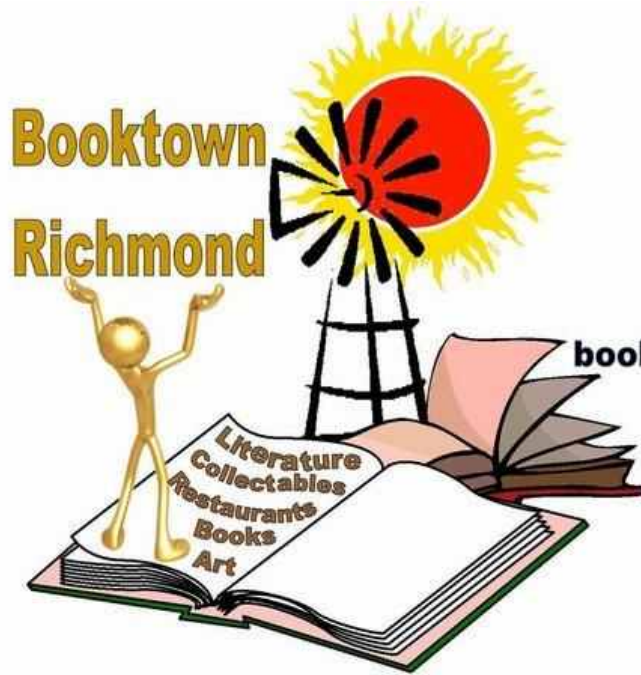




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Don't Frack With Our Karoo™

Booktown Richmond's 6th Anniversary

BookBedonnerd V October 25,26, 27, 2012

A Richmond Community Development Foundation Project

BOOKTOWN RICHMOND 2012 REPORTBACK

You thought we had forgotten about all of you, didn't you. Our humblest apologies, but once out of Booktown Richmond we have to land back on terra firma of the real world and start again doing what real people have to do. That 4 lettered word.

We were on fire at BoekBedonnerd 2012! I think that it is safe to say that when many of you left Richmond, it was with a heavy heart but with a feeling of great joy to have been part of such a great weekend. It was truly special. Undoubtedly BookBedonnerd V was the best festival to date. We knew it was going to be a good year when we saw the crowds on the first morning. Usually we only fill up by lunch on Friday, the second day, but as the festival has matured, so too have the bibliophiles, and now they don't want to miss a word. Our journalists have also matured. In the old days they took down notes with pen and paper. Now the likes of Tymon Smith can be seen with fingers dancing like spiders on iPads, spinning yarns for webs of a different sort.

I said it right from the start. Hector Kunene came to Richmond as an unknown. But I predicted that everyone present would know who he was by the time he left. And I was right. By the time the 'Kanga taker' left Richmond, he also left with our hearts and admiration. Costumed in a rainbow, multicolored, harlequin, condo-commando, outfit he was an entertainer *par excellence*!



Anton Schoombee was next up and he was a great addition for the festival. At Richmond, we pride ourselves on finding interesting speakers, and Anton's talk on his magnificent obsession - collecting signatures - had us spellbound. It was a really interesting account and story of the characters he has stalked and we shudder at the thought that he almost didn't come; in addition to a great talk he was also superb company in the evenings as well, a true Richmond all-rounder.



Find of the Festival

After tea, it was the turn of Anni Snyman and her land art project. She strode into the venue with a bright red scarf. Days before she rode into Richmond in a bright red Alfa Mito. Definitely a *fashionista* this one! And they would have us believe that they were slogging under the harsh Karoo sun and creating land art in the form of a Riverine Rabbit in Richmond, but whenever I saw them, they were poshly dressed with a glass of wine in hand. But many thanks to Anni and her team for bringing a truly unique project to Richmond.



No not Marilyn Monroe

Tod Collins, my old mate from Underberg, told us about his journey from being a vet to author of animal tales. Tod can shame many an academic with his exposition of how one crafts a short story, and Welma Odendaal remarked that Tod's story was a classic example of how one goes about creating suspense. Considering where that vet's hand has been, it is unsurprising that he has such interesting stories to tell.



Vets are perhaps some of the most intelligent, clever, handsome, witty, and entertaining people on the planet....

