

Book launch of *Uncommon Enemy*

The book launch for John Reynolds' two books *Uncommon Enemy* and *Writing Your First Novel* was held at the Belmont Rose Centre – a small theatre in North Shore City.

Over 200 people attended and, having enjoyed the wine and nibbles, settled down for an entertaining evening.

Devonport writer Graeme Lay introduced John Reynolds. Graeme, having congratulated John on the publication of his two books, pointed out that the North Shore had a long history of writers and poets including Frank Sargeson, Maurice Duggan, A.R.D. Fairburn, and Bruce Mason,

John then read extracts from his novel, supplemented with quotes from *Writing Your First Novel*, and fielded many questions and comments from the audience. Having been careful with his extracts not to give too much of the plot away one of the first questions was, "How does the novel end?" To laughter he responded, "If I told you that I'd have to kill you."

Other questions asked at the book launch have also been asked at subsequent readings to groups throughout greater Auckland and other parts of New Zealand. These include:

Q: Did you have the entire plot planned before you began?

A: No. I had a general idea of the concept and of some of the key characters but when I began to write the novel I had no idea where it would go.

Q: Did that cause you problems?

A: Yes, at times, but in many ways it was a journey of discovering for me. At the end of a day's writing I'd read through the material and think, 'That's intriguing. How did we wind up here?'

Q: Did you have to do much revising?

A: Yes, constantly. Even if when I'd spent hours on a passage, if it didn't work it had to be ruthlessly pruned or even cut? Every word had to earn its place.

Q: Did you have any doubts as you came to the end of the project?

A: Yes. As I'd been so close to the work for so long, it was difficult to maintain my perspective. Consequently, since its publication, I've been delighted with the positive responses to *Uncommon Enemy* from so many people.

Q: How long did it take you to write *Uncommon Enemy*?

A: I wrote it over a 5-year period. It was not commissioned or funded so the only deadlines I had were self-imposed. There were periods (rainy Sundays) when

I worked solidly on the manuscript, and other times when I let it lie for a week or two before coming back to it again.

Q: Did you make any major changes to the characters in your first drafts?

A: Yes. I added more depth to the female characters and gave them more of a participatory role in the events that unfolded and in their relationships to the other characters. I also added some more information on the main villain, Hamish, to provide the reader with a greater understanding his nature and motivation.

Q: How about the plot?

A: That also required a number of revisions. Initially the plot was too linear, inasmuch as it moved along to a fairly predictable conclusion with insufficient twists and turns. I found that when I added a couple of characters who were from an anti-Nazi German resistance group, I was then able to create a more complex series of twists and turns in the story.

Q: What was the most challenging part of writing *Uncommon Enemy*?

A: The ending – I wrote 8 versions before I came up with the final one.

Q: And did it work?

A: Yes. Nobody I've asked guess the ending. Some had an inkling, but nobody guessed what would happen. Furthermore everyone was felt the ending was credible.

Q: So, was credibility an issue?

A: Yes, credibility and feasibility were central to the concept. The Germans didn't win World War II and neither New Zealand nor any of the other Commonwealth and Empire was occupied. Therefore the challenge for me was to write a story that could have happened, that readers would nod their heads in agreement and say, 'Yes, it's fiction but if it had happened it could have turned out the way it's described in the book?'

Q: Do you think you succeeded?

A: Basically yes. Perhaps this is best personified by a friend of my wife's who phoned her and exclaimed, 'Damn your husband! I was reading his novel in bed last night, fell asleep and woke up in a sweat because I dreamt that the Germans had taken us over!'

Q: So what's next? Is there a sequel in the making?

A: Not yet. I'm currently working on a film screenplay, as I believe *Uncommon Enemy* has the potential to be an excellent movie. But I am thinking about a sequel.