

What Stayed with Me About the JBF: The Launch of Poetry for Friends 8

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Last month, the 16th Annual Jozi Book Fair (JBF) took place in Newtown Park and Workers Museum. This edition of the JBF was themed 'Literature and Solidarity in Times of Crisis' which focuses on something relevant to children, parents, organisations and other active community members.

Particularly for the young people and children that Khanya College works with the theme invited them to express their thoughts creatively. This would be through writing stories, poems and engaging in panel discussions about matters that concern the communities they live in.

At the Festival itself, several buses filled with learners from different schools and OVCs around Johannesburg came. There were also study group members who had been participating in the Khanya College Winter School in July this year. Many of these activists came from different provinces, but there were also authors, and the event was also public.

This article specifically focuses on the experience of 'a collective book of art, the emotions, and the warm feelings' poured into the Fair when each learner reads their story in front of their peers. The onlooker would have watched each learner called onto the stage, mazing through a tent full of young writers, young authors, and exhibitors who were watching. And they would have been thinking, 'These are the young leaders who will make great decisions for their lives, surely, for their families, communities, and the country they live in.'

They were not on the podium to read scripts that were written by other people but poems from their hearts. They read with pride and joy with their heads held high. I, the writer here, was amazed and wished I had these opportunities when I was their age besides going to former President, Nelson Mandela's house every 25 December for a Christmas event in Qunu. Yes, I had the privilege of shaking his hand and being given toy racing cars and a white school shirt that I didn't wear, which I indeed cherished but my grade 4 school shirt was powder blue. Luckily it suited me well on Sunday school choir practice.

During the Jozi Book Fair the group of young writers called Poetry Buddies (PBs) had a 4-hour session that included fun dance challenges, performances from a magician, and awareness lesson about strangers. There was a session on creativity as well with the PBs making a bracelet and of course the big one for the day - the Poetry for Friends 8 book launch.

Saluse Ncwadi from Sakha Kids said they had fun, and excitement and were proud to see their poems in the book. Another PB Kamvelihle Mazwai said when she read her poems to the audience, it helped her to express her feelings and show her inner self. Mazwai enjoyed the JBF and says she will invite her friends to go to the next edition of the Festival. She wants them to get the opportunity to use their powers of imagination through writing and reading, and so that they can be helped with their writing skills as well.

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