

Irvine Welsh on near death moment

Irvine Welsh has told how he was once almost killed when a double decker bus he was travelling on to watch his beloved Hibs crashed and he was hurled through the front windscreen onto the motorway.

The Trainspotting author said the fact he was drunk saved him as it made him “rubbery” as he “bounced along the road”.

The incident, in which another football fan died, was a turning point for Welsh as he received £2000 in compensation. The money helped him buy his first flat in London, where he wrote diaries that would eventually become his classic first novel, Trainspotting, published in 1993.

The author reveals all in a new feature length documentary, “Choose Irvine Welsh”, which had its world premiere at the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF).

Speaking in the film, he says: “The bus crash was one of my near death experiences. I’ve had quite a few of these bastards.

“We were on a bus going to a Hibs (versus) Dundee United game and the bus blew over in the wind, which is a strange thing to happen to a bus.

“I was in the top deck of it. One guy, Mark McGhee, was killed. The bus fell over and smashed up and skited along the

motorway.

"I woke up in the Perth Royal Infirmary. I didn't really know that much about what had happened. I was very drunk, which was a saving grace because when you're drunk you're very rubbery.

"I think what happened was I went through the front windscreen of the bus but the bus went one way and I kind of bounced along the road the other way, which is good because I didn't get caught up in the bus.

"A pal of mine, Sandy Macnair, was injured as well and he was in the Bridge of Earn hospital two miles away... we used to meet in our dressing gown and slippers.

"I got some money for it, which was a good thing for me because it meant I could get on the property ladder. I decided to use it to buy a flat in Amhurst Road (in London).

"Two grand – this was in the early eighties – was quite decent money then, it felt like a decent wage."

Welsh says he was "already quite druggie" and had "self-destructive tendencies", but the flat gave him "a bit of stability". He stumbled into a desk job and started writing Trainspotting as "an antidote" to the prospect of being "a nine-to-five-type guy forever".

Welsh eventually returned to Leith and worked for Edinburgh City Council writing reports, which he says gave him the skills to "smash out loads of words and be able to research something that you knew nothing about".

He added: "I thought 'this is going to f***** kill me'. I just thought I've got to write this book that is about these old diaries that I've had that I'd been compulsively writing.

"When I could do nothing, basically, but sit on a couch and stare at walls, I found that I had the obsession to write these diaries... I kind of just went for it, smashed the book

out.”

Welsh tells the fim how the book attracted the attention of publishers, but he initially ignored their messages, thinking they were a prank.

He said: “I thought it was one of my mates in the pub ripping the piss out of me so I ignored all the messages and they kept coming. Letters started to arrive on official notepaper so I thought I’d better get in touch with this guy.

“I thought ‘this’ll be out next week’ but it was two years later it came out... I just thought ‘give them it and it’ll be in the shops next week’.

“The Acid House came out six months later which is almost unheard of in publishing. I just carried on after Trainspotting.”

Welsh, 64, discusses his life from growing up in Edinburgh to his times in London, San Francisco and Miami.

The film also includes contributions from famous faces like actors Martin Compston, Stephen McCole and Simon Weir to musicians like Iggy Pop, the Alabama 3 and Primal Scream’s Bobby Gillespie as well as music mogul Alan McGhee, TV presenter Gail Porter and Trainspotting filmmakers Andrew Macdonald and Danny Boyle.

Welsh insists none of his Trainspotting characters was based on any individual. He sourced names from the telephone directory, but admitted one family did suffer from his decision to use their name, which would become synonymous with his most thuggish character, Begbie.

He said: “I’m not really interested in representing anybody from real life in fiction, but I’m interested in observing traits and characteristics of people in real life and mixing them up to make a kind of character that feels realised.

“The names came from the phonebook and funnily enough when I stayed in Muirhouse there was a family called the Begbies who lived down the road, so it must have been a subliminal thing.

“They were actually the nicest family ever so I think it was quite stigmatising to them that the nutter was named after them.

“The thing is that every nutter in Edinburgh thinks that they are Begbie – it’s always like ‘that’s f***** about me, eh?’ and I’m like ‘well, no’.

“The scariest ones are the ones who don’t see it in themselves and say ‘aye, there are some people like that though eh?’ and I go ‘hmm there are one or two’.

Welsh said the film adaptation, when it was released in 1996, gave his novel “another life”, adding that “it went global after that”.