Just before lunch, Cyril Hromnik gave one of the talks of the festival. Never before had I heard such controversial thoughts that Indians were actually the first people in Africa; that the San could not be the civilisation that brought us rock art, nor the rock temples and markers on the Karoo landscape. This is a talk I will never forget as long as I live. And as I told Cyril, maybe people will soon stop saying to me: 'What is an Indian doing in the Karoo?'

Lunch was a wonderful affair. There was a buzz in town, and Richmonders must be congratulated for putting on a smorgasbord of delicacies. This was truly a highlight of the festival for me. I feel like leaving my desktop as I am typing, because I am feeling hungry just thinking about the food.

After lunch, Chris Nicholson was at his sublime best. I have always claimed, like M-Net, that if there is magic out there, we will find it. And I am proud to say it was I who discovered Chris. Everyone knew him as the man who set Jacob Zuma free; we know him for his Cricket SA investigations. But I know him as the author of great books on *Papwa Sewgolum*; on the *Cradock Four*; and this book on *Wagner and Hitler* was spectacular. That book should have earned Chris an Honorary Doctorate. It is a lesson in how research should be conducted.



Chris Nicholson, always good value for money..

Syddra Essop's book? WOW! What a book. I know a thing or two about food. I have the stomach to prove it, so I know a bit about cookbooks. And let me just say - this is in my estimation one of the greatest cookbooks that I have ever seen. For weeks I could not get this book out of my head. Quiver Tree Publishers must be commended for producing a book of such extraordinary beauty. And clearly I am not the only one who thought so, because last week, *Karoo Kitchen* won the Gourmand Award for Best Local Cookbook in SA. Sydda will now go to Paris in the New Year to hear if international accolades await her.

Nico Moolman, like Hector Kunene, is not a household name in literary circles. But by the time he closed proceedings on day one, there could have been little doubt that we were standing next to a man who had penned a great book, *The Boer Whore*. This is a book which will gain the recognition it certainly deserves. Like Sonja Loots' *Sirkusboere*, it is a story that has been excavated from the Anglo-Boer War over a century ago. After the festival, Nico told me that someone had bought the film rights for his book. I sincerely hope it makes it to the screen, because it is sheer magic.

Welma Odendaal: I am not ashamed to say I only came to know of Welma's writing about 4 years ago. Students are not what they used to be and when they don't pitch, I usually pick a book from our library and just read. *Verlate Plekke* was my choice and I immediately fell in love. Strangely enough one of the stories I most admired in that anthology was *PA*. How strange then that she should read a story about the death of her mother at Richmond. And I learnt so much about Durban architecture from the story. Thank you Welma.

André Pretorius is one of my favourite travel writers in Afrikaans. He is Mr. Slow Hand personified when it comes to describing the far off places he visits, so I was thrilled when he said he would come out from England to speak at BookBedonnerd. What shocked me about André though is how British his English is, and yet how good his Afrikaans has remained. Having heard him speak at Richmond, I was pleased to learn from the man who brings the far flung places of the world to life on the pages of *BY* at least once a month, of his new book *Eilande en Enklaves* which chronicles his travels to some amazing places. It was a talk that no student of travel writing should have missed.



André and Parents...sorry for the slow service!!!

After tea, Jeanette Ferreira had me guessing her age. She really looks youthful as she spoke about her collection of stories around the *Boereoorlog* and *Grensoorlog*. But I left with the impression that Jeanette has been almost scarred by the stories she has heard. At times I saw her eyes tear up after recounting a moving story. But when she ended her talk about 10 minutes early she had all of us in a panic as our next speaker Sarah Lotz was nowhere to be seen. We scrambled around like the proverbial headless chickens and eventually found her a while later outside one of the restaurants. Sarah has to be one of the free-est spirits ever to have visited Richmond. Her life's story is amazing; her co-authorship with her daughter was even more amazing, her honesty about some of her books flopping, refreshing. Like Denis Beckett she does not talk much about her books per se. Master sales people these two, I thought to myself when I read a few weeks later that Sarah had just landed a six figure contract with one of the major publishing houses. No crime in writing pulp fiction I suppose if these are the rewards, eh Sarah???

