

Dawn Service

Things my mother told me about Great-grandad

That he always wore a brown jumper.

That he had tufts of hair like white feathers.

That he didn't like the word "um". (Once he made her brother write it down on a piece of paper and bury it in the garden.)

That his laugh always turned into a wheeze.

That his chest sounded like it had ropes and pulleys in it.

That once he wore a leather flying jacket and stood on the wing of a biplane, waving.

That once he was only nineteen. That he looked like a boy then.

That he wrote in a logbook with a soft pencil about how nervous he was to fly.

That he looked forward to the mail cart coming.

That he and his friends would stand right there in the field, all quiet with their goggles and boots, reading letters from home.

Things my mother didn't tell me about Great-grandad

Whether he was scared the first time he flew alone.

How tightly he gripped the controls.

How long the nights seemed. Whether he had bad dreams.

Who he thought about when he couldn't sleep.

What it felt like to hear shells bursting close by.

How many friends he lost over the Western Front.

Why he didn't talk about the war when people asked him.

What he would think about us coming here at dawn

still warm from our beds

to listen for his name. Whether he would look up at the rows

of people, their faces blurry with sleep, wearing red poppies

and at the bright lamps anchored in the sky

and the flags hung like coats on the cenotaph

or whether he would keep his head down,

looking at his polished boots.



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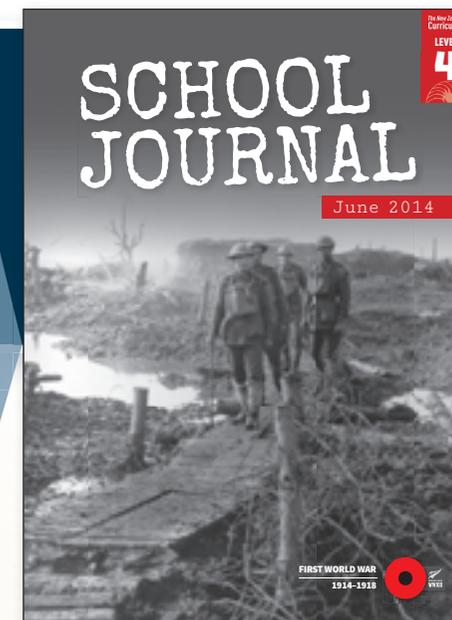
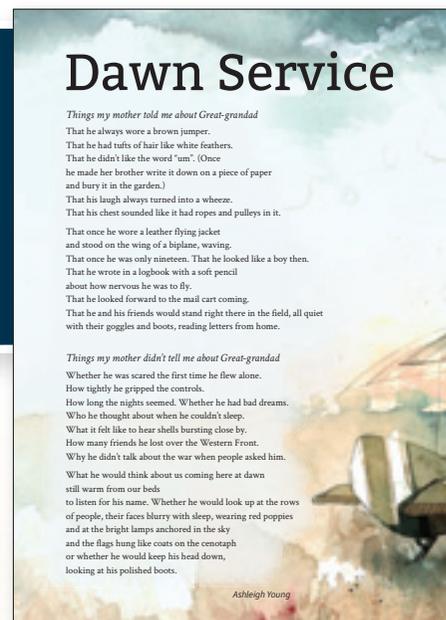
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