



December 2010

BOOK TOWN RICHMOND SYNOPSIS



Booktown Richmond's new HQ

For those of you wondering what happened to us after the festival, there is one word that best sums it up- FATIGUE. However, now that the pressures of the exam period at university are receding, I have had time, and distance to reflect on this years literary festival in Richmond.



*Despite the frenetic weekend some were lucky enough to take time to smell the roses!
Rian Malan always appreciated & sharp as ever ..*

In all honesty, I felt it was our best festival yet. And for that I must thank each and every speaker for making the arduous journey to the Great Karoo. Although our festival theme was 'The Coolie Odyssey', in many respects, the journey that writers make to come to Richmond is an odyssey. For our KZN crowd, it represents a journey of well in excess of 1000 kilometres. Of course this pales into insignificance when compared to the journey that Canadian writer Fred Stenson had to make! So I am eternally grateful to all of you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be a part of this fairytale. But I am sure that most of you will agree – coming to Richmond is food for the soul. It is a literary detox of our creative spirits. Mind you, after photographing people at the restaurants, many might have been in need of a detox of another persuasion. On the subject of restaurants – when I was leaving Richmond, one of the restaurateurs hugged me and said : Thank you for what you are doing. Last year I served 300-odd meals. This year I served 850 meals!

And that's only one restaurant. When I launched Booktown Richmond, I claimed that Booktowns the world over have a 'multiplier effect'. There is no better example to illustrate the point.

But back to the festival. What stood out for me? Well, I am not one to mince my words. I believe that Donal McCrackens talk on 'Saving the Zululand Wilderness' was probably the most entertaining talk in the history of Booktown Richmond. If you don't believe me, just look at this photo of Peter reacting to Donal.



Donal.... "I live for Ireland, I'll die for Ireland, I'll fight for Ireland...I'll do anything for Ireland but just don't ask me to live there"

Rajendra Chetty's talk on his book *The Vintage Collection: 150 Years of Indian Writing in SA* must go down as the best received talk in the history of Booktown Richmond. People were clapping so lustily that the energy propelled them to give him a standing ovation. It bordered on violent, I tell you. It was so well received that Rajendra has received invitations from people who heard him to give a talk in their neck of the woods.

Ahmed Kathrada was also a revelation. But I had a hunch he was such a person. I must admit that I don't have a soft spot for politicians. But Mr Kathrada is a statesman, a gentleman, modesty and humility personified. The DVD that we played preceding his talk was magical. And his book – no chest beating like other biographies, but a poetic treatise on a life spent in the pursuit of freedom.

And what about our coffee-table format books? What a derogatory term for some of the finest books I've read – Rosemary Rudd's *Wooden Buildings of South Africa*. Roger and Pat de la Harpe's book *In Search of the African Wild Dog*; Gerald Hoberman's *Lighthouses of South Africa*, and Angela Read Lloyds *Artist in the Garden* are perfect cases in point. Now I know that Jenny Crys-Williams usually gives her list of best Christmas buys, but I am telling you – these 3 books are a must. The photography is out of this world, and the sheer breadth of Rosemary's and Gerald's books especially are astounding. Mind you, if you are not on a shoe string budget, please support Gerald because he blew his car's engine on the way to Richmond. But thank you Gerald for still honouring your commitment to us. Mind you, *101 Country Churches of SA*, which I co-authored with Philippe Menache has done so well in the month after the festival that it has surpassed our wildest dreams. I would be punting it as a Christmas gift were it not for the fact that it sold out in a month! We only have a few copies left that we have had to hold back to honour our speaking commitments at literary festivals for 2011.

