Crystal's Song, Eighteen Couper Street, The Tangling of the web, When sorry is not enough, Silver Linings and Moving On.