NICK'S STORY

MY COLOURFUL KITE









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Foreword

Having personal stories to tell and record creatively is a vital feature of young children's lives. Hearing others' life stories can also help children make personal meanings. In fact, storying can help children create memories, as well as revisit storylines relevant to their lived experiences. One way that young children might strengthen personal memories* is via storybook words and images alongside family conversations as memory-frames. However, it seems that early life remembrances can be rather unreliable – 'infantile amnesia'*. This mental situation may reflect the idea that children's earliest life experiences actually do exist but in some neural form that is not accessible. So, we adults might wonder... when he is older, what will Nick actually recall about his mother's first few work-away trips? Here, I connect with Nick's home life. We became a one parent family when I was three, as my father died suddenly one morning from a heart attack. Yet, I don't really recall any of that traumatic time; rather, I occasionally revisit scant snippets from a questioning chat with Gram years later.

Through Nick's voice we explore what he did and how he felt when mama left home for a month. As the title reveals, flying the colourful kite they created together offered a focus, even a mother-metaphor, for Nick's personal emptiness and worrying. Such play outdoors contributed to his feeling a little more settled, while Auntie's 'let go' encouragement supported him.

This story highlights aspects of a healthy, enjoyable life; sharing family foods; playing actively outside; engaging in creative arts; uncovering inner strengths; and, a solid measure of relationships with mutual-help from others. Collaborative outdoor experiences, such as 'pitching in' with edible gardening and observing for careful nature study and engagement, can set a deliberately slower life pace. Also, being outside promotes children's development of emotional competencies – personal awareness, control, and inspiration, along with worldly empathy and community involvement.

Dr Nadine Louise McCrea
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* Refer to Jonathan Foster's book (2009) Memory A Very Story Introduction, Oxford University Press; autobiographical episodic memory, p 39 & 'infantile amnesia' p 103.



Mama loves:

- playing trombone
- pot plants



Nick loves:

- opportunity shops
- playing the tin whistle



Aunt Theresa loves:

- playing clarinet
- going to the park



The sky is blue
but my kite is
colourful.
Bright, bright
colours;
its wings are
made of cloth.



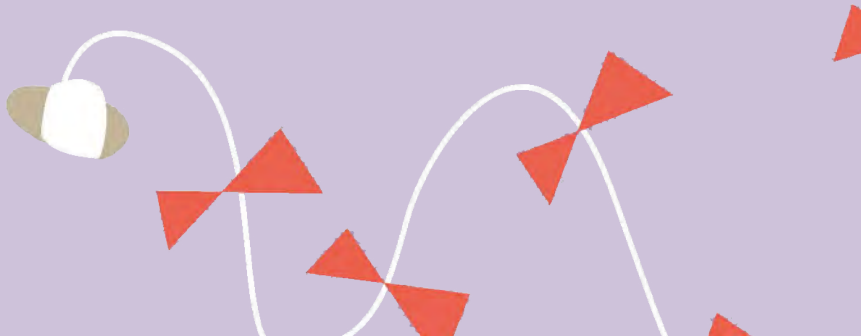


Last week my Mama
helped build my kite,
sturdy and strong,
before she went away
for work.



The tail is wiggly
but the rods are so strong.
Bendy and strong
to keep the cloth tight.





We made it together
and we sang as we worked,
laughed and talked,
and Mum told a joke.




The string is so long
but the tail is short.
Ribbons and bows
are knotted all along.


Aunt Theresa came in
‘To check we’re okay’ with tea and cakes, ‘You’ve been working so long’.

Mama packed and left.
I felt myself cry,
deep inside
but no tears fell
down.




The house feels empty
now that Mum's gone.
Four long weeks;
how will I cope?

I miss Mama so much

but Aunt Theresa is here;
cuddly and warm,
but just not my Mum





I have missed her all day.
She will phone me tonight.
That's good;
but I want her here now.





My Aunt sees me crying
and gathers me up;
safe and secure
and tells me I'm
loved.


