

ALFRED'S WAR



Rachel Bin Salleh


Illustrated by Samantha Fry

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Magabala
Books 



Alfred George lived outside.

He slept in parks.



On benches.

Under big trees.





Sometimes Alfred rolled up his bedding and walked from town to town looking for work.



Always with his hat on, his billy tied to his swag and holes in the soles of his shoes.



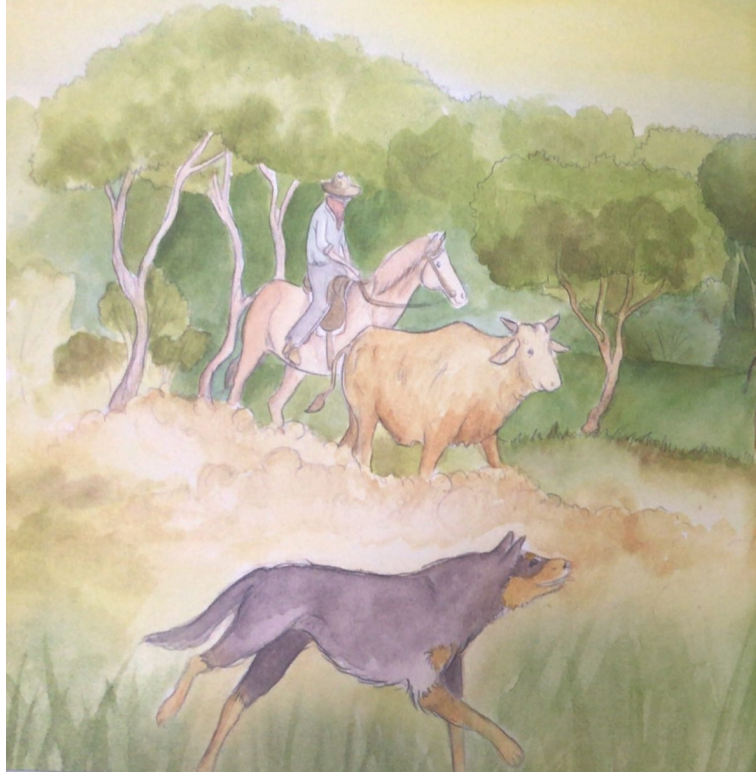
At night, Alfred camped on the outskirts of town.



There were many places Aboriginal people weren't allowed to go. That's how life was in those days.



Alfred had grown up on a mission and, when he was old enough, he set off to find work.



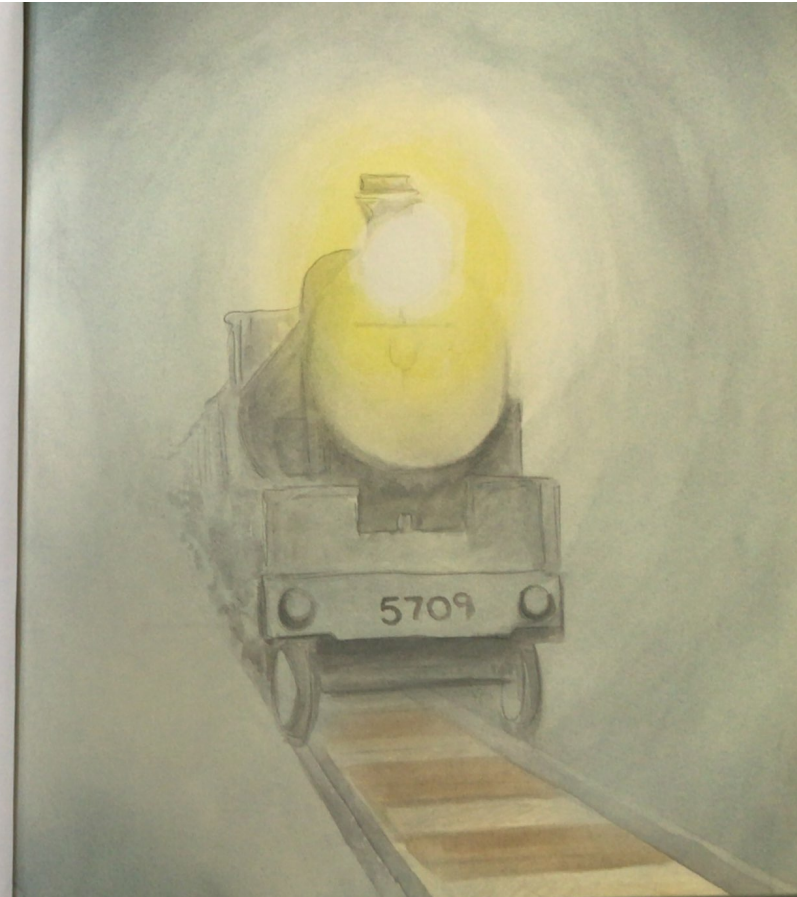
He worked as a gardener and a labourer, and mustered cattle on stations a long way from home.