Needless to say, Clinton du Plessis was merrily taking in the sights when I yanked him off the street 10 minutes before his scheduled talk. All courtesy of Jeanette Ferreira!!! But boy did Clinton not wow the crowds with his poetry through a blend of some hard hitting, no holds barred social commentary and innovative genius pertaining to the layout of his poems. By the time he had finished he got a standing ovation. I don't know what he smoked before his talk but it was a completely new Clinton from the man I met in his home town of Cradock through my Schreiner Festival. It was exhilarating stuff from one of the most under-estimated voices in Afrikaans poetry; so go and read his report on the festival on Litnet. How he wove the lyrics of the Eagles into his report was the stuff of genius

Taking us into lunch of Day Two was a heavyweight of Afrikaans literature - Alexander Strachan. Alexander you can see is a quiet, introverted soul, a man who you can see thinks deeply about life. And even though a dizzy spell forced him to sit and deliver his talk, those of us wanting to learn the craft of writing a novel were left giddy with



Alexander Strachan in down time...

delight by this craftsman. *Dwaalpoort* and Alexander Strachan's oeuvre are definitely going to occupy the thoughts of academics and readers for years to come

After a delicious lunch Mike Nicol showed all and sundry why he is rated so highly. That a major literary prize can escape a writer of such audacious talent makes a mockery of literary prizes. This was a satirical glimpse into the world of crime writing. It was pure charm by Mike and had the audience in stitches. I just hope Mike is able to build on this and do a Nabokov on the South African crime fiction scene.



Please someone give this man a watch!

Dan Wylie spoke movingly about his mentor - Don MacLennan, and the genesis of the book that he co-edited with Craig McKenzie about Don MacLennan. As good as it was though, it was his throw away remark of 'Can I use the little time left to talk about my own anthology?' That had the audience wishing they could have heard more. The poetry that Dan read out was superb. Congratulations Dan!

Paul Weinberg. What a gentle soul. As long as I live I will always have memories of this gentle, kind man. Years of gently depressing the shutter to prevent camera shake must have rubbed off on one of this country's great photographers. *Dear Edward* is a personal journey in the footsteps of Paul's family. I think Paul took a spread of super pictures using a small digital for the book and like Obie Oberholzer, the accompanying text was a revelation; a wonderful wordsmith as well.



Dear Paul

Supper on evening two was an entertaining affair. Ashwin Desai was in the company of David and Renaye Kramer and he was tipsy after his second glass of wine; no doubt because the food took so long to arrive. (He asked me to include the last sentence!!!). If you thought Ashwin's talk the next day was magnificent, we were privileged to a virtuoso performance during and after dinner. It was undoubtedly one of the highlights of our time at Booktown Richmond.



Ashwin....the man lion

By 8.00am the following morning I saw a somewhat....hung-over Peter Baker sauntering up to BTRHQ to open the venue. The poor man must have been scared out of his wits thinking he was late because the queues had already begun forming for Deon Meyer's talk. Now bear in mind that Deon had already filled the hall with an Afrikaans audience the day before and treated them to a taste of things to come from his next novel. So to fill a hall the second time to a somewhat different audience I might add takes some doing. If Jonathan Ball in the form of Anika had been worried that the Karoo would not be the ideal place to have the national launch of *7 Days*, she had a smile that stretched right into 2013 when she bumped into me as I was hustling a few chairs from anywhere to cater for the large crowds. I tried to feign concern to festival goers, but deep down I had a smile that stretched into 2014!!! This is the stuff of dreams for festival organisers!



Dream Festival and throngs of wonderful people, we were choc a bloc

Deon opened with a retort to Mike Nicol. The previous day Mike was on about how gullible readers are because they want the same hero appearing in every book and how authors are afraid to kill off their heroes because they bring in money through sales. So Mike makes a jibe: 'that is why Deon owns a Rolex and has just bought a brand new BMW bike.'

Deon opens with: 'I have given my Rolex to Mike Nicol.' I would have liked to say the crowds were rolling in the aisles metaphorically speaking, but that was quite literally the case on this glorious morning. Deon had looked a bit tired the previous day but when he introduced me to his beautiful wife later in the evening looking the picture of youth, I could not help but hum that Smokey Robinson classic: 'Now that we are younger than we were last night...'

Deon Meyer is truly a man at the pinnacle of his powers. It has been a long climb to the top but a well deserved one. We at Booktown Richmond cannot thank him enough for what he has done for our town. Did you see the articles that appeared after the festival about Booktown Richmond? So a special thanks to Anika and Jonathan Ball.