“Mama
can’t be
here,
but I’ll tell you
what;
let’s fly the kite,
that will cheer us
up.”


The kite flies up,
but not too high.
Holding it tight,
I will not let it go far.


“Oh, Nick, you need to
let it go a bit more.
Give it string;
let it fly like a bird”.


“But Aunt, my Mama
made me
that kite;
bright and
colourful,
I can’t lose
it now.”


“Oh, my love
we can bring it back down,
anytime now.
Just give it some slack.”


I ease it out carefully
to let the kite up;
dancing and twirling
just like a kite should.


“Bravo, my boy,
just look at it go!
I’m so proud;
you’re a clever
young man”.

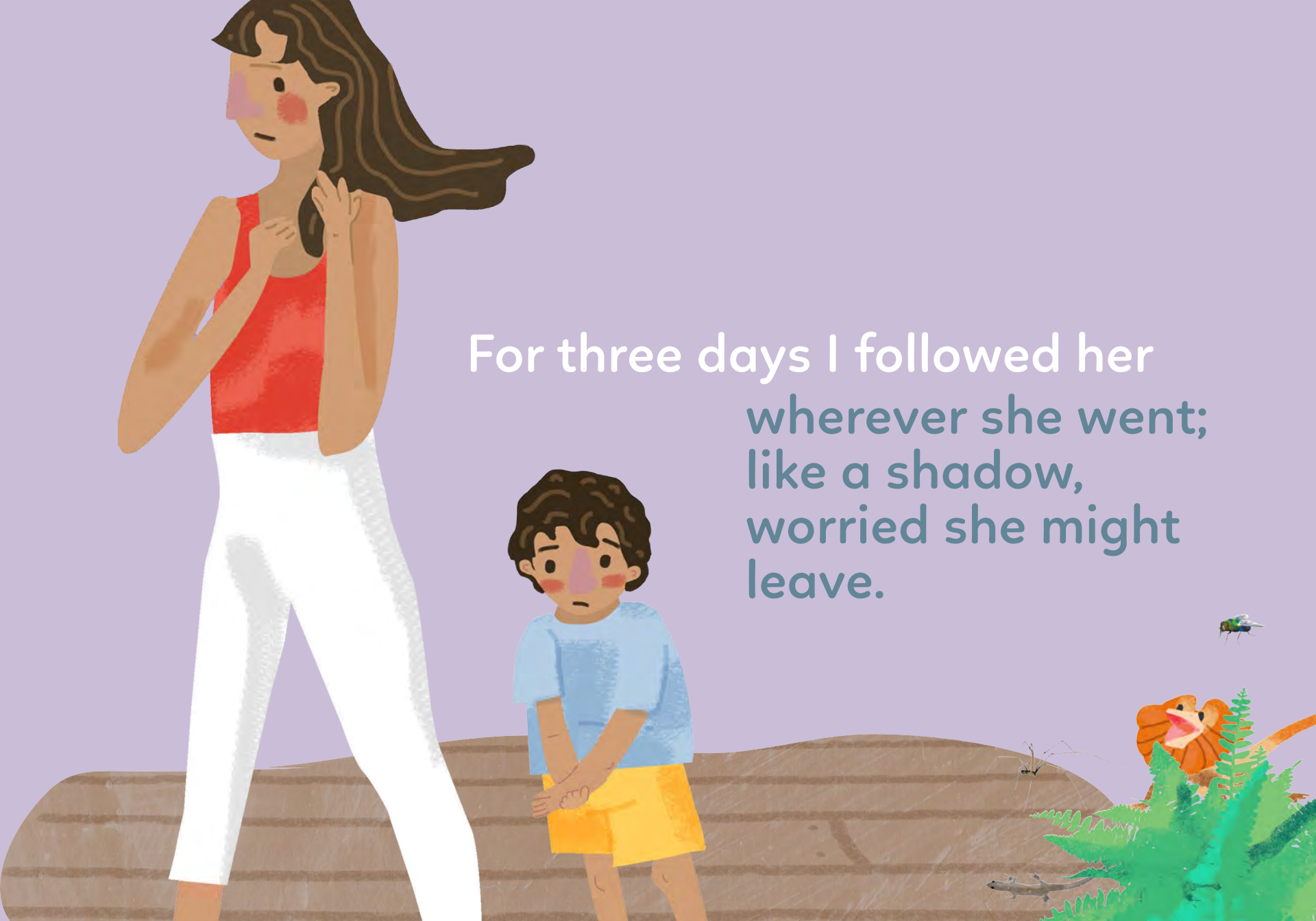

Finally, she lets me
bring it back down;
safe and secure,
I hug it so tight.


“Oh Nick, you have to learn to let go. Mama’s coming back just like the kite.”


The tears fall then
and she wipes
them away.
“Mum comes
back
just like your
kite.”



just like Aunt said;
smiles and laughs,
lots of stories to tell.


For three days I followed her
wherever she went;
like a shadow,
worried she might
leave.


"Ah, Nick, you must
remember that kite;
flying so well
when you gave it some
string."


It’s hard you know
but I’m trying
my best to
give Mum
space
and help her
fly high.





Name the types of Australian birds in this book. Find out which parts of Australia you would see them. What do they eat and what sounds do they make?





‘Mama’ is another name for ‘mother’ that is used by people in some cultures. Choose 10 different countries around the world and find out what their words for ‘mother’ and ‘father’ are.

Nick and his family enjoy playing musical instruments. Find out more about the 3 instruments they play. What instrument family do they belong to? How does the player make the sound? How does the player change the note (pitch) and volume?



Kite festivals are very popular. Find out the place nearest to you where they have a kite festival. What time of year is it held? What types of kites are flown at the festivals?





What other Australian animals can you find in this book? Which parts of Australia would you find them? What do they eat and what sounds do they make?

