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## Evie's War

Anna Mackenzie

***Evie's War*** is a brilliantly poignant novel of love, strength and resilience.

Written in the form of a young woman's journal, *Evie's War* is a moving and dramatic story with a compelling narrative.

In 1914 Evie has just finished school in New Zealand and is embarking on travels abroad with her family. When war breaks out, the family's planned tour of Europe is abandoned, but with return to New Zealand impossible they elect to stay with Evie's Aunt and Uncle in England. Evie immerses herself in the local community, first becoming involved with the burgeoning women's rights movement then signing on as a VAD nurse tending injured soldiers in a vast military hospital.

After a personal tragedy changes the course of her life, Evie impulsively agrees to become an ambulance driver in Belgium. Here she experiences first-hand the shambolic horrors of a Casualty Clearing Station just 10 km behind the Front Lines.

***Evie's War*** follows our young heroine as she faces the harsh realities of war, meeting both courage and tragedy. On a personal level she must also battle society's restrictions and find a way to unify her hard-won independence and experience with the still Edwardian attitudes and expectations of her family.

Writer Anna Mackenzie developed the idea for ***Evie's War*** after a conversation with her Aunt. As Anna explains, 'I had been trying to pin down a few family stories — the sort you remember being told as a child but about which you find you're a bit hazy on the details — and the conversation started me thinking, reading and ultimately writing. The First World War is part of the fabric of my family heritage. I never knew my paternal grandfather, but grew up aware of the scars war had left on his life, on his generation, and on society.'

Anna decided to focus on a peripheral story, looking not at the men at the Front, but at the people supporting them. 'My hope is that ***Evie's War*** might provide a voice for stories less frequently told, of families and communities in England and New Zealand, of women at home and at the Front, of children too young to serve but not to see, of the survivors and the scarred.'

Thoroughly researched, Anna visited many of the sites in which Evie's story is set. 'I visited Flanders in 2012 and the trip confirmed my commitment to writing about the Great War. At the same time I embarked on a programme of reading and research about WWI (a process which could occupy the rest of my life) and became increasingly drawn into the very human tragedy of it all.'

In 2013 Anna was awarded a writing residency in Belgium by Passa Porta, International House of Literature. The residency allowed Anna dedicated writing time, distraction-free, alongside ready access to on-the-ground research. 'This wonderful opportunity allowed



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time for both writing and research, time to stand on the ground so many fought and died for, to develop a feeling for the places, the moments, and the dues still owed.

'Being there was hugely helpful. The skies, the landscapes, the feel of a hard frost and the look of snow settling on cobbles — so many little things. One evening I went for a drink in a dingy old estaminet which appeared not to have changed in a hundred years (dark wood panelling, leather banquettes and grime.) When Evie visits an estaminet, the sense of place is gleaned from that experience.

'In early winter in the northern Somme Valley I stood in a dark, dank cellar that had been used as a forward dressing station. The farmhouse above has been rebuilt, but the cellar is original, as are the trenches that run along the back wall and across the paddocks beyond.

'Then there was an amazing day when I drove to Armentieres, Fromelles and Messines, and chatted in bad French to an elderly woman in a farmhouse rebuilt on the site where NZ soldiers were billeted before walking over ground where my Grandfather and Great-Uncle fought. *Evie's War* is not their story, but the personal connection I have to their experiences helped me build a sense of realism and intimacy into the work — it's a bit inexplicable, but I do see this book as honouring the lives given on that ground.

'In the author bio in the book I suggest I might have become a bit obsessed — I fear it's true! I'll certainly be writing more about the First World War.'



## More about Anna Mackenzie

Anna Mackenzie writes historic, contemporary and speculative young adult novels, mentors beginning writers, teaches creative writing and edits magazines.

Anna's novel *The Sea-wreck Stranger* won an Honour Award at the 2008 NZ Post Children's Book Awards, was joint winner of the 2008 Sir Julius Vogel Award and was awarded a prestigious White Raven Award in Germany for outstanding children's literature. The book has been published in both Australia and France. Its sequel, *Ebony Hill*, was shortlisted in the Young Adult Fiction category of the 2011 NZ Post Children's Book Awards while the final title of the trilogy *Finder's Shore* netted her fifth Children's Literature Foundation Notable Book Award. Anna's other titles include *High Tide*, *Shadow of the Mountain*, *Out on the Edge*, *Donnel's Promise* and *Cattra's Legacy*.

Anna lives on a farm in Hawke's Bay.

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## Anna Mackenzie is available for interview



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