

From Victorian Secrets to Jacksonville Streets: Authors in Conversation

Words and design by Kaili Cochran

Sheila Athens, a local and accomplished author who has several published works, was at The BookMark, a locally owned bookstore in the Beaches Town Center, for a book signing and discussion on September 18.

Sitting beside her was international best-selling author Madeline Martin. These two authors couldn't be more different in their writing styles, yet the messages they convey throughout their books are remarkably similar.

Martin is known for writing about researched contemporary fiction rooted in local land-in their writing. Resilience, especially in

During this event, multiple groups of listen to the authors in conversation cations.

Martin spoke to the audience with books so immersive, explaining the her attention during her research Society, which takes place during

"We have hatpin fighting. And I've pin fighting, was this a real thing?"

She went on to explain that women hats and the way that they would a hatpin, which could be up to a foot with beaded ends and could be used

Martin also went into "floriography," munication in which various flowers and messages.

"Every flower and plant that is mentioned in the said. "If you wanted to go on a literary scavenger every flower and plant has been placed there, either pening in the scene."

In contrast, Athens brings her readers to places they recognize. Her latest novel, Mae Van Doren's Perfect Storm, takes place in a combination of Jacksonville Beach and Ponte Vedra.

"The BookMark even makes an appearance on page 125 and you'll recognize some local restaurants as well," Athens said.

Her novel focuses on a 32-year-old woman whose life blows up, and she's forced to move to Jax Beach to live with a brother that she hasn't seen in 10 years. She goes to work for a minister, a founder of a mega church who may not be quite as Christian as he should be, but the people kind of in his orbit teach her that there is good in humanity, which is something that she needs to learn because she has lost trust that there is any.

Though these authors are separated by genre and style, both Athens and Martin left the audience with a message that literature, whether set in Victorian England or Jacksonville Beach, carries the power to reveal resilience. And for one evening at The BookMark, those stories lived side by side, reminding readers that the past and present aren't so far apart.



historical fiction, while Athens writes about scapes. But both leave a message of resilience the face of societal pressures.

friends and family gathered around to about their most recent individual publi-

the kind of vivid detail that makes her quirks of Victorian society that caught for her latest book, The Secret Book that time.

had so many people that are like, hat-Oh my gosh, yes, it was," Martin said.

would have these very large, elaborate secure them onto their heads was with long. They were very sharp and long as a sword for self-defense.

which was a Victorian-era means of comfloral arrangements were used to send coded

book has actually been done with purpose," Martin hunt with this, you could and you could find out why based on the character or the mood or whatever's hap-