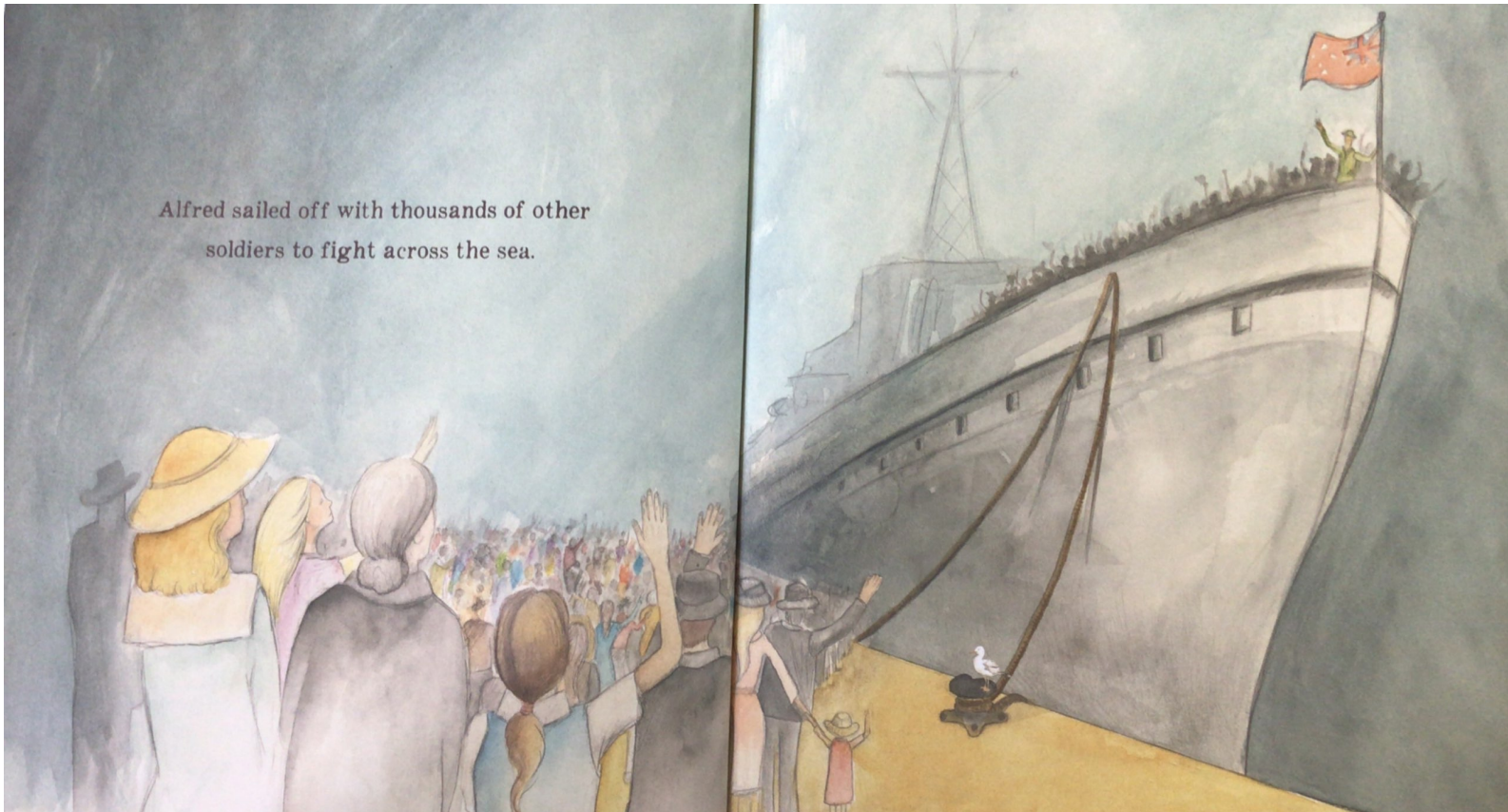
One day, Alfred wrote a letter to his family, telling them he had signed up for adventure and travel.



