

with
JODIE
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Precious gift

A father's dying wish sends author on poignant mission

An elderly Henry George McGregor rummaged through his belongings and pulled out a box containing two pennies. "These are another two pennies that I earned when I was a little boy, I've kept them all this time," he said as he handed them to his daughter, Vicki Bennett. "Will you take them back to the Victoria School in Villers-Bretonneux?"

It was early 2012. A few months later, George McGregor, 89, passed away in Brisbane with his children by his side. Soon after, Vicki, now 62, delivered the pennies to France. "I knew the significance of them and how important this story was to him," the Chelmer resident says.

George had been a baker, soldier, city council officer, Queensland Diabetes Association president, Returned and Services League councillor, and more, but one of his proudest moments was as a child, raising money for a school in a faraway land.

As a five-year-old, George started working for his bakery-owning father in Albert Park, Melbourne, by caring for the horses that pulled the bread-delivery cart every morning.

He sent the first two pennies he earned to help some French children build a school after hearing their village, Villers-Bretonneux, was devastated in WWI. It resulted in George's own primary school helping the French children.

When Vicki delivered the two keepsake pennies to the Victoria School in September 2012, she says the headmaster cried and laughed during her speech, both because of the poignant story and Vicki's poor French pronunciation.

Now the corporate trainer-turned-writer has turned the true story into a children's book *Two Pennies* (Vicki Bennett, $19.99). Illustrated by John Flitcroft, the book tells the story of George, who showed courage and persistence throughout his life.

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"This is a story about hope and the love of children between two countries," Vicki says.

As a child, Vicki says she had her own "imagination tree" in a park at the end of the Annerley street where she grew up. "There weren't any kids my age in the neighbourhood at the time, so I'd spend a lot of time in that tree," Vicki says. "I used to make up stories about ants and their families, or stories about people sitting beneath the trees."

Those stories were the basis for her 1999 book, *Making Dreams Come True*, which will be re-released later this year.

FIND *Two Pennies* by Vicki Bennett in bookstores or online at vickibennett.com.au