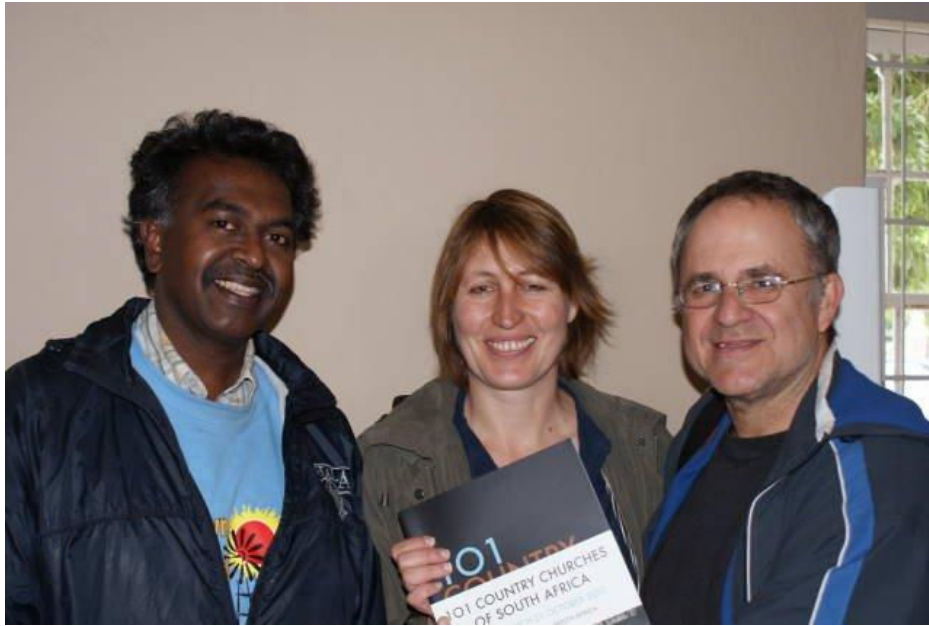
Fred Stenson was also a revelation. Used to Canadians being bombastic (no names mentioned!), I was expecting another loud Canadian. But what a humble, down to earth man Fred Stenson proved to be. A man who lets his writing do the talking for him. And for those of you who were not there, I was so taken by Fred Stenson's novel *The Great Karoo* that we awarded him the Booktown Literary Award for 2010. Of course, in true Booktown Richmond fashion, he knew nothing of this. One could see he was quite moved by the award. He gave the First Annual Bree O'Mara Memorial Lecture in honour of South African writer Bree O'Mara who died earlier in the year well before her time.



Canadian Fred Stenson Winner of BTR Book of the Karoo Year Award and presenter of the First Annual Bree O'Mara Memorial Lecture

Chris Marais and Julienne du Toit walked off with the Booktown Richmond Award in the Open Category for their beautiful book *Karoo Keepsakes*. If you haven't got a copy, you deserve to be shot. You can't come to Richmond in the Great Karoo and not know about this book. This book is truly a hymn to the Karoo. Beautiful photography and wonderful stories about the characters that brighten this bleak

looking landscape. Julienne should also be commended for the evocative title she chose for the book. Well done



Doyens of the Karoo, Jules & Chris Marias

For those of you new to Booktown Richmond, the literary awards are awarded to writers who live in the Karoo, or who write about the Karoo. So don't be upset – it doesn't mean your book was useless. It simply means that you must buy a house in Richmond!!!

In 2009, Jeni Couzyn and Julia Malgas won the inaugural award for their groundbreaking book *Koos Malgas – Sculptor of the Owl House*. The choice of this book won me just as many disapprovals as my theme for this year *The Coolie Odyssey*. In 2009, however, we only gave one award. But it worried me for the next year that I had overlooked that masterpiece by Gabriel Fagan *Flatroof Houses of the Karoo*. And so this year, I righted my wrongs by retrospectively awarding Mr Fagan the Book town Richmond Literary Award in the Open Category for 2009. For a man who has achieved so much in his lifetime, I was taken aback at how much the award meant to him.

Another wrong that I managed to right this year was to honour one of the Northern Cape's most famous sons – Sol Plaatje. Luckily, Stephen Gray told me of one Sabata Mokae who was about to publish a biography on Sol Plaatje. From Sabata's talk on Plaatje, you could see he was a man possessed, because not only did he publish the biography, but he also launched the Sol Plaatje Literary Festival after our festival. Strange, isn't it. Almost every town in the Northern Cape has some reference to Sol Plaatje. And yet it has taken 16 years for someone to see the need to celebrate the man for what made him famous – his writings. Sabata is also a journalist, so we hope he will spread the gospel according to David & Baker through his newspaper in Kimberley.