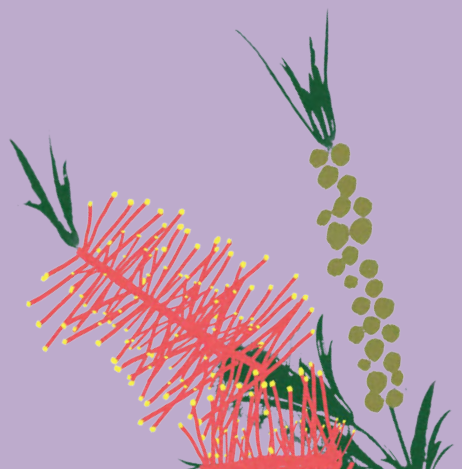


How was this research-based eBook written?

The static eBook was written using research data collected with defence families, professional experience and other research. The original research project was titled 'Young children's understandings and experiences of parental deployment within an Australian Defence Force (ADF) family' (Rogers, 2020).

eBook research question

How can an eBook assist children to build their knowledge and understanding of possible social responses when parents work away?



eBook research statement

This digitised eBook was designed to build on children's knowledge and understanding of:

- clinginess as a social response to parents working away
- the importance of protective factors in families, such as the support of relatives
- the powerful effect of engaging in the creative arts
- the importance of nature play to promote wellbeing
- the benefits of frequent communication between the child and the parent who is away

Through the experiences of Nick, children learn about clinginess when they see Nick clinging to the kite when his mother goes away. Nick does this because the kite is tangible, whereas his mother is far away. Children are reminded of the comfort of extended family members when a parent is away. Through making the kite together, the children can gain an appreciation of engaging in a joint arts project with a parent or other adult. The kite provides Nick with opportunities for outings and engagement with nature with his Aunt, and eventually, his mother. These outings provide enjoyment and opportunities to engage positively with adults. The story provides an emotional sequence of a parent going away for work. Nick is worried before his mother leaves, sad when she is gone, and ultimately, excited and relieved when she is home again. Seeing other children experience these emotions allows children to safely practice their own emotional responses as they empathise with the characters of the story. Other children who do not experience a parent working away can gain understanding and empathy for their peers who do experience this arrangement in their family.



