



ISSUE 1 · AUG 2022

SCRIBBLINGS

News from Rae Blair

'More Than I Ever Had' now available!

The concept for writing my first book came in March 2019, when I was thinking about what I would get for my grandson for his first birthday. I thought I would write him a children's book; a story about his six-times great-grandfather. It might inspire him to be interested not only in his family history, but history in general. But, in plotting out the book, I realised the story was not best told as a children's tale. At least, I was not the one to tell it in that format, so I organised a different gift. However, I was now filled with inspiration, and decided to plough ahead to write the story for a general audience.

After more than three years of research and writing, several drafts, much consultation with family and friends, my writers' group and other critique partners, I decided that Theo's story was ready to go out to the world.

As a lover of stories, I know the joy good writing can bring. In setting out Theo's story, I had high ambitions for it—it had to engage a reader and make them want to go on Theo's journey with him. There was the additional pressure of telling a tale based on someone's actual life—of imagining conversations, thoughts and feelings.

Welcome to my first newsletter!

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A writing tenet I know to be true is that story is about the 'why' and not about the 'what'. We knew a lot about what Theo did in his military career. Where he was born. Where he lived. Who he married. Where he died. My job was to connect all of those 'whats' into 'whys'.

Theo was there in the very early days of the foundation of modern Australia—contributing to the settlement of Sydney Cove, Parramatta, the northern end of Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), and the first iteration of British settlement of Norfolk Island. More than two hundred and thirty years later, Theo's descendants still live in Sydney and in Tasmania (as well as other parts of Australia), where food and supplies are abundant. I often wonder what Theo would make of it all.

What the British military asked of Theo, as a soldier, and of his family, is difficult to believe. If you were not tough, or resilient, you fell by the wayside. But it was these very qualities that enabled Theo's family—and many others like them—to not only survive in the harshest possible circumstances, but to thrive. I found Theo's story to be not only inspiring, but one filled with hope, and I hope you do, too.

Stockists

Amazon – paperback and eBook (world-wide. Link [here](#) to Australian site)

And, big thank you to these quality booksellers for their support:

[Berkelouw](#) Balgowlah

[Berkelouw](#) Mona Vale

[Better Read Than Dead](#), Newtown

[Burns Bay Bookery](#), Lane Cove

[Harry Hartog](#), Warringah Mall, Brookvale

[Novella](#), Wahroona

[Rutherford & Maine](#), Heathcote, Vic

"We are a
long way
from home,
Theo."

ELLEN



This book captivated me from the first page and continued to engage me to the end. The trials and tribulations of Theo and his family as they forged a life for themselves in the early Australian settler was engagingly revealed. I felt I was on the journey with them.

What people are saying

Published reviews for books are particularly important for self-published authors (a.k.a. Indie Authors). Not only do they assist other customers to find the book and give them confidence to buy it, but a book with a high number of reviews has other marketing avenues opened up to them, creating opportunities for expanded distribution.

The Amazon review rating for 'More Than I Ever Had' is 4.5/5 stars and I'm so grateful for those people who take the time to post their comments. Here's just a snippet of what people have posted online, so far:

"Definitely the best historical drama I have found and devoured quickly since I finished the Patrick O'Brian series." NT

"...the author has done a brilliant job of recreating the extraordinary life of Theo...she brings the story to life with beautiful descriptive passages that really do take you back to the harsh realities of colonial life in Australia." JA

"This book captivated me from the first page and continued to engage me to the end." AC

"Beautifully written and clearly well researched. Highly recommend." JA

"Rae Blair has done a wonderful job of melding fiction with genealogical and historical facts and as a result has created a riveting story of love, loss and survival. Highly recommended!" DGL

"...a real page turner." TJ

"Once I started reading 'More than I Ever Had' by Rae Blair I simply could not put it down. I am not really into historical novels, but the book is so engaging, that you feel you are next to Theo on this journey." AS

"...loved hearing the details of the early settlers and how difficult it was for them, especially the women. Great read!" LN

"A tribute to the human spirit." RR

"If you enjoy historical fiction set in Australia's colonial past, I recommend this novel." JCS



*B*ilston, England, 1789 (West Midlands)
A crushing blow knocked Theo clear off his feet. A moment before, he'd held forceps and pliers twisting hot metal into a buckle tongue, his own tongue clamped between his teeth in concentration. Now flat on his back, confusion muddled his brain. A thick beam pinned him to the ground, making breathing difficult.

