

**SOMEWHERE TO FIGHT FOR**

**By Drew Lane**

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Based on the musical “Somewhere To Fight For”  
written by Drew Lane.

## **DEDICATIONS**

To my wife, Jenni, and my three beautiful boys -  
it is because of you that I am inspired.

To the people of Wickliffe and Lake Bolac -  
thank you for your encouragement, hospitality and the  
beautiful heart that continues to beat strongly in the face  
of hardship and challenge.

To the original cast and crew of the musical “Somewhere  
To Fight For” - the fight goes on.

## PREFACE

*"I'm only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something, and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do that something I can do."*

- Edward Everett Hale

## PROLOGUE

### TIME MARCHES ON

In the year of Eighteen Thirty Six,  
Explorer Thomas Mitchell  
Fought through shrub and sticks  
And found water clear as crystal.  
He named the river "Hopkins"  
And wrote these words profound:  
"A land more favorable  
For life could not be found."

Time marches on, time marches on.

John Farrell and his wife arrived in Eighteen Forty Three  
And erected by the river "Farrell's Inn"  
As it came to be,  
A home for the traveller and the lonely.  
People came by horse and cart  
And stopped as they passed through  
And there the town of Wickliffe swelled  
In Eighteen Fifty Two.

Time marches on, time marches on,  
While life is sparking.  
Time marches on, time marches on  
And keeps on marching.

Wyselaskie started building his Narrapumelap,  
Completed in Eighteen Seventy Eight,  
A building that stands

Proudly still today.  
A community thrived and prospered  
Through flood, and fire and war,  
A people proud of what they'd built  
On Hopkins River's shore.

Time marches on, time marches on,  
While life is growing.  
Time marches on, time marches on  
And keeps on marching.

A town of sporting prowess, the Magpies premieres,  
Racing, cricket, tennis, golf,  
All made the land aware,  
That here was a people full of promise.

But in the 1980's, there came a shift in tide,  
Slowly promise faded  
And with it went the pride  
Of a town once strong and stable.  
As the year two thousand closed,  
More families left the land,  
And whispers of the history  
Became too hard to understand.

Time marches on, time marches on  
While life is dying...  
Time marches on, time marches on  
And keeps on marching...

## CHAPTER ONE

### A DUMP LIKE THIS

Wickliffe wasn't meant to last forever.

Kate sat on the banks of the Hopkins River breathing in the warm summer air, rolling thoughts over in her mind. The cool water of the river brushed by her toes as it meandered along its path, crossing under the old disused bridge and then under the newer (though still old) bridge that carried the occasional traffic along the Glenelg Highway. The thin gum trees along the banks of the river swayed gently in the breeze, tickling her tanned skin and shoulder length brown hair, whilst giving just enough relief from the heat of the sun. A few metres away, ants scurried in the dirt, weaving their way around stones, leaves and gum nuts. Above, the sounds of birds could be heard, singing a duet with the rustling leaves.

This was paradise.

Well, to Kate anyway.

The summer holidays had arrived and any time away from school was a chance to hang out by the river. She had finished Grade Six at Willaura Primary, a tiny school in another small town about ten minute's drive from Wickliffe. But even though she had said "good bye" to her old school, it didn't mean that she wouldn't see her friends again. When you lived around here, friends were for life. Kate knew that she would see them all again after the holidays when they started fresh at Lake Bolac College, the only high school in the area.

Wickliffe didn't have a school of its own. It had closed

down in the early 1980s. Actually, Wickliffe didn't have anything of its own. *Everything* was closed down - except for the old Uniting Church. Even the pub couldn't stand the tide of people leaving the area and had finally shut its doors. Well, that wasn't entirely true - it still opened for a few hours on a Saturday night when the owner from Melbourne drove to Wickliffe to open its doors. But no one stopped in the town anymore, unless it was to use the roadside toilets. The town had become nothing more than a blink-and-you'll-miss-it road sign.

As Kate sat staring into the river she couldn't help but feel a little sad. This was her hometown and even though it had its faults - lots of them - she loved it. Kate loved the way the sunlight hit the tall yellow grass that covered the acres of land around her. She delighted in the taste of the air; sweet, crisp and refreshing. And she loved the way the side roads drifted off the main highway like dusty gold and brown snakes. They held hidden secrets from the past, with voices that whispered their stories. People from the city couldn't hear the words that floated on the air: they were too busy, too fast and too preoccupied.

But Kate could.

She could hear the rumble of the old Cobb and Co coach that would pull into Farrell's Inn for a rest stop; the giggles and screams of the children who used to attend Wickliffe Primary School Number 948; the tolling of the bell at the Wickliffe Uniting Church; the chatter from locals who came to the old general store; the raucous songs that burst out of the Wicky Hotel. Even though it had been many years since the town had experienced those sounds in day to day life, Kate could still hear the

echoes if she closed her eyes and listened carefully.

She could also hear the voices of her friends as they approached.

"Hey Kate!"

Kate didn't need to turn to know who was coming.

"Hi Jane. Hi Wendy. Hi Stuart."

"Are we really that predictable?" asked Wendy as she sat down next to Kate.

"Everything in this town is that predictable," smirked Stuart, kicking the ground behind Kate.

"But you're just as bad," said Jane, sitting down opposite her friend. "That's why we knew you'd be here."

Kate smiled. Jane was right.