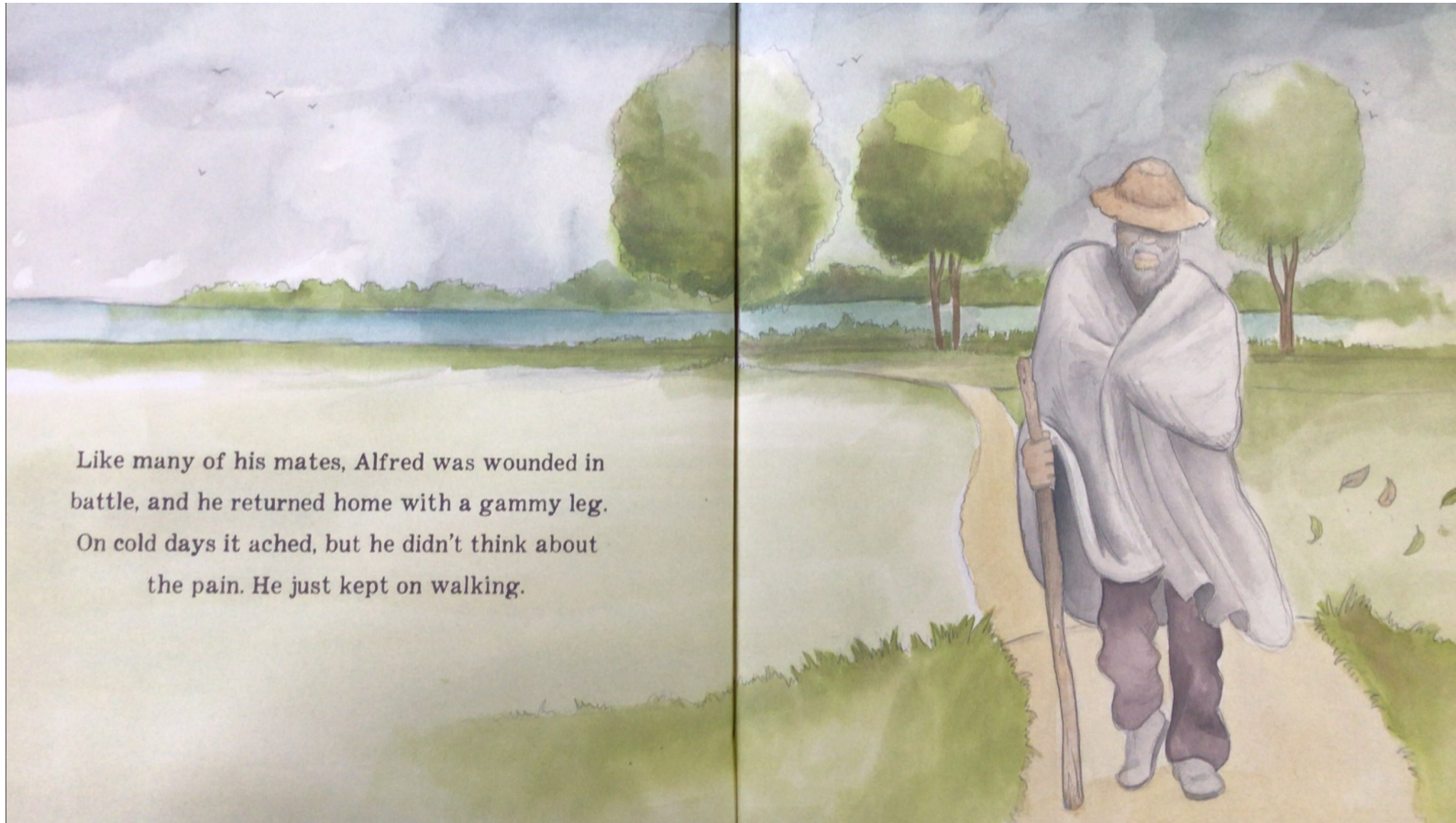
He was heading to the city to join the Army and serve in the Great War.