He tried to order his thoughts, blinking as air thick and bitter with smoke stung his eyes and filled his throat. Grunting with effort, Theo pushed the beam away, ducking as more of the crumbling roof crashed around him. Amongst debris and rising dust, he made it to his hands and knees, flexing his grazed knuckles as pain shot through his shoulder. People pushed past him. Panicked curses contributed to the surrounding chaos. From behind, rough hands dragged Theo to his feet, and he was swept up with others rushing to safety. Heading to the light of the open door, Theo stumbled over rubble, avoiding the collapsed fireplace spewing liquid metal which snaked across the factory floor, glowing black and red.

Relieved to be outside, Theo bent over gasping as he wiped his streaming eyes. He squinted at the building, at the flames crackling within, at the black smoke pulsing out the windows. *What a disaster!* Men, screaming in agony with scorched skin and hair, were being assisted to



The stories behind the story

Theo's life played out within major moments in Australia's early history. For those readers who want a deeper understanding of these moments, I've posted some blogs on my website giving further details—see links below. More are on the way! Have you missed hearing about my blog posts? Make sure you sign up on my website so you know whenever I post something new.

[The Scandal of the Second Fleet](#)

The shocking story of the second fleet of convict transport and store ships sent from England to Port Jackson, and why contracts were changed forever.

[The Baughan Affair](#)

The arm wrestle between civilian and military authorities, the ex-convict-turned-mill-wright in the middle, and where Theo's life hangs in the balance.

**"You are a
great
scoundrel and
I demand
satisfaction."**

LT. JOHN MACARTHUR



DURING AN ABORIGINAL FEAST ON A BEACHED WHALE,
THE FIRST GOVERNOR OF NSW, CAPTAIN ARTHUR PHILLIP
RN, WAS SPEARED IN THE SHOULDER BY AN ABORIGINAL

Additional scenes

My early drafts of 'More Than I Ever Had' included some scenes which I reluctantly had to cut for the final version—otherwise the book would have been more than 600 pages long! So, I've posted an additional scene on my website for readers of 'More Than I Ever Had' to enjoy.

[The spearing of Governor Phillip](#)

Governor Arthur Phillip was speared through the shoulder by an indigenous man in Manly Cove, three months after Theo arrived in New South Wales. How did it happen, and what happens next?

What is an Indie Author?

You might have heard the term 'Indie Author', which is a phrase for authors who choose to publish their own books. There are a variety of reasons why an author might choose to self-publish over what is termed 'traditional publishing' (that is, with a publishing company). One benefit for an author who chooses to publish their own work is they have complete control—over everything—including book title, cover design, interior format, pricing, time-liness of publication, and ownership of copyright. Another benefit is that royalties paid are concomitant with risk—a self-published author takes all the financial risk, so the royalties paid are significantly better than what an author receives through a traditional publisher, as the traditional publisher covers all of the production and distribution costs.

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"I promise to
be the
husband you
deserve.
Please marry
me."

THEO



BOOK REVIEW

DARE NOT TELL BY ELAINE SCHROLLER

'Dare Not Tell' tells the story of returned Australian soldier, Joe Parker, and American nurse Sophie Holt, who worked at the American Hospital in Paris during WWI. Joe has kept from Sophie his worst experiences of the war, and when they receive an invitation to attend a commemoration ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Villers-Brettonneux, his deeply held memories refuse to stay pushed down, and threaten the foundation of Joe and Sophie's relationship.

