Anthony's Story

Now that I am big ....

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Personal photographs supplied by a defence family and ADF personnel
My Dad works away when he is on deployment. He helps people in another country or even in Australia.

When he is at home, he works at the base but comes home every night. It is different work to 'deployment'. Sometimes when he is training he stays away for a few nights, or a bit longer.
When he is on deployment, he works with others to help keep people safe. They help other people build a better country or community.
Mum, Rose and I miss him when he is away.

Sometimes he is away for a very long time.
When I was little, I thought he was never coming home.

Now that I am big, I know he stays away for months at a time. I can count on the calendar how many days, weeks and months he has been away. When Dad Skypes us to tell us when he is coming home, I count down the days until he arrives on my special calendar.
When I was little, I didn't know what to do when Mummy was sad.

Now that I am big, I can take her the tissues and cheer her up with my toys.

She also likes my cuddles, a lot.
When I was little, I used to get grumpy waiting to talk to Dad on the phone.

Now that I am big, I know how to wait my turn.

And wait,

and wait

and wait.
When I was little, I could do a bit to help Mum when Dad was away on deployment.

But now I am big, I can help her weed the garden and look after the dogs. I can even help Rose get ready for daycare on the days Mum goes to work.
When I was little, Mum had to do all his jobs when he was away.

Mum still mows the lawns. When the mower doesn't start she gets really mad at it.

Now that I am big, I can help to put out the rubbish bins.

Mum still mows the lawns. When the mower doesn't start she gets really mad at it.

I am glad I am not the lawnmower.
When I was little, I could only talk on the phone and Skype Daddy when he was on deployment.

Now that I am big, I can email him and tell him what I have been up to.

Dad emails me back to say that he has been missing me and asks if I have been looking after his pillow at night.
When I was little, I used to help lick the bowl and taste test the biscuits we made to post to Dad.

Now that I am big, I can help measure, pour, mix, and of course I still taste. Dad only likes yummy biscuits so we always need to check. Mum says quality assurance is very important.
Before we send the biscuits, I do a drawing for Dad.

Mum and Rose post the letter and parcel when I am at school.

A week or two later, Dad Skypes me to say that the biscuits taste great. He loves my drawing too.
When I was little and Dad was on deployment, I would miss running in the back yard with him.

Now I that I am big I also miss playing cricket, kicking the ball, romping, tickling and tackling with him.
When I was little, I would sometimes get cross and grumpy with Dad after he got home.

I was cranky that he had been away for so long. I was also worried that he was going away and leaving us again.

When he went to work at the base for the day, I thought he was going back on deployment and I would get very upset. I didn't understand that he was coming home again every night.
Now that I am big, I know the difference between going to work and going on deployment.

When Dad is home, our time together is very special.

We are a family.
Now that I am big, I also know that Dad loves me and thinks about me ...
... whether he is far, far away on deployment or training ....
...or right here at home with me.
I love my Dad.

Now that I am big, we are also great mates.
What the literature and research says

This book explores a number of themes identified in the author’s thesis entitled ‘Young Children’s Understanding and Experiences of Deployment within an ADF Family’ undertaken at the University of New England. These themes include:

- **Emotional reactions to deployment and post-deployment** (e.g. supporting others, anger toward deployed parent)

  This book shows the way some children take an active role in comforting other members of the family when they are missing the absent parent. The wellbeing of the non-deployed parent has a major influence on the reactions of children to parental deployment (Siebler & Goddard, 2014). The non-deployed parent who is able to show a normal array of emotional responses, but who also models ways to deal with strong emotions, helps their child build resilience. Siebler (2009) acknowledged the pervasiveness of difficulties associated with reuniting the family unit after deployment. Bowling and Sherman (2008) believe that such readjustments need a heightened level of communication and malleability. Agreement on how to handle children’s emotional and behavioural outbursts requires a large amount goodwill between parents. To build a united approach with the children, there needs to be a realignment of parenting techniques (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). There also needs to be readiness by the at-home spouse to give up some influence and accept the other parent’s way of operating again. Generally this is achieved, however Bowling and Sherman (2008) discuss ongoing control issues that are more difficult. These power struggles may be due to the at-home parent’s increased, or newly acquired confidence and personal development (Siebler, 2009). The at home parent could be hesitant to give up their new level of authority and autonomy to work again as a team. Adding to these issues, military parents often feel an emotional numbness along with guilt and fatigue when they return home making it difficult to readjust. The numbing of emotions is useful for military personnel as it allows for better workplace functioning in combat (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). Re-adjustment to intimate relationships at home, and allowing themselves to feel the full gamut of emotional bonding, can be challenging for the returned personnel. Additionally, the at-home spouse and children often confine themselves emotionally as a self-protection device to help them cope without the deployed family member. Generally, families are able to let go of these emotional restraints and reconnect once more. Issues continue when communication patterns between family members are ineffective as a result of previous problems or a refusal to investigate each other’s experiences and understanding. Bowling and Sherman (2008) outline the way children struggle to do this if they fear breaking down emotionally if the parent leaves again on another deployment.