Jane had been Kate's best friend since they could remember. They were the same age, roughly the same height and lived an easy bike ride away from each other. Their parents, and grandparents for that matter, had always lived in Wickliffe and worked the land. They were locals through and through and knew every nook and cranny of the countryside and its history. You could pick the two girls from a mile away: Kate with her dark hair contrasted by Jane's sandy blonde, both walking in step with their hair swaying side to side, chatting loudly and often over the top of each other. They dressed pretty much the same - well, everyone did in Wickliffe. Fashion wasn't really a concern. Jeans and a random t-shirt were the flavour of every month, regardless of the weather. Kate and Jane were rarely apart and agreed on pretty much everything. Kate however was a dreamer while Jane was the logical one; she saw things in black and white, right or wrong, good and bad.

They were best friends for life.

Wendy, on the other hand, was a bit of an odd-bod. Her parents had moved into the area when she was six, so they still weren't considered *real* locals. Wendy always seemed to be just a step behind everything and could never quite get herself organised. Her hair was long, dark and a bit unkempt, but the smile from her deep brown eyes showed that she was at ease with herself. Her pale skin was occasionally red in patches where she had missed putting sunscreen on. She was naturally pretty, even though half ironed school uniforms and faded op-shop t-shirts were less than flattering. Everything, including her schoolwork, was a little unprepared, rushed or not quite finished. When their Willaura Primary teacher, Ms Knight, asked Wendy about it, she would just shrug and smile. It never seemed to bother her. That was the best way to sum Wendy up: unflustered and unbothered.

And then there was Stuart, the obligatory boy of the group. City people would've thought it strange for a boy to be hanging around with three girls, but not in Wickliffe. When there's no one else to hang with, boys are OK. Stuart was shorter than the girls, but compensated with his loud mouth. His short spiky blonde hair and sharp blue eyes were just like his personality and he was never lost for a smart comment to throw back at the girls. Secretly though, he liked hanging out with them - after all, as they grew older, the girls would soon be chasing after him!

The four of them sat by the river, watching the water trickle by.

"So, what are you doing for the holidays?" asked Kate. Jane spoke up first.

"Nothing much. I guess I'm stuck here for the summer."

"I'm sticking around too," Stuart said. "Dad's got a few sheep with flies up their bums."

"Ew! That's gross!" replied Wendy. Stuart grinned.

"Meh. Happens every year."

"Are you going anywhere Wendy?" asked Kate

"Mum says we can't this year. We didn't make enough money from the last wheat sale. So, we're stuck here."

"Boring!" yelled Jane.

"What are you talking about?" asked Kate. "Wickliffe is a great place to be!"

"Are you serious?" Wendy couldn't hide her surprise.

"Of course."

"No, really!" said Jane.

"Yes, really."

"Hell, I want to be anywhere but here," Stuart said adamantly. "This place is a hole."

"The black hole of the Western District!" yelled Wendy.

"I thought that was Hamilton," laughed Jane.

"Nah," smiled Wendy. "Even Google says it's Wickliffe."

The three laughed out loud.

"Get off it guys," defended Kate. "There's heaps to do."

"Like what?" Jane asked.

"The river. The old church. The old school. Bike riding. Climb a tree. Have a picnic."

"Yadda yadda yadda - boring!"

"Shut up Stuart."

Stuart stuck his tongue out at Kate.

"Geez, Kate," began Jane, "anyone would think you actually liked it here!"

"What's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong with it? Kate, are you nuts?!" Jane was indignant. "There's nothing here! You described it perfectly: everything is old."

"Or dead," smiled Stuart.

"Personally," giggled Jane, "I can't wait to get out of this dump and hit the big city."

"You guys sound like my parents. But, I can't imagine ever leaving here," sighed Kate. "Sure, I wish Wickliffe was bigger ..."

"A lot bigger!" sang out Stuart.

"Right!" backed up Jane. "And it's just gonna get worse Kate. This place has been going downhill since the eighties - that's what mum and dad say. We had the floods last year. Drought for years before that. But the city ... the city's got everything! Places to go, people to meet, things to do, and you're never bored!"

Kate was quick to the defense. "But there's heaps that Wickliffe has got that Melbourne hasn't."

"Like what?" asked Wendy.

"Peace and quiet, the trees, the fresh air ... the friendships."

Kate met Jane's eyes and she knew that Kate was right. Their friendship wasn't something that could be found in the city, especially when Kate was so adamant to stay in the country. For a moment, the four of them were silent, thinking about what Kate had said. The breeze continued to brush against their skin, but it seemed less soothing this

time and somehow sombre.

“So, tell me,” continued Kate. “What *are* you going to do today?”

“Nothing,” said Jane.

“Nothing,” chorused Wendy and Stuart.

“Sounds like there’s an echo here.”

“Well, nothing’s changed in the last ten minutes,” Jane responded.

“We could go fishing,” offered Kate.

Stuart groaned. So did Jane.

“It’s better than doing nothing like you guys.”

“Dunno about that,” said Wendy. “Maybe you could come up with something that makes Wickliffe into a tourist attraction!”

“Oooh - a waterslide!” Stuart piped.

“A theme park!” offered Jane.

“A castle!” Wendy laughed and the others joined in.

“Funny guys. *Real* funny.” Kate couldn’t help the sarcasm from creeping into her voice.

“Whatever, I’m off,” Stuart said in his typically nonchalant way. “Besides, I’m hungry.”

“You’re always hungry,” Jane replied.

“True.”

“Are you coming Kate?” asked Wendy.

“You guys go on. I’ll catch up later.”

Jane nodded. “Cool. See you soon.”

Jane, Wendy and Stuart got up and started their way back into town, along the grass-filled paddocks and then up the hill towards the old school along one of the dirt back roads.

Kate closed her eyes and listened to the sounds around

her while her head swirled full of questions with no clear answers. Although she was still years away from going anywhere, Kate knew that her friends were right. Time changed everything; sometimes for the better, often for the worse. And Kate couldn't escape the feeling that things were about to get a whole lot worse for Wickliffe.