Big Thanks To Jonathan Ball & Anika

Next up was Naomi Moolman, wife of Nico Moolman who had spoken on Thursday. Naomi is the lady who created that huge quilt about the Anglo Boer War for the Women's Monument in Bloemfontein. They say dynamite comes in small packages but this petite lady is a ticking time bomb. Everyone who heard Naomi speak was treated to interesting subject matter and even more interesting anecdotes about men! Luckily Nico had to sit at his table with all his books and Naomi's quilts

Fanie Naude undoubtedly came to Richmond with the book of 2012. It literally scooped every prize on offer. Fanie was a lawyer who swapped the scales for a pen and weren't we all glad for that. Make sure you read the wonderful story..... Is it just me or are there traces of Eben Venter's masterpiece *Ek Stamel Ek Sterwe* in the story?



After tea it was the turn of another slightly built woman but of imposing stature. Gwen Fagan is a household name in SA, and a fundi on roses. All I can say is 'what a book'; truly a labour of love. When you listen to Gwen talk you wonder if Gawie does any work at all.

But that notion was soon dispelled when we learnt Gawie Fagan did the photography. This is a book in the same class, if not better than Gawie's *Flat Roof Houses Of The Karoo*. As one speaker noted: who would have thought roses could be so interesting? Of course my daughter will never forget Gwen after she said she smuggled a rose plant out of Brazil I think by hiding it in her panties. I sincerely hope it was a thornless variety Gwen!!!



Karin Brynard strode to the microphone with one arm in plaster. Now you know what I mean when I say I had to twist a speakers arm to come to Richmond!!! Let that be a warning to all of you writers out there. Of course I felt very bad about Karin's mum not liking the name of our festival. No problems of this nature for Karin though because I think the majority of people out there are going to love *Onse Vaders* which has garnered rave reviews since its launch.



Don't you dare ...

During the lunch break David Kramer had to set up his equipment. It was then that you got a glimpse of the adoration people have for the man. One Richmonder actually asked David to sign his shirt. But I also got a glimpse of the price of fame. Literally when in the public glare the man has no peace, but he is a true gentleman and greeted every single person with his patented country boy charm.

I went up the road to my guesthouse below Vegkop to say a quick Howzit to my wife, and saw that Ashwin Desai was only just waking up!! (Just for the record he was not in my bedroom) I know Ashwin to be nervous before his talks so he said that the rest was ordered by the Doctor. Ashwin was due to speak at 2pm but by 1pm the hall was full in anticipation of David Kramer. Not even the delicious smells of braaing lamb in the quadrangle next door could pull people away.



Let the good times roll..

Ashwin was at his irrepressible best when the session started for he is undoubtedly one of the brightest and most ferreting of minds in SA. He is certainly one of the top orators in the country. When I was a student at university I used to attend political rallies just to hear Ashwin speak. It just goes to show how old he is and how young I am!! But seriously his *Shakespeare on Robben Island*, what a brilliant idea for a book. Long may it continue Ashwin.

My co-author Philippe Menache and I had the unenviable task of being sandwiched between Ashwin and David Kramer. But if I must say so myself, our book was a thing of beauty. Philippe was his usual competent, composed self, and the Romantic in me caused me to shed a tear or two. One never knows how long these good times will last. Since then Philippe has been interviewed by Jenny Crys Williams

for an entire 13 minutes. Even Booktown Richmond has not as yet cracked the nod! We hope to chip away at the idea of church tourism in the year ahead. The Karoo is the right place to have a festival built around churches. I have Aberdeen in my sights!!!



Just had to include one of the sights.....

And then the moment everyone had been waiting for: David Kramer. I had waited for this day for almost five years, well actually for about 25 years! Every BookBedonnerd I would write to David, every year he was busy. My wife asked me: can't you take a hint? Well no dear, I actually can't! That is how I ended up marrying you! And besides, I have a sixth sense about writers; something told me David Kramer is a good man. No man can have a social conscience like that and not have a good heart. That is why David thanked me at the end 'for not giving up on him'

Those present would have noticed my interview with David got off to a rocky start. I did not write down my questions. I typed them on my Blackberry, and then promptly lost them, leaving me a bumbling.....you know! Fortunately David noticed my dilemma and just let the conversation flow easily between us and his karrooning (sic) which had the jam packed old library tapping feet, clapping hands and in stitches of enthralled enjoyment. He is truly one of this country's super stars and nice guys.

