

For what it's worth:

In 1965 I left my job as a journalist and became a freelance writer. Okay, I was also at home minding a baby, but I wanted to write fiction and my situation was such that it was essential for me to be earning money. I promised myself that if, two years down the track, I wasn't making enough to live on I would find myself a 'real job'.

In 2006 I qualified for the pension. In the 41 years between I made a - generally meagre - living from writing. Most of it from writing other than fiction, some from teaching writing. Radio New Zealand was, for the first 15 years, a wonderful source of income - mostly drama. They supported writers by properly paying them.

Although my first novel, *Other Halves*, was a 'prize winning best seller', the royalties weren't sufficient to support us (me and my children) while I completed another novel. In order to put in the time writing fiction I had to apply for, and receive, grants from Creative New Zealand. While I was very grateful for these sums of money, the process felt uncomfortably competitive and rather shameful.

Then there was a point where, in order to remain a fiction writer, I wrote 'a novel' on commission. I gave the completed manuscript to the person who had 'purchased' it, and several years later it was published without a copy edit or proof reading, and with a blurb in which the protagonist's name had been mysteriously changed. I was named as the author. In retrospect I see the whole venture as, on my part, an act of writerly desperation.

While I was fortunate to receive grants towards producing fiction, they were always for modest amounts until my final application in 2002 (or thereabouts). Ironically that novel still has not found a publisher - times and tastes have changed.

Fiction these days is more 'international' and increasingly genre based. Which is perhaps all the more reason why writers in New Zealand must be part of that increasingly digitalised chorus; contributing, but also exploring who we are (or were) and who, or what, we are becoming.

Royalties are the obvious, and fairest, way to support our writing community.

Sue McCauley