Booktown Richmond was also privileged to have Ingrid Winterbach at the festival talking on her book *Die Benederyk*. This is a daunting book by one of the indomitable female voices in Afrikaans. I must admit to being slightly intimidated by this book, but for those with an interest in art, the artist intertexts will prove to be very rewarding. It is a book I plan to prescribe for my 3rd years in 2011.



Ingrid Winterbach

Eben Venter, a true son of the Karoo, was once again in Richmond. Eben is a booksellers delight. He always sells all his book. Of course it helps that Eben suffers from a very rare condition – he never ages!- so he always has his admirers. But I admire Eben for his writing. *Brouhaha*, his latest offering of short stories will not disappoint. If you are looking for a good Christmas present, this is it people. His novel *Santa Gamka* is the closest Fred Stenson came to losing his award.

And Wynand Coetzer. What a lovely man. And so dedicated to his craft. Even dabbled in a drug or two to gain insight into his characters. He has inspired me to write an erotic thriller!!! But I feel blessed to have read *Skerpioen*. Read it and you'll see what I mean – authentic through and through. And to think I thought scientists couldn't write!

Loftus Marais – even his name sounds poetic now that the Blue Bulls are losing. Yes, young Loftus is a precocious talent. His articles in *By* are a treat, and his poetry sublime. And it was so nice to see a mother so proud of her son that she too came to hear him speak. Or maybe keep him on the straight and narrow!!! We can't wait for Loftus to return to Richmond with his second anthology.

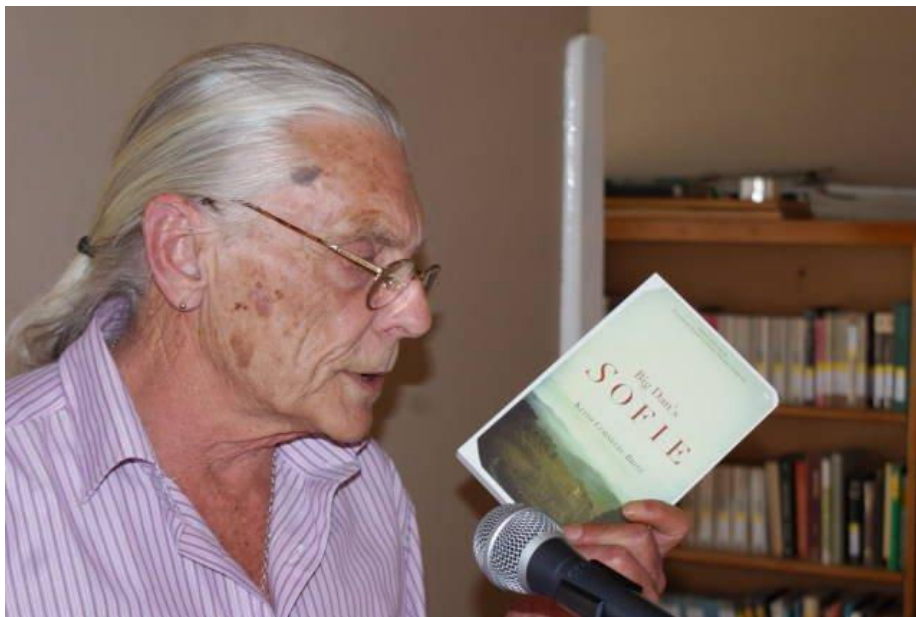
Poor old Kirby van der Merwe was looking decidedly edgy as he strode to the lecturn. Somewhat surprising for such a gifted writer and journalist, I thought. But after reading his wonderful article after the festival referring to me as 'The King of Coolitude', I understood why. Apparently, all of Richmond were very upset that *their* town would now be associated with such a derogatory word like Coolie. And with Kirby's talk asserting that the Indian influence stretches back at least two more centuries, and that we are all in a sense 'Coolies', he had every reason to be nervous. But Kirby is undoubtedly one of the top 3 journalists in SA, in my humble estimation, and his talk added a dimension to proceedings that none of us would have picked up on. It is a compliment to Kirby that Ahmed Kathrada picked up on what he had to say and quoted from Kirby's talk when he took centre stage.