Alfred sailed off with thousands of other
soldiers to fight across the sea.

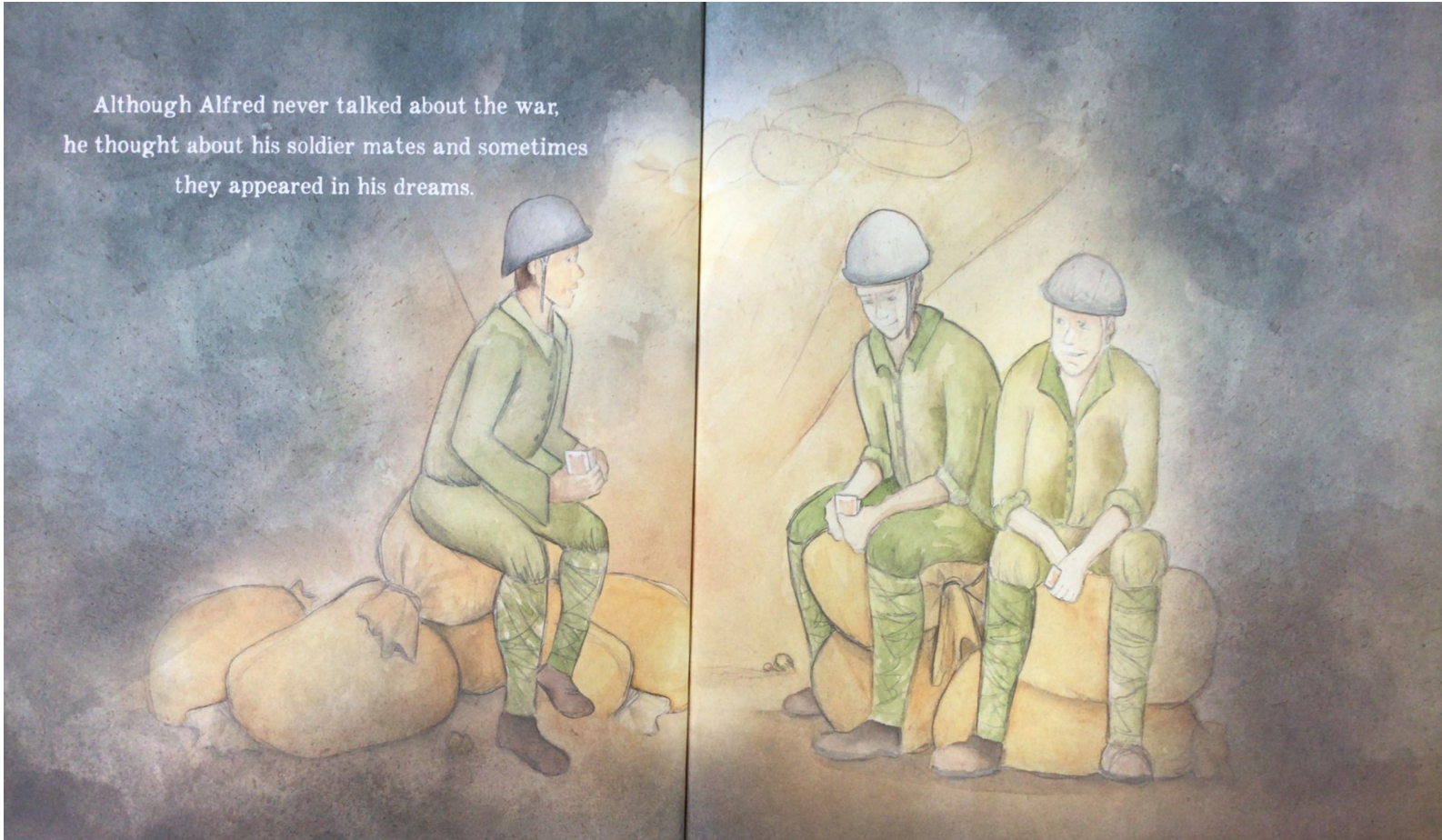






Like many of his mates, Alfred was wounded in battle, and he returned home with a gammy leg. On cold days it ached, but he didn't think about the pain. He just kept on walking.

Although Alfred never talked about the war,
he thought about his soldier mates and sometimes
they appeared in his dreams.

