

Jon interviewing Francis Herbert Powell

Jon: I'm with Francis Herbert Powell and he's just compiled a collection of short stories, poems and illustrations. So Francis, what gave you the idea for this book?

Francis: It kind of originated really when I was with my son and we were at the play park where he usually plays, and I saw these men kind of arriving and they were kind of putting up plastic tape and putting up barriers, and it suddenly dawned on me that we were in the middle of this momentous event, this terrible occasion caused by Covid-19. The night before we'd heard some gossip that this was kind of happening in our area but while I was in the park this kind of really struck me, and so I, I started taking photographs and then I started writing things, writing poems, and doing drawings and this kind of thing. It kind of all evolved into a book.

Jon: So were you actually in contact with the contributors throughout the pandemic or before the pandemic?

Francis: Well I started off asking friends that I knew who wrote and then, I don't know why but it suddenly popped in my head that also I could maybe invite you know well known writers and so I sent out literally hundreds of emails to people. Sometimes I got no answer, sometimes I got kind of messages saying that they were too busy, some even said they were too traumatised by the pandemic to actually write anything at this time. It was kind of like that. But it was quite an enjoyable period it was quite exciting to receive a poem from somebody and to find out what they had written. I can understand why some people maybe were traumatised, and I you know obviously I respect that but I reacted in a rather different way maybe and I suddenly became very creative during this time. Maybe it was because you know maybe we had time on our hands or maybe you know there were things being triggered in my brain that you know I needed to write it down, I needed to put things in my mind in some kind of order.

Jon: But writing isn't your sole occupation because you teach as well don't you?

Francis: Yes, yes I teach. I've taught English for quite some years now. At the moment I work in a university and I teach both English and history.

Jon: The actual book of course as well as being very entertaining is very useful to the Marie Curie nurses charity. How much of the actual cost price of the book goes to the charity?

Francis: In fact what I did was I did a crowd-funding campaign so I managed to get quite a lot of money for that in terms of the printing costs and also there was one very generous contributor who also contributed quite a reasonable sum of money to the printing costs, so quite a lot of the costs have been paid for, so hopefully in a few weeks time

I'm going to be able to transfer quite a big sum to the charity which is obviously part of the objective of the book. A lot of the contributors also were probably attracted by the fact that it was going to go to this particular charity.

Jon: Why did you choose this particular charity?

Francis: When I started to get the book together I started to think which charity would be good. So I sent an email to my sister because I know my sister has a lot of connections in terms of charities in England and it was her who suggested Marie Curie.

Jon: Obviously the Covid pandemic has been quite negative in its impact, but do you think there's been anything at all positive?

Francis: I think so, I think maybe there were some people who you know went out their way to help people who were in a much worse situation than themselves. That's been kind of good. Maybe some people have re-evaluated their lives in some kind of way, but at the same time I find it very disappointing because I think governments have carried on in the same kind of way, whereas they could have maybe gone in a new direction and they could have learned a lot of things I think from it. You know when the pandemic came along, umm, I thought that poetry was a very good medium a way to express what I was feeling. So it was kind of then that I started you know doing more sort of poetry.

Jon: Thank you very much for talking to us Francis.

Francis: Thank you very much.