

Interview with Jo Nesbo @ Athens Megaron, 18.9.2015

When you were young, you were determined to become a pro soccer player. Then, you suffered a serious injury. How can someone accept such a disappointment and make a new start?

Good question! I was nineteen at the time. It was my dream to be a professional football player and I could have gone on dreaming... but it wouldn't help me. When reality hits you like that, well, you need to refocus, come up with a Plan B. "OK, my life is not going to be about soccer. What else can it be about? I'm interested in music. I'm interested in writing or, at least, in reading. But how can I make a living reading? I don't know what to do with my life." So, what do you do with your life when you don't know what to do? You study economics. And that's what I did. After some years, I started a band and then another band and later a third band with my brother and, finally, we had a little success. Actually, the band was terrible. We used to play in a club in Oslo and the only reason they let us play there was just because the bass player knew the owner. And we were so terrible that, in order to have people come back, we would change the name of the band every week. After two years, we were much better and we made our first album. In the daytime I worked as an economist for many years and then I started writing. My advice to young people: Get an education!

In Scandinavia authors write without taboos in children's books when in other countries this is not that common .Do you think it is appropriate to speak freely to children about anything?

I try to be who I am. I don't talk to you in a children's voice nor try to figure out what you think is funny. Of course, I will try not to use words I know you cannot understand. When I grew up, I used to listen to my parents and all my relatives telling stories. They would talk to each other and they wouldn't care if they were children around and I always sat and listened to the stories because I thought grown-ups have the best stories. So, I didn't understand everything and sometimes they would tell a joke and everybody would laugh and I wouldn't quite get it but I understood it was funny and I would laugh too. I didn't get the point but it felt funny in a way. So, there are some things in my books that are like that.

You have referred to bullying incidents when you were young. Do you think literature can help stop this phenomenon?

I don't think it can be stopped. I don't think we will ever have a society where people are not mean to each other. I think bullying cannot be stopped by literature. It cannot be stopped by movies. It's something people have to sort out themselves. They have to learn to stick together. If you see someone being bullied, then it's your responsibility. You just need to be a friend and stand up for your friends. If you are the strong cool guy in the class, your responsibility is towards the "uncoolest" girl or guy, the weak people around you.

You said you are a musician too. Have you ever been tempted to compose music for children combined with a book for them?

I used to make and play music for my daughter. Once, she had a birthday party. Her mother thought it would be a great idea if I brought my guitar and played some music for my daughter and her friends. I asked: "Are you sure? Children are not interested in a grown-up playing music." "Oh, yes, they are," she insisted, "children love music." So, during this party I gathered all the children around me. My daughter was so embarrassed ("Daddy's playing his guitar?!") that she left the room, of course. And I played the guitar and it took me 30 seconds to just clear the whole room. So, that's the reason I'm not composing any music for children.