Jonathan Jansen, was, well, Jonathan. The door to our venue refused to open after lunch, in fear of what Jonathan would say. The men of God were fearless and opened the church to hear his divine message. And what a message it proved to be. I want to thank Jonathan for driving all the way from Bloemfontein and back on the same day, simply to honour his commitment in Richmond. Jonathan makes you see the world anew. He makes you want to follow him to change this country for the better. He is charismatic, and yet blessed with humility. It makes one wonder why he cannot be Minister of Education in SA.



Prof Jansen enthralling in “the Big House”

Keith Britz – my old pal. Thank you for dedicating your book *Big Dads Sofie* to me. If ever there was a writer that epitomises the spirit of Booktown Richmond, it is Keith Britz with his never-say-die attitude. It took the man almost 25 years to get this book published, but he persevered. Well done, Keith.



Perennial Richmond House Guest

Chris Nicholson. What a gentleman; and what a lovely boyish sense of humour. And what a book. *Papwa – From Pariah to Legend*. This was certainly a story that warmed the hearts of the audience. It is surprising how few people knew one of the great sport stories in the history of SA. Thank you Chris, for resurrecting this story from the cracks of history.



Here come da Judge

Sadly, I did not get to hear Joanne Rushby, Chris Marais & Julie du Toit and Ronnie Govender, due to it being my wife's birthday on the opening day of the festival. I apologise to these speakers, but if I had to choose between making you or my wife angry...need I say any more? And thank you to Rajendra Chetty for kindly agreeing to chair the session. I heard Ronnie was on fire. Not sure what he had before his talk!!! And if you read Joanne Rushby's beautiful article in the Mail & Guardian, you will know that in Joanne we have a fan. She has already given me her topic for 2011. Now that's the spirit. And Chris & Jules are always a hit. Pity you didn't hear Chris sing. What a singular voice. And just to let Jules know – I've heard you too are something of a songstress. Get your act together for Schreiner 2011 in Cradock!!!

And then there was our good friend Denis Beckett. Seems like he couldn't wait to speak on his latest book *Radical Middle*, because he barged in on Rajendra's talk, unaware that the programme had changed somewhat. I must say Denis has been hobnobbing with the politicians recently. I am actually getting worried that someone is finally understanding his political thoughts. In fact, I am getting quite worried that he may just be on to something, because from all the reviews I've read thus far, apparently no one understood him 30 years ago either, but today they say his words have a prophetic ring to it. Luckily, he made a line on our newly painted walls while drawing an imaginary graph. So one day we will be able to boast – Denis Beckett left his mark on Booktown Richmond.



Jacana Press Writers Dinner



Denis and friend

The last word must go to Gail & David Robbins, who we hope will make Richmond Filums a permanent fixture. But more specifically, we would like to congratulate David on winning the South African Literary Association Life Time Contribution Award. When we invited David, I said that he would be coming to Richmond for years to come, because he has written 18 books in his lifetime. And it is so nice to see that his contribution has been celebrated through this accolade. Well done David!!



Gail & David

A special thanks to Douwe and his team from the National Library in Cape Town who for the second year hosted a book binding and document restoration workshop. It is always a regret that I never have the time to attend these workshops, but we at Booktown Richmond believe in the power of this initiative to empower people in Richmond to one day earn a living from this craft. It will be a slow road, but it will happen as we gain greater currency on the South African literary scene. We are hoping in the coming year to have two young people set up with some more training in Kimberley, and eventually to start a book restoration enterprise in the village.