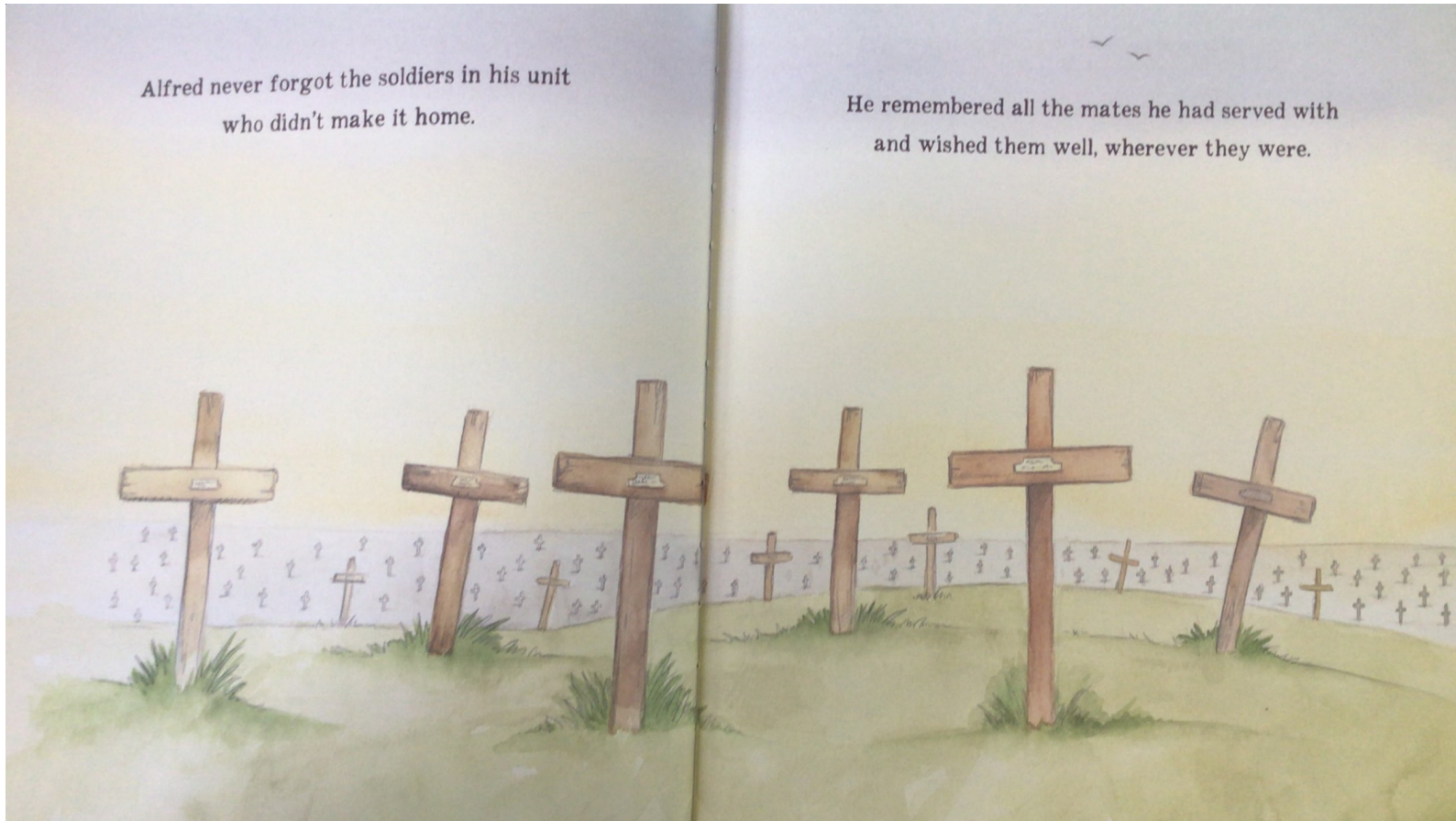


Every so often, Alfred could hear the never-ending gunfire in his head and the whispers of young men praying. On those days, he curled into a ball and slept in the shadows.