We forget David Kramer is over 60. But all in attendance would agree: the voice and those signature moves are seemingly timeless. His song *Wakkers/aap* showed us we were in the being entertained by a Dylanesque poet; not just a performer. By the time he had performed a few of his classics, everyone had a smile on their face and laughter in their feet. The hairs on my arm saluted the greatest South African musician in my books. Some may have a greater range with their voice but David Kramer is the complete package. He is to SA what Elvis was to America. No one



Something funny and something serious....

moves like David Kramer. And he is an artist. He experiments with genres and his career is guided by the Johnny Walker slogan: "Keep walking". What he did with *Karoo Kitaar Blues* was nothing short of amazing. He is the Breyten Breytenbach of the musical world. He has spoken with a moral authority over a sustained period like no other musician. And I am sure everyone who was in Richmond would agree with me.





What a boytjie in our midsts..

But what I will remember most of the man is his boyish charm and razor like wit. When one of the audience asked if he had been for voice training, without evening thinking, he replied: Can't you tell!!!!

And who could ever forget that remark about 'my voel kry vlerke' comment when I presented him with the beautiful statue that all writers received. Now I know why Renaye kept such a low profile during the show.

I woke up the next morning on such a high. And as I drove out of Richmond my heart sang that old Dionne Warwick classic

I know I'll never love this way again

So I keep holding on

Before the good is gone

I know I'll never love this way again

Hold on, hold on, ho-oh-oh-oh-hold on.

Just in closing we would like to mention a few of the Off Broadway events which although not in the spot light certainly added to the over all hype of the weekend. First was the William Humphries Art Gallery's exhibitions and workshops held in the Town Hall which was a magnificent success. They had invited Dave Chislett who interacted with the kids through the medium of song and poetry and was by all accounts a huge success as were the 2012 Richmond Films.

Architect and town planner Dave Clemens..local boy literally from across the road once again excelled with his Richmond Ramble about town, showing the evolution of the dorp's old flat roofs into the houses of this modern era. He has built up quite a following.



Pied Piper of Richmond

No doubt you will have noticed on any small perambulation about town, that Picture Booktown Richmond is really starting to flower into something special. Mike Norris has done wonders but he has assured us that the best is yet to come ...so watch this wall!



The Land Art project which will be started in Richmond was given a soupçon of things to come with the creation of a Riverine Rabbit in the small park on Spring Street. The real deal will be constructed next year and will be a visible from space walking trail of a Riverine Rabbit or even the Nationl Bird, the Blue Crane...so watch this space from space. This massive art work is meant to symbolize our, the people of SA and in particular the Karoo's bond with the land and the water which lies beneath the hard rocky surface, in no slight way as a way to tell the country and the world that the gas which purportedly lies 5000m below the ground should stay right where it is; read my lips: ***NO FRACKING IN OUR KAROO!***



Karooster Deon Meyer expressing himself in more ways than one.

One of the villages local boys, Chris Shelton put on a very good walking tour up Vegkop to the old Boer War fort which nestles at the top...and on this weekend flying the Canadian Maple Leaf in honour of the Canadians who had winged their way to BoekBedonnerd. Chris put on a very informative talk and the sundowners were a grand success and will become a regular feature for the next BoekBedonnerds.



Vegkop Sundowners 2012

Catering this year was organised by the folks at the Kerk and was certainly a move in the right direction. The choppies were fantastic and the frozen meat packs were all sold out. We are still battleing in the restaurant department when the sleepy dorp has to go from low rev first gear into over drive in the space of only a couple days... I have been assured that we'll be quicker next year, but I think it is fair to say that one of the best parts of BB V was the free mingling of all visitors, the famous speakers to the infamous, and the just plain regular people who came to Richmond to have a good time and to meet some extremely interesting people. This we all did and we thank you all.



Not only David K was singing the Karoo Blues

So please all have a wonderful Christmas and safe driving; soon we will be back in the saddle reminding you of the JMCoetzee and Nobel Laureates AND Athol Fugard Festival on the last weekend of May. The Fugard Day is being launched by a talk by Producer Ross Devenish...more meat to be added to the skeleton, so just keep an eye on the inbox!

Best to all, a Merry Christmas and a super 2013!!

DED & PCB

To those of you expecting fat and expensive gifts under the tree this year...

The good news is... Santa's already on his way!!

The bad news is... he's had a pretty crap year too...

