

Real parade experience inspires book

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A Masterton woman has turned a special day with her son at the WWI re-enactment parade into a children's book.

Last year, Michelle O'Connell and her son Christopher, who was 6 at the time, took part in the parade, which re-enacted troops marching to Masterton railway station on their way to war on August 13, 1914.

She had researched the family that had lived in her Perry St home during this time, the Wellingtons, and she and her son dressed in period clothing as two members of the family.

She said the book titled *Leaving For the Front, A Boy's Story* was about the re-enactment through his eyes.

"It's about Christopher walking in the footsteps of history, bringing history to life," she said.

"It was a really special day."

Ms O'Connell said she had been moved by the re-enactment and her son's keen interest in it and "suddenly" had the idea to write and illustrate a book about it.

"I got such a positive response, [I thought] this is a story that needs to be written."

She said Christopher, now 7, seemed to have "mixed feelings" about being the book's main character but enjoyed reading it.

Ms O'Connell, a former teacher, said she was always writing and this was her first published book.

She said she liked to write simple stories and had always wanted to illustrate a book.

"I always thought I'd love to be an illustrator one day."



OUR STORY: Michelle O'Connell with her son Christopher Shaw, 7, read Ms O'Connell's illustrated children's book, *Leaving for the Front*. Ms O'Connell based the book around Christopher's view of the 100-year WWI re-enactment parade in Masterton in August last year.



IMAGE: The start of last year's parade, illustrated by Michelle O'Connell.

Ms O'Connell said it took her around four months to write and illustrate the story, using graphite pencil and

watercolours.

"One of the hardest parts I found was I really wanted to put so much in it, the details of the



REAL LIFE: The parade starts from the town hall in Masterton.

march — there was so much more to the journey."

She dedicated the book to her grandmother and grandfathers,

who served in WWII.

There will be a book launch at Masterton District Library on Saturday, April 18, at 11am.