

JANET FRAME EDEN STREET TRUST
56 Eden Street, Oamaru

CURATOR'S REPORT

Although one of the best experiences available to visitors to 56 Eden Street is to be able to sit at a writing desk that once belonged to Janet Frame, it has to be remembered that the writing she did here in her Oamaru childhood was mostly *schoolwork*, and letters and poems sent to "Dear Dot" of the *Otago Daily Times* children's page, all probably written at the kitchen table. "Work stations" - such as the desk kept at 56 Eden Street, and the famous *Landfall* desk now at Victoria University in Wellington - were to come later.

It is, however, the *writing* of Janet Frame that brings people from all over the world to her childhood home in Oamaru, where the Janet Frame Eden Street Trust works to encourage visitors to the House to give some thought to putting themselves into written words.

Over the seven years since the House has been open to the public, nearly five Visitors' Books have been filled with entries ranging from the laconic to the lyrical, the prosaic to the philosophical, written by many people taking a few moments' pause to sit at Janet Frame's desk and "frame" their thoughts.

In a more formal context, a succession of notable New Zealand writers - Owen Marshall (twice), Roger Hall, Kate Kamp, Fiona Kidman and Fiona Farrell - have come at the Trust's invitation to Oamaru to teach writing workshops, during which the House hosts a lunch-break for the students, who then have an opportunity to invite "inspiration by association" to round out the morning's work and further hone their writing skills. These annual workshops have already become something of a J.F.E.S.T. tradition and an important celebration of words, language and writing that we feel Janet Frame would have applauded.

As curator at 56 Eden Street, it is my pleasure and privilege to meet and talk with the wide diversity of people who come in search of Janet Frame, and to see how they are intrigued, fascinated, touched, moved, and sometimes mystified by Janet Frame, her life, and the spell woven by her work and words. Just to be in the House, even for a short time, is to fall under this spell. Longer, I have found, brings a kind of pen-to-paper compulsion. For me, spending many hours here, this has resulted in a ten-volume journal written since November 2005.

For the serious, aspiring, or casual writer, used to either desk or kitchen table, the Janet Frame House provides a haven that the Trust hopes will become a main focus of activity in the future for creative writing groups as well as solo wordsmiths. There is a quality of nurturing about 56 Eden Street which feeds and encourages enthusiasm for language and literature for those taking their first taste of the "real thing," through to those with the heartiest appetite already whetted.

Throughout the past season, I have experienced this particular "magic" at work many times as visitors explore the House, buy a book, postcard or bookmark, chat to me about their interest in Janet Frame (and often much else besides!) or pause to write their impressions in the *school exercise book* on Janet's work desk... which brings us, in a way, full circle.

Ralph Sherwood,
Curator, 56 Eden Street May, 2012