The story opens in July 1939, twenty years after Australian police officer, Joe Parker, left the WWI battlefields as a soldier. He and his American wife, Sophie, receive an invitation to visit the Australian War Memorial in Villers-Brettonneux for the one year anniversary of its dedication. Joe is rattled by the thought of returning to the scene of his darkest nightmares.

The story goes back at the beginning, to 1916 in Paris. Second Lieutenant Joe Parker is on leave where he crosses paths with Sophie Holt, who is spending the day with her godson. Immediately, Joe realises they have much in common, and he finds himself sharing things with her that he'd kept from his wife, Annie, who is back in Australia with their son.

After they go their separate ways, they start corresponding with each other. The story unveils through Joe and Sophie's letters, where they share difficult news from the war—Joe from the trenches fighting the Germans, and Sophie in Paris dealing with the wounded and the effects of the Spanish Flu. Then, in April 1918, Joe is in Villers-Brettonneux, the location of his most brutal battle, where he is forever changed through the bloody depths and depravity of war. Then he receives an unthinkable message from home.

Ten years later, now widowed and wealthy, Sophie and her godson travel to Australia where she unexpectedly bumps into Joe, who is in Sydney working on a murder investigation. Joe is now a single father to Sam, and his friendship with Sophie develops. Two years later they marry, but by February 1939, a raid goes wrong for Joe which threatens their very happiness, and changes the course of his career.

Now the story catches up with its beginning in July 1939, as Sophie travels with Joe to North America and London, where he is to meet with policing counterparts, but it is Paris that she wants to show to Joe. From here, they travel to Villers-Brettonneux where his shameful and long-buried memories erupt, and Joe struggles to keep his anxiety from Sophie.

Joe and Sophie head to the French Alps, where they become involved in solving the mysterious appearance of German war artefacts discovered on pristine alpine trails. Perhaps a spy is in their midst? But despite everything, the walls of the miles-deep Chamonix valley close in on Joe, and all the defences he used to hold his memories at bay start crumbling as the world teeters on the brink of a second world war.

Sophie begins to doubt how well she really knows her husband when the foundations of their relationship seem to shift out of control. The investigation comes to a startling climax in Chamonix, and Joe finds he can no longer keep his secrets from Sophie.

Author Elaine Schroller's meticulous research of the battlefields of WWI is evident, yet it is handled so deftly. Joe is authentically drawn, as a man of his era, as is Sophie, beautiful and strong-willed, and their love story creates a world that you won't want to leave.

As one of Schroller's characters, Edmund, says, this story has "...intrigue, war, peace, an unexpected death, scenery—" and what scenery it is. Schroller takes the reader on a journey with vivid descriptions of Paris and Villers-Brettonneux during and after the war, London, Chamonix, Lyon, Marseille and Sydney. Like the beautiful Sophie, Dare Not Tell is a story with style, and I highly recommend it. Available from [Amazon](#).





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Another reason authors choose to self-publish is that an exceptionally low number of manuscripts are accepted for publication each year through publishing houses. Some experts quote a figure as low as only 1-2% of manuscripts submitted are accepted, which makes sense, when you realise that thousands of manuscripts are pitched each year to agents and publishers who are buckling under the tsunami of submissions. Unsurprisingly, many worthy manuscripts slip through the cracks. I often remember successful English author, Sebastian Faulks, talking about how it took him three years to find a publisher for 'Birdsong'. This novel has now sold more than 13 million copies.

One downside to self-publishing is that indie authors need to work that bit harder to achieve validation of their work. For example, any novel published by one of the big publishing houses, automatically has that validation. This is why reviews posted on retailer platforms, like Amazon and Goodreads, are so important to give potential readers confidence in purchasing an 'indie' book.

Let me introduce you to an indie author worth knowing -- Elaine Schroller. My review of her debut novel 'Dare Not Tell' is included in this newsletter.

About Rae Blair



After a career in communications and as an editor and corporate writer for more than twenty-five years, I combine my passion for writing and history, with my enthusiasm for genealogy, in my first novel 'More Than I Ever Had.'

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