The power of the creative arts

When children engage with the creative arts, it deepens their learning and allows for creativity (Dinham and Chalk, 2017). In this story, Nick and his mother enjoy making a kite together. Spending time working together on art projects allows time for unhurried conversations. Children pick up on household stress and know when their parents are busy. They often avoid asking questions if they think the parent is busy.
Working on shared art projects gives children ongoing opportunities to talk to the parent when they are away, such as through phone calls, messages, emails, photo-sharing and postcards. This keeps the relationship active, despite the distance between them. This can create smoother reunions and reintegration into family life when parents return home (Rogers, 2020b).
The arts also provide a vehicle for improving: language skills, fine motor skills, expressing emotions in a safe way, aesthetic appreciation, agency, problem solving, literacy and numeracy. Arts projects provide opportunities to engage in exploration of cultural expression and self expression (Roy et. al., 2015).

The therapeutic nature of nature play

When parents work away, there are higher levels of stress in the family due to the ongoing transitions they experience (Siebler, 2009; 2015). Additionally, parents might also bring the stresses from their work back home, especially when their work away is very stressful, such as when they are working in emergency services or providing medical support. Cramm et. al. (2016) discuss the potential stresses for children when their parents work away for military service.

To counteract stress, children and families can engage with nature. Wellbeing in populations is linked to the amount of interaction they have with nature, natural spaces and natural materials. Bakarat and Yousufza (2020) discuss the importance of green spaces for the mental health of vulnerable populations, such as veterans and their families. In this story, Nick, Aunt Theresa and his mother spend time flying a kite at the park where they are immersed in natural spaces. Educators, parents, educators and family workers can encourage families and children to spend time outside to boost their wellbeing. Elliott and Young (2016) discuss the important role educators play in promoting nature play:

'Australian early childhood educators, supported by current policies and frameworks, are readily embracing the identified need for children to be outside and actively engaged with nature. We acknowledge this has enormous benefits for children's health, wellbeing and experiential learning about natural elements' (para. 1).

The benefits of nature play are profound. Children can improve their attention span, engage their senses and improve their physical and emotional wellbeing (Elliott & Young, 2016).



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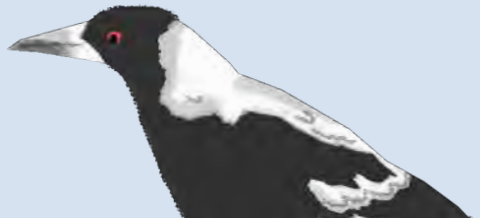
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About the author

Dr Marg Rogers is a lecturer and researcher in early childhood education at the University of New England. Her PhD researched 'Young children's understanding and experiences within an Australian Defence Force (ADF) family'. Marg witnessed the impact of war on her uncle's family when he served in Vietnam on multiple deployments and the effects on his physical and mental health. She also experienced the intergenerational effects of her grandfather's WWII service that resulted in injuries. Marg has qualifications and professional experience in early childhood, creative arts education and language education (ESL). In both her current and previous work roles, her passion for education has always been in supporting families to 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 defence families and discuss many of the issues they face. She hopes her eBooks will provide children, parents and educators with a starting point to discuss these issues further.

Other resources by Marg Rogers can be found at www.ecdefenceprograms.com, or on Orcid https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8407-7256





Copyright, ethics and citation

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Pseudonyms have been used in this book. Ethics approval was gained from The University of New England (UNE).

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The Ian Potter Foundation

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From the author:

While I have some marvelous men in my life, I have always been surrounded by women. Wise, witty, wonderful, willful, wiley, wacky, warm, wild and welcoming. You have all been such a source of strength, encouragement and humour when I have needed it most. I can't begin to count you, but I am blessed indeed to have you all.

