



Full house: - The screening at the Phoenix Cinema. Photo Mike Coles.



Swings and roundabouts: Bill in Market Place Playground



Bill chats to Carolyn Pickles during the Q&A session.

Bill takes his seat for campaign to restore playground

By John Lawrence

Actor Bill Nighy made a special appearance at the Phoenix Cinema in support of the campaign to turn the run-down Market Place Playground in East Finchley into a smart new natural play space.

And it was a case of life imitating art as he chatted with fellow actor and local resident Carolyn Pickles ahead of a showing of his 2022 film *Living*, in which he plays a civil servant fighting to turn a Second World War bomb site into a children's playground.

The Phoenix was sold out for the screening and Q&A at the end of April, and all profits went towards the £100,000 transformation target set by the Friends of Market Place Playground, which is close to Holy Trinity

Primary School and The Archer Academy.

Bill and Carolyn first met at the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool when they appeared in repertory there in the 1970s. He told the audience how important playgrounds are for youngsters and recalled his own childhood when he said they were a great place for meeting girls.

Using the funds

Funding for the new playground has already been secured from Barnet Council, Grange Big Local, and the Mayor of

London's Grow Back Greener fund, Betty Messenger Foundation. Further grant applications are in progress and the Friends are asking anyone who can help them get over the line to donate at: www.spacehive.com/marketplace-newplayequipment

Money raised will fund a wholesale rebuilding of the space, replacing the ageing Tarmac and rubber surfaces with grass and sand, and providing a new slide, swings and climbing equipment, as well as seating and shade with new planting

for all the community.

The campaign began in January 2021 with six residents petitioning to save the site from its 'low value, low quality' designation by the previous Barnet Council administration. The aim of the group is to bring nature and imaginative challenging play back to the space and create a local park for everyone to enjoy, year round.

Kathy Batten, Chair of Friends of Market Place Playground, said; "It was the icing on the cake to have the support of

Bill Nighy at the Phoenix. Our local councillors and the new administration have supported us throughout. Our funders have understood our vision and what we are aiming to achieve.

"Above all the local community, engaged from the start in developing our plans, have driven us forward. We are on the final stretch and need a final community push to get us over the line and help fully fund the work. Please give generously." Find out more at: friendsofmarketplace.org.uk



Every penny counts: Sofia, Emilia and Maya ready for their street sale in aid of Ukrainian children.

Street sale makes a difference for sick children in Ukraine

By David Melsome

Sisters Sofia and Maya Whitehouse were getting ready for bed one night when they began sorting out their bedrooms. They ended up with two big piles of unwanted items and decided there and then that they wanted to sell them for charity.

Sofia, eight, wanted to raise funds for sick children and Maya, six, wanted to help Ukraine, so they combined their ideas and decided to support the Children of Heroes charity, which looks after sick children in Ukraine.

On the day of their street sale in Lankaster Gardens, N2, their good friend Emilia Almarsdotir, nine, came over to help set up the tables for their stall and the three girls sat out for three hours selling items to neighbours and

passers-by.

"Items were priced either 10p, 50p, or £1," said Sofia and Maya's mother Julia. "They sold jigsaw puzzles, books and games. People were very generous and ended up giving more money for the cause. The girls were very excited." After the company their dad works for, insurers Marsh McLennan, doubled the money raised, the trio could make a donation of £122. Well done, girls!

Basma's storytelling inspires young writers at nursery

By Diana Cormack

Children looking through books at the Monkey Puzzle Nursery may well come across a character they know pictured on the cover. Marvellous Martin the Monkey already appears as the nursery's mascot on the notices outside their premises in East Finchley and Muswell Hill.

Also appearing at both these branches is the writer of the books in question, nursery teacher Basma Mohamed. When the nursery chain's head office pitched the idea for a staff story writing competition, colleagues encouraged Basma to enter.

Perhaps knowing that Basma was on the way to completing a degree in English Literature at Kings College may have given a clue to her prowess. In fact, Basma has loved writing from her primary school days and it has gone on to play a major part in her life.

Her poetry has been published as well as performed in places like the Arts Theatre and, she told *The Archer*, lockdown had inspired her to develop her skills.

She will probably be able to pass those skills on, for when she reads her award-winning story to the youngsters she teaches, they know that she wrote it. This inspires the little ones to write their own stories and perhaps go on to become authors themselves one day.

Marvellous Marvin and the Missing Puzzle Pieces tells the children how everything fits together to bring happiness to all. Basma praised her own parents for their

great support in whatever she chose to do. This is probably why she says: "Go for things. Never be afraid to put yourself out there in a positive way."



Story time: Writer and teacher Basma Mohamed reads to Monkey Puzzle children.

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