A very big thank you to the perennial favourite Len Raymond of the Drakenstein Heritage Foundation and his wife Cathy who religiously make the trek each year to demonstrate to the folk just how lucky we are in Richmond to have the rich architectural heritage we sometimes take for granted. I must apologize to Len for my (PCB) error in not placing him on the programme....the same I confess applied to Richmond Filums and some of the other Off Broadway happenings...we'll do much better next year. We are also indebted to Julian and Martisan Theron who have so generously undertaken to do the Karoo Krawls on their farm out on the Deelfontein Road. The feedback from all of these activities has always been fantastic. And finally we are indebted to Harrie Siertsema and MAP Galleries for their exhibitions and hosting of the book restoration programme and WHAG art exhibit

And where were all of you for Justine Josias' concert. Oh, what a singular voice this young girl has. It gave me goose bumps. And for the first time, we saw the Coloured community out in their droves. Such was their adulation that a few young people decorated the hall to welcome Justine, a true Superster!!! For those of you who missed it, all I can say is that you missed one of the great emerging voices in SA. And to think we discovered one of the unsung heroes in Richmond – Sidwell.... What a voice this young man has! And totally unrehearsed, he and Justine thrilled the crowds with two duets. Talent personified. Richmond will never be the same again.



So to all of you, on behalf of Peter and myself, we want to thank you for putting Booktown Richmond on the map again this year with your continued support. As you are hopefully aware the Booktown Richmond annual BoekBedonnerd Bookfair is but a small part of the entire upliftment programme which we are still endeavouring to put together through the Richmond Community Development Foundation. Literacy programmes, libraries, skills training, job creation and the inculcation of a sense of pride in oneself through genuine upliftment and achievement are at the heart of the entire Booktown Richmond exercise. If you feel you have something to offer and would like to get involved we are on the other end of the phone!

We continue to receive generous support from the Northern Cape Government for which we are very grateful and appreciative. I believe that Booktown Richmond is a shining example of what the private sector can and will continue to do with the right governmental funding. Here's to a greater 2011!

And just in case you can't wait a year to return to Richmond, great news! Booktown Richmond is proud to announce the launch of the inaugural **JM Coetzee Literary Festival** over the last weekend in May 2011. Below just a snippet from the book website...the link follows at the end of this write-up.

The end of the year is fast approaching, so we would like to take this opportunity to extend to you, your families and friends a most wonderful Christmas and the happiest and fulfilled of New Years, 2011.



Booktown Richmond

P.S.

by Ben - Editor on Dec 2nd, 2010



Alert! It might as well be 2011 already.

No sooner had Mervyn and myself [announced the Open Book Cape Town festival for September next year](#) than a notice from our friends (alter egos?) Darryl David and Peter Baker in Richmond, Northern Cape appeared in our inboxes, announcing... the inaugural JM Coetzee Literary Festival, to take place in Richmond in the final week of May.



My first question to Darryl was, naturally: Have you got JMC?! His cagey reply: “Not yet”. Unlike the [“Is dit JM Coetzee?” festival held last May in Amsterdam](#), then – which Coetzee attended – it would appear that we have the first *unauthorised* (for now) Coetzee-dedicated litfest on our hands.



David, who, apart from having founded Richmond’s [Boekbedonnerd](#), also organises the [Midlands Meander](#) and [Spirit of Olive Schreiner](#) litfests, explains the genesis of his latest idea:

Ever since we launched Book Town Richmond in 2007, I’ve agonised over the fact that there was little chance of us ever honouring our two Nobel Laureates, Nadine Gordimer and J.M Coetzee. The problem as I saw it had everything to do with a writer’s sense of place. Cradock, for instance

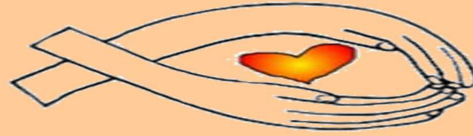
<http://book.co.za/blog/2010/12/02/from-the-founders-of-book-town-richmond-and-boekbedonnerd-the-jm-coetzee-literary-festival-may-2011/>

BUILDING COMMUNITIES THROUGH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

**Richmond Community Development Foundation
(RCDF)**

**P.O. Box 1608
Parklands
2121 Johannesburg
South Africa**

**33 Loop Street
Richmond
Northern Cape
South Africa**



**REGISTERED AS A SECTION 21 COMPANY
INCORPORATED NOT FOR GAIN**

REGISTRATION NUMBER 2008/00/1433/08