Alfred never forgot the soldiers in his unit
who didn't make it home.

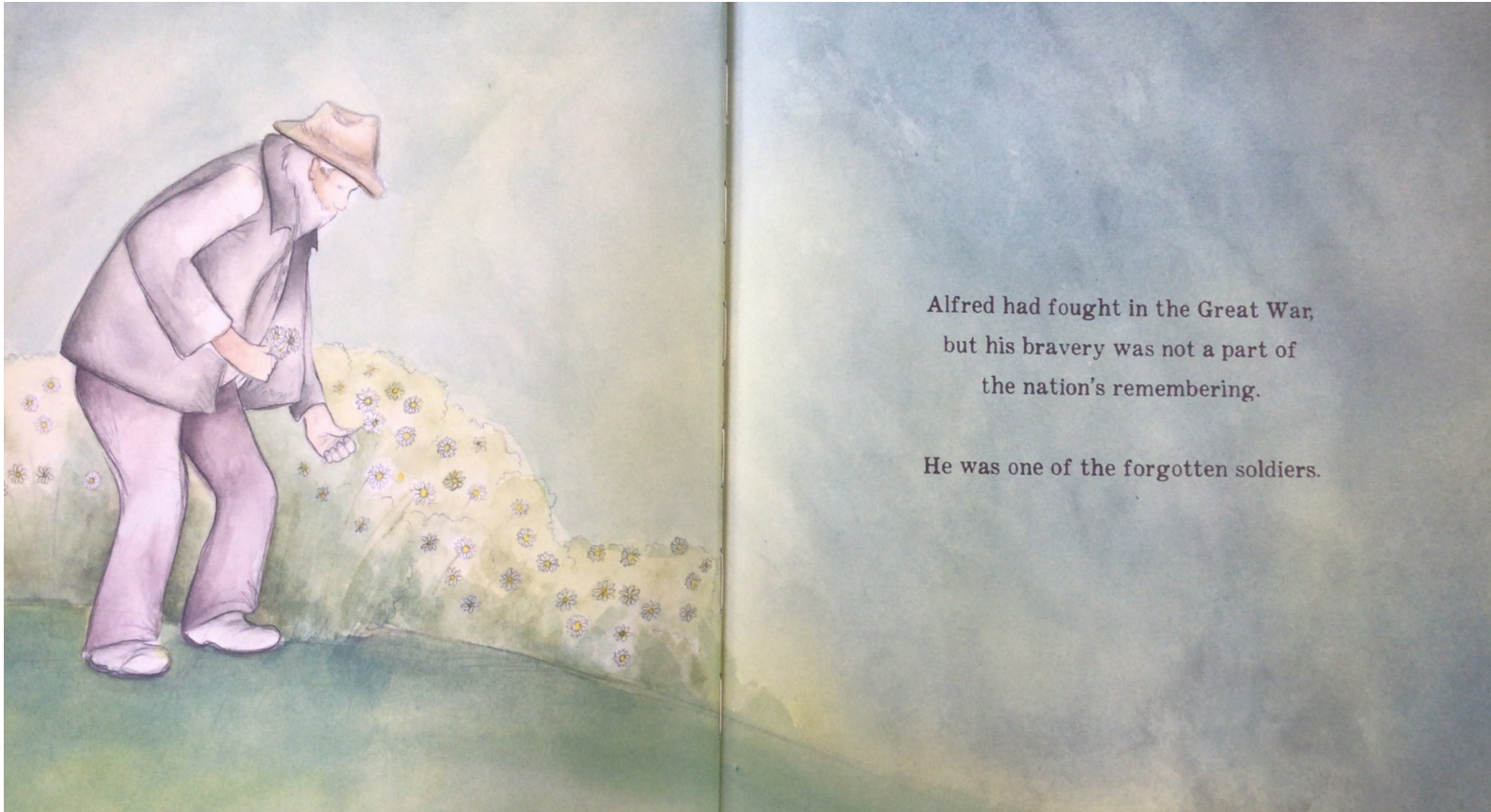
He remembered all the mates he had served with
and wished them well, wherever they were.