- **Tools and stories helping children understand the concepts of deployment** (e.g. time, work and deployment differences)

  Knaus (2010) showed that young children’s understanding of time is very different to that of adults and is influenced by culture and family. To help with concepts of the length of time a deployed parent is away many parents help their children make calendars, using stickers to count down the days of deployment or training episodes. Conversations and stories about why the parent is gone, where they have gone, what they do when they are away and the importance of the work involved are essential to help children understand what is happening. Ensuring there is a difference in the language describing work, training and deployment is very important. This clarity helps children realise that going to work for the day at the base is different to a two-week training episode or a nine-month deployment.

- **Communication** (e.g. use of phone, parcels, emails, photobooks)

  The Defence Community Organisation (2014) endorses frequent positive communication amongst family members as a way to encourage, share and bond. Photobook albums and pre-recorded story-books can be a great source of comfort to children as they can get them out whenever they want to connect with the absent parent through shared memories.

In Australia, there are a number of websites that may give you more information and support through the Defence Community Organisation, Early Childhood Australia and local, state and national health and community services.
Reference List


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Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the special family who asked for this book to be created and thus highlighted the glaring need for age-appropriate Australian books and for community understanding of veteran families. Thanks must also go to the Defence families and relatives who have made themselves available for this project, giving their time, photographs, generosity and honesty. Many thanks also to Black Mountain and Niangala Public schools, and their enthusiastic teachers and students, who combined with us in an action research project to explore teaching strategies for creating a unit of work on the ANZAC story that would be suitable for primary aged students. A huge thanks must go to the families, organisations and friends who also contributed their time, photos and memories to make this book a reality. A special thanks to Di Swann for her administrative support and Beth Rogers for her grammatical expertise.
About the authors and editors

**Dr Marg Rogers** is a lecturer and researcher in Early Childhood education at the University of New England. She has qualifications and professional experience in Early Childhood, creative arts education and ESL. In both her current and previous work roles, her passion in education has always been in supporting families to help them do the best job they can through authentic community and education partnerships. As a part of this project, Marg has had the privilege to meet with some defence families and discuss many of the issues they face. Marg hopes these books will support children, parents and educators by providing a starting point to discuss these issues further. This book is a research output from her PhD thesis entitled ‘Young Children’s Understanding and Experiences within an Australian Defence Force Family’. **Her other current research area is in the use of technology within early childhood services.**

Other publications by Marg:

Research output link: Liam’s story: So why do I wear Dad’s medals?
http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/cha.2016.8
http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244017706711
http://www.une.edu.au/about-une/academic-schools/school-of-education/research
http://artinearlychildhood.org/journals/2018/ARTEC_2018_Research_Journal_1_Article_5_Roger.pdf

**Madeline Fussell** was the person contacted by the family reflected in this book and thus this project has held special meaning for her. As a primary trained and Early Childhood educator, Madeline has 30 years teaching experience, the most recent as a lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of New England teaching pre-service primary teachers. Teaching about implementing the Australian history curriculum, identified a clear lack of suitable resources for primary aged students. Madeline’s own childhood with a father who battled PTSD and her learning through her own two sons’, and their friends’ military careers has been a driving force to see further community understanding of veterans’ needs, and their families, developed.
From the author:

For my first beautiful great nieces, and all of her generation to come.