

Books of Summer Interview with Kensington Kid Author Bill Mettinger

Books of Summer - We recently had the opportunity to sit down with Bill Mettinger, author of a really great self-published book about growing up in Philly called "Kensington Kid - Small Town Life in the 70's in the Shadow of the Market-Frankford EL" The book is available through his website www.KensingtonKid.com . We highly recommend reading it, as it really will hit home for anyone who grew up in Philly during that time.

Books of Summer - It was really a pleasant surprise how much we enjoyed reading your book. It was almost like sitting down and having a conversation with an old friend. We could almost hear a voice talking to us telling a story. It's really great meeting you and being able to put a voice behind your words.

Bill Mettinger - Thank you so much, that really means a lot.

Books of Summer - What made you write the book and tell your story?

Bill Mettinger - I really didn't set out to write a book, let alone have anyone else read it. I had some time on my hands, and I began thinking about a recent conversation that I had with my son and some of his friends. We spoke about how different things are today and how kids today seem to have all the luxuries of life, cell phones, texting, the Internet, computers, iPods, designer fashions, video games, and hi-def flat screen TV with hundreds of channels. I told them that when I grew up, when I wanted a friend to come out and play I went to his house and "knocked for him." I told them that we could spend hours on end outside with one lone pimple ball. We had 10 channels on our new color TV if we were lucky, and that included UHF and I said that all you had to wear to be accepted and make a fashion statement was a pair of Chucks (Converse All-Star Chuck Taylor sneakers!) I told them that although they seem to have everything I wouldn't trade growing up where and when I did for anything.

Books of Summer - Kensington seems to always get a bad rap for one reason for another. It was really great reading how you put such a positive spin on things.

Bill Mettinger - That was another reason why I wrote. Kensington always seems to get such a bad rap. Of course, I admit some things are definitely justified, but I really feel that the media always seems to find a way to put a negative spin on just about everything Kensington related. If it's something positive in the area it's Fishtown or Northern Liberties, if it's anything negative, it's Kensington. I also got tired of when people would ask me where did I grow up? When I said Kensington they always seemed to imply how bad it must have been growing up there. I guess that I wrote the book to tell the world just how great growing up Kenzo really was and that no matter where

you go or what you do in life that once you're a Kenzo, you will always be a Kenzo, you're a Kenzo for life, its in your blood.

Books of Summer – So you mentioned that you really didn't set out to publish a book, you just happened to write. What finally convinced you to follow through and put your pages to print?

Bill Mettinger - When I wrote, I really didn't have a beginning or an end, I just wrote for myself and as I remembered things I wrote about them. One thing progressed into another. After a little bit of persuasion I let a few friends and family members read what I had written. Some from Kensington and others not and they were the ones who convinced me that I should attempt to put it together and make a book.

Books of Summer – Your book really can appeal to readers of just about any age. People who not only grew up with you, but also to others who like you have previously said in other interviews “didn't have a clue what it was like to go outside for an entire day with a single solitary pimple ball and be happy.”

Bill Mettinger – I really didn't have a clue that anyone other than my family and a few friends would have any interest in reading about my life. I am nobody special. Who else would really care about my story, but I was convinced that although I was talking about my personal experiences I was talking about a generation and an entire neighborhood that may have experienced growing up similar to the way that I did.

One thing that really hit home to me was about a month or so after I published the book I received a letter from a person who I had never met before basically thanking me for writing the book. She went on to tell me that reading my words was actually like reliving her childhood and that telling my story was just like telling hers. She couldn't wait to share “our” story with her own children.

Books of Summer - What was your feeling when you received that first piece of fan mail and you knew that you had made a connection with you readers. That must be the ultimate feeling of success.

Bill Mettinger – Well, I wouldn't call it fan mail, but it was great and totally unexpected. The whole idea behind my book was hoping that my memories about growing up in Kensington would maybe help spark the memory of the reader and maybe bring back something from their childhood that was long forgotten. Whether it was a person, place, or something we did as kids.

Books of Summer – Although your book was written about your life growing up in Kensington, it seems as though just about anyone who grew up almost

anywhere in Philly would relate to your story. What do you think gives your book that sort of appeal?

Bill Mettinger – The majority of the people who have contacted me have shared something or another with me. Maybe we hung on the same corner, went to the same corner store, sold pretzels, or played the same games as a kid. So many people have shared the same experiences. Others have said that they have tried to tell their own kids what it was like growing up in Kensington and they didn't believe them and my book put into words what they have been trying to say for years. So I guess the book could appeal to different people for different reasons. Some people who may have shared the same things and are familiar with the streets, stores etc, others who through my memories help rekindle their own memories and even others who didn't live there or maybe were too young to remember, maybe the book could give them just a little look into what it was like.

Books of Summer – Before this interview you had mentioned how Facebook has played such an important role in the success of your book?

Bill Mettinger – Facebook has been amazing! About a month after I published my book I was contacted by someone on Facebook whom I had not seen in probably 35 or more years. We grew up on the same street. A friend of hers had read my book and knew that it would hit close to home and gave her a copy not realizing that we actually knew each other as kids. As soon as she saw my name she realized that we only lived a few houses away and contacted me through Facebook. This was great, and actually the first of many childhood friends who I am now in contact with.

When I wrote the book, I was a relatively new Facebook user and Facebook wasn't nearly what it has become today. Today there are many great Kensington related groups where fellow Kenzo's can get together to share memories 24 hours a day. This is amazing to see so many of us share the same stories. One person may remember something and post it and someone else will add to it and before long there's twenty or thirty people commenting. Its so cool having so many people with the same interest together online.

Books of Summer – So through your book and through Facebook you have found some old friends?

Bill Mettinger – I have, and it's great! Again, they are both great for rekindling memories. I am now friends with people who grew up on the same block as kids and friends who went to grade school together. One thing leads to another.

Books of Summer – Now back to The Kensington Kid. How can those interested go about purchasing a copy of your book?

Bill Mettinger – The absolutely easiest way of getting your hands on a copy is through my website www.KensingtonKid.com You can use any Major Credit card or Paypal. Paypal handles all of my online transactions, but you don't need a Paypal account to buy the book, just a credit card. You can also send a check or money order for \$14.95 including shipping to: MettMedia PO Box 386 Willow Grove, PA, 19090. We ship fast, so the book will be in your hands in just a few days. While at my website, take a look around, there are other interviews, some photos, reader comments, and even a book excerpt.

Books of Summer – Bill, it was really great chatting with you. I wish you continued success with your book. One last question. Now that you have your first book under your belt do you have any plans for another?

Bill Mettinger – I admit, I do! This has been such an unexpected and positive experience for me I am still blown away. I have been writing, I always am writing. Hopefully I can get enough down on paper and we will see what the next step will be. There is so much more to say, hopefully I can come up with something worth enough to share. Thanks so much, hopefully we can do this all again in the future.

Books of Summer – Thanks Bill! Hopefully we can!