Every year on Anzac Day, Alfred walked to the nearest town for the dawn service.

He stayed in the shadows until he heard the lament of the bugle, and then he quietly joined the people gathered in the morning light.





Alfred had fought in the Great War,
but his bravery was not a part of
the nation's remembering.

He was one of the forgotten soldiers.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans

From the Boer War (1899–1902) onwards, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have fought in all of the wars that Australia has been involved in. In World War 1 (1914–1918), also known as the Great War, nearly 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys and men enlisted and fought overseas.

At that time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had no citizenship rights, and were not allowed to vote. Under various Acts of Parliament, some state governments compelled people to live on missions or reserves, and regulated where they could work.

At the beginning of WW1, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were prohibited from enlisting in the armed forces on the grounds of their race. In 1917, the Department of Defence issued Military Orders that allowed 'half-castes' (Aboriginal people with one parent of European origin), and Aboriginal people who had 'lived with white men' into the army's ranks. This was only after Australia had suffered huge casualties and a declining rate of enlistment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men joined the Great War for lots of reasons — some hoped for better or equal rights, some did so out of loyalty to their country, some were looking for adventure. Others signed up because their mates and family members did. Once enlisted, these men were accepted by their comrades as equals and mates. They also received equal pay, which was unheard of for Indigenous men and women.

World War 1 was traumatic and bloody for all those who served overseas, and it was not uncommon for veterans to experience difficulties adjusting back to civilian life. It was an even harder road for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors. Civil rights had not improved, and curfews were in place around most towns and cities.

Despite their bravery and sacrifice, the Black Diggers were not fully recognised by their country or in the communities they returned to. Few Indigenous returned soldiers received land under the 'soldier settlement' scheme, and many struggled to find work. Others were not welcomed to share a drink with their comrades at pubs, or at the meeting places and institutions established to support war veterans.

It would take years before the service and sacrifice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veterans to Australia's war efforts were acknowledged and valued.

Rachel Bin Salleh is descended from the Nimunburr and Yawuru peoples of the Kimberley region of Western Australia. She has worked in publishing for over twenty years and is passionate about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people telling their stories.

Rachel lives in Broome with her family. *Alfred's War* is her first book.

Samantha Fry grew up in the Northern Territory and lives in Darwin.

She is descended from the Dagiman people from Katherine and as a child lived in remote communities across the Top End.

Samantha is an accomplished artist and talented designer.

Alfred's War is the first book she has illustrated.