

Lynn Davidson: Randell Cottage Creative NZ Writer in Residence, 2021

I am extremely grateful to the Randell Cottage Trust for the opportunity to work on my memoir over six months as the Randell Cottage Creative NZ Writer in Residence for 2021. This residency arrived in my life at the best possible moment. I had just returned to Aotearoa New Zealand after four years in Edinburgh, having left during the second wave of Covid. In that very unsettled and unsettling time, this residency offered not only a significant amount of time and space to write, but a port in a storm.

It has been a fruitful experience to be living in the Randell Cottage for many reasons, including the historical aspect of the cottage which was incredibly helpful to me as I wrote about, and imagined, my settler family migrating from Scotland to New Zealand in the mid 1920s. The neighbourhood and the cottage itself helped me to imagine my way into their lives as newly arrived immigrants to Wellington.

During my tenure as Randell Cottage Writer in Residence I was invited to read at the Gala Evening for the Verb Readers & Writers Festival in Wellington, along with other writers including Becky Manawatu, Sue Orr, Clare Moleta and Talia Marshall. I was invited to run a workshop during the festival, and an essay from the memoir is published on the Verb website. Poems written during the residency were published in a journal called *Meniscus*, established by the Australasian Association of Writing Programmes, and in the Friday Poem slot for *The Spinoff*. Also during my tenure I wrote and recorded four poems for a 60th birthday Amnesty International Concert at St Columba's by the Castle in Edinburgh, and an essay from the memoir was published in the summer issue of *The Poetry Review*, London. I very much enjoyed reading from my memoir at an event for Friends of Randell Cottage, Friends of the Turnbull Library and Friends of Katherine Mansfield House at the National Library in April this year, and reading from my work at the Randell Cottage Trust AGM. In the past week I took part in the NonfictionNOW Conference, speaking about the lyric essay in a Hui with participants from New Zealand, Australia and America. The residency was a contributing factor to many of these invitations, and in every case helped me to produce the work that the invitations required.

The residency offers a very useful block of time to work on a significant piece of writing. When you are working on a big project you need a good space of uninterrupted time to hold the project in your mind; to 'disappear' into the work; and to allow the subconscious to draw threads together. This big-project work is almost impossible when you can only come to it in those brief spaces between juggling work and home commitments. With its features of time, financial support, and a supportive 'team' of Trustees, the residency truly did the job of lifting me away from daily concerns so I could turn to my writing and find out what I was thinking and what I wanted to say.

It has been inspiring, and sometimes a little daunting, to consider the writers who have written in the cottage before me. I believe that the constant use of this space for writing and researching creates a tradition of continuity and support that has in some way 'held' me during my time here. I'm grateful for those past writers and the traces they left behind them. The international aspect of this residency makes it unique in New Zealand and seems to provide a reminder of the 'wide world' beyond Aotearoa New Zealand, and our connections with it.

Another unique and invaluable aspect of this residency is that a writer can bring their family to the cottage. This makes it one of the few residencies that I know of, in New Zealand and further afield, that offer this particular support for writers. Although I didn't personally need to take advantage of this aspect of the residency, I am grateful for this forward-thinking, progressive aspect and how it has and will enable other writers to get their work done.

I leave the residency with the bones of my memoir very much in place and I look forward to developing the work and submitting it to my publisher within the next twelve months. And I leave it with a huge debt of gratitude to the residency and the Trustees and to Creative New Zealand for keeping this precious and unique residency going.

Dr Lynn Davidson