

Report on the 2022 Creative New Zealand Randell Cottage Writing Fellowship

The Randell Cottage is a picturesque cottage nestled at the base of Te Ahumairangi Hill. I was fortunate enough to be the Writer in Residence in 2022, and am very grateful towards the Randell Cottage Writers Trust, the Friends of Randell Cottage and Creative New Zealand for the support that makes this residency possible. There are very few paid residences for significant lengths of time in Aotearoa, and without these it would be very difficult for writers to produce works of significant length, depth, and complexity.

Given the luxury of time, I was able to have those sorts of meandering, introspective days where the best ideas can rise to the top, and the middling-to-bad ideas can either be refined in the subconscious or forgotten completely. I spent a lot of time reading, which lays the foundation for writing. I wandered down many different paths of plot and character and had the freedom to explore what worked and what didn't, something that was especially helpful as I made the transition from writing nonfiction to writing fiction. In the end I got to a mostly complete first draft of a novel.

It's very rare to have the opportunity to write full time, and actually feel like a writer, rather than someone who has a day job and squeezes writing into the margins. The residency coincided with a workshop series called Slow Currents that I participated in, which was a partnership between Aotearoa, Australia and the Asian American Writers Workshop. I joined the video chat for these calls from the Randell Cottage, and it felt good to add some Asian American writers to the chorus of Aotearoa and French writers present in the space.

Through the Randell Cottage Trust I was also invited to speak at a few events. At the AGM of the Friends of the Randell Cottage and did a reading followed by a small Q&A, and at the end of the residency I was in conversation with Francis Cooke, one of the trustees, about the residency at the National Library of New Zealand. I met the incoming French resident (delayed due to COVID) over zoom and talked to her about the cottage and the area. I gave an interview with Lynn Freeman on Radio New Zealand about the residency. The cottage was also

used as a location in the filming of the documentary series “Xīn xī lán”, focusing on the experiences of contemporary Chinese people in Aotearoa.

While I am normally resident in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, I had never lived or spent much time in Thorndon, where the cottage is located. It was interesting to see the place that I lived from another perspective, and I tried to partake in as many Thorndon related activities as I could. I got familiar with the offerings at Goods, a cute cafe tucked just behind the main street. A team comprising of me, Chris Tse (current Poet Laureate) and other rag-tag individuals participated in the Sprig and Fern’s quiz and won. I took many walks through the Botanic Gardens, and the winding trails of Te Ahumairangi. It’s rare to be able to be writer full time, and I feel thankful for the opportunity to do so and would encourage others to apply for this opportunity.

Rose Lu

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