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# COVER STORY

Cover photo: Warwick author Deb Wheeler's latest book holds a special place in her heart.

# AN ANZAC DAY MESSAGE

BY JEREMY SOLLARS

With Anzac Day a week away today Warwick author Deborah Wheeler is putting her support behind injured veterans to ensure they have access to rehabilitation services to aid with recovery.

Deb's latest book, 'My Pop was a Kangaroo ANZAC', tells the story of her grandfather, William James Wheeler, who was one of the original Wagga Wagga Kangaroo ANZACs and who suffered a serious arm injury during World War I.

Deb is encouraging locals and people around Australia to purchase a copy of the book and pay it forward by donating a second book to a local school.

Every book sold will support Mates4Mates, a not-for-profit providing support and rehabilitation services to current and ex-serving Defence Force members who have physical or

psychological injuries as a result of their service, and their families.

Deb says raising funds to support rehabilitation for veterans is a cause close to her heart.

"After joining the Australian Imperial Forces during World War I, Pop left Wagga Wagga on December 1 1915 for Sydney, as part of the Kangaroo recruitment march before setting sail," Deb told the Free Times.

"He later returned to Australia where he lived in Sydney until his death in 1961.

"Pop almost lost his arm in the war and had to have 21 surgeries and wear a brace for the rest of his life which had an impact on him.

"I've decided to support Mates4Mates through the sale of the book because I know Pop would have supported an organisation that helps to rehabilitate veterans."

Deb is passionate about raising funds and providing the book to schools as an educational resource.

"It's my vision to see 'My Pop was a

Kangaroo ANZAC' in every school in Australia, giving children an educational and informative account of the Kangaroo Anzacs," she said.

"Either people can donate it to a school of their choice, or I can donate it to a school in need.

"This book will help young people understand that those who went to war were just everyday men, doing their bit to protect their family and the country that they loved.

"The book has been illustrated in a such a way that younger children can understand the storyline just through the pictures, and older children and adults can read the narrative to get a better understanding of what happened.

"The message I am trying to get across is that if you have a disability it doesn't mean you're useless - my Pop led a very active and successful life.

"I've had a really positive response so far and I'm happy that through the sale of the book I can also support a worthwhile cause."

Books have been a passion of Deb's her entire life - she worked as a library technician for more than 20 years - but writing itself and her other major passion, historical and particularly military research, came to her relatively recently.

Also a keen lawn bowler, Deb created the 'Travelling Bowler' publication 12 years ago after a close friend and fellow bowler from the north Queensland town of 1770 was forced to travel to Brisbane for medical treatment and wanted to find a club to have a bowl during that time.

Deb discovered there was no central point of information for bowlers to link up with clubs outside their home town and as a result the 'Travelling Bowler' - these days fully online - was born.

It led to Deb later being approached by the Mandurah Bowls Club in Western Australia to compile and write the history of their club, and in following years history publications for the Applethorpe, Severnlea and Thulimbah State Schools.

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Then, in 2014, she was approached by the Stanthorpe RSL Sub-Branch to write the history of the former Kyoomba Sanatorium, where Australian Diggers afflicted by mustard gas from the trenches of World War 1 were sent to convalesce.

As well as 'My Pop Was A Kangaroo ANZAC', Deb's military-related works include 'Tales of a Military Medal Recipient and a Lancaster Bomber Rear Gunner' which describes the war service of veterans Stephen Flood and Tom Phillips - now both deceased.

Deb and partner Ross run the gorgeous 'Grafton Rose' bed and breakfast in Warwick - the home was built in 1902 - but writing is Deb's primary occupation and she can be found at her desk in her comfortable writing room seven days a week.

Deb recently discovered she has mild dyslexia - perhaps not the most helpful condition for a writer - but it has never affected her love of words.

"I'd known from a young age there was something going on because I was always such a terrible speller at school," Deb laughs.

"It was the age of teaching with phonetics.

"I remember being at my convent school and Sister Juanita asked the class, 'What are martyrs?'

"I piped up and said, 'They're them red things you buy at the shops!'

"I just didn't have any distinction between words.

"My friend and editor of 'My Pop Was A Kangaroo ANZAC' Jane Rheeder was the one who spotted it - she's a teacher and has a son with dyslexia and she picked it up through my speech patterns.

"With my writing it just means I sometimes have to stop and think about a particular word and I always have my huge Chambers dictionary right by my side.

"I can recognise word structure - I wouldn't say I have a photographic memory but I have really good written word recall - and of course spell check is essential.

"But I do get confused with commas."

### SUPPORT INJURED VETERANS ...

Deb Wheeler will donate \$2 from the sale of every copy of 'My Pop Was A Kangaroo ANZAC' directly to Mates4Mates. The book is on sale for \$20, including postage, from [www.deborahcwheeler.com](http://www.deborahcwheeler.com)

Mates4Mates Family Recovery Centre Manager Marc Diplock has thanked Deb for supporting Mates4Mates through the sale of her book.

"Funds raised through initiatives like this enable us to provide support and rehabilitation services to all ADF members who have injuries as a result of their service," Marc said.

"We offer tailored services from

psychological support to physical rehabilitation activities, adventure challenges, employment support, and peer support through social connection activities.

"With over 3700 registered Mates and family members - we rely on the generosity and support from people like Deborah to help make a difference."

To find out more about Mates4Mates or to fundraise, visit [mates4mates.org](http://mates4mates.org) or phone 1300 4 MATES.

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### BOOKS BY DEBORAH WHEELER ...

- 2018 - My Pop was a Kangaroo ANZAC
- 2018 - Kyoomba Sanatorium 1916-1935 Volume II
- 2018 - Kyoomba Sanatorium 1916-1935 Volume I
- 2016 - Kyoomba Sanatorium - Set of 5 broadsheets
- 2015 - Tales of a Military Medal Recipient and a Lancaster Bomber Rear Gunner
- 2015 - I Remember in 2015

Deb's Kyoomba works and broadsheets, along with 'Tales of a Military Medal Recipient and a Lancaster Bomber Rear Gunner' have been accepted into the Australian War Memorial (AWM) reference collection, while 'My Pop Was A Kangaroo ANZAC' has been accepted into the AWM's Education Programs Collection. Her military works have been supported with funding the Southern Downs Regional Council, the Regional Arts Development Fund and the Queensland Government.

### HERITAGE WEEK ...

Deb Wheeler will be speaking about her books relating to the Kyoomba Sanatorium and the forgotten soldiers who were patients there as part of the upcoming 2019 Southern Downs Heritage Festival. Join Deb in her beautiful period home 'Grafton Rose' - 134 Grafton Street, Warwick - and listen to her talk on 'Our Forgotten Anzacs' - cost is just \$2 and proceeds will be donated to Mates4Mates. For bookings call 4667 0151.

For those who wish to stay and talk with Deborah why not just sit back and enjoy a delicious homemade Devonshire Tea. Cost \$12 with \$2 going to Mates4Mates.

### Times ...

- 10am-11am
- Saturday 27 April
- Sunday 28 April
- Wednesday 1 May
- Thursday 2 May
- Friday 3 May
- Saturday 4 May
- Sunday 5 May
- Monday 6 May ●



The big Chambers dictionary is never far from Deb's side...



Deb's Pop, William James Wheeler.



The message of 'My Pop Was A Kangaroo ANZAC' resonates as much with adults as it does with kids.



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