



Tales from the Rails

By **JANE PATRONI**, Chairperson

We are always looking for interesting rail stories to share with our readers in the Phoenix and this one from a former Merredin resident takes us on a trip down memory lane. On a recent visit to the Museum, Anthea McGrath shared the story of her cousin Norman Keith Sawyer, known as Keith.

Keith was born on 24 January 1931 in Boulder WA. His father, Norman Francis Sawyer, came from Menzies WA and was employed as an engine driver for the WAGR. He and Keith's mother, Jean (nee Weir) were married in Boulder on 30 October 1929. The couple moved to Merredin, building their own home at 18 Hart Street. Following Norman's death in 1953, Jean remained in the house until she moved to Perth in 1968 to be closer to the boys.

Keith was the first of four boys born. He attended Merredin Primary School. An exercise book of his stories, marked by his 6th grade teacher notates his interest in writing.

As there was no High School in Merredin at the time, Keith moved to Kalgoorlie to attend the Eastern Goldfields High School, living with his grandparents. He returned to Merredin during term breaks.

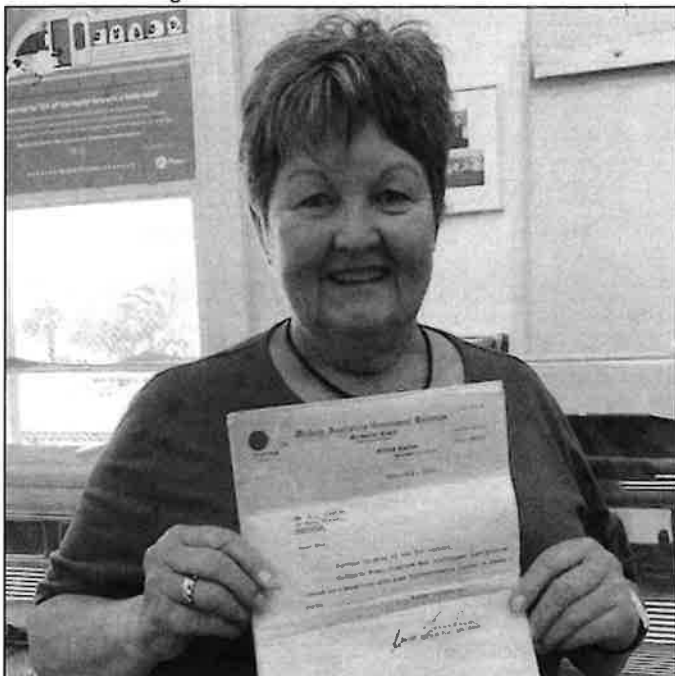
On leaving school in 1947 he obtained an apprenticeship with the WA Government Railways and Tramways in Car and Wagon Building at the Midland Workshops. On successfully completing his indenture, he worked at the Public Works Department for some time.

In 1955 Keith joined the Royal Navy, working as a naval shipwright. He was honourably discharged (in 1975) after 20 years, having attained the rank of Warrant Officer.

Keith then worked for the Travel Department of Westpac Bank until he retired at the age of 60.

In 1972 whilst still in the Navy, Keith married **Pamela Woods**. They had no children.

Keith passed away on 29th January 2018.



Anthea McGrath

CENTRAL WHEATBELT DISABLED WORKSHOPS SUCCESSFUL

By **BEVERLY LIGMAN**

Ben Aldridge has a powerful story to tell and his recent online workshops in Merredin allowed him to connect with the Central Wheatbelt's disability community to tell that story.

After an alcohol-assisted gravity accident where he fell 10 meters, Ben became a quadriplegic at the age of 22 – he then created his organization 30 Foot Drop devoting his life to making sure that the disabled community has a voice.

An important part of 30 Foot Drop's program is Empowered Leadership, a six-day Leadership Development course that aims to develop the leadership potential of the disability community across WA.

"Resilience, adaptability, innovation, and collaboration are skills every great leader strives to develop and often they spend years doing so," Ben said.

"When you have a disability, these are tools essential to our survival, these building blocks are already in place and all we need to do is develop them.

"That's why these workshops are so important to regional WA, they give the disabled community in towns such as Merredin the chance to connect to their potential."

The workshop took place over two weeks from March 14 to 25, with Ben's team working

with participants to ensure their accessibility needs are being met.

Ben uses modern leadership theories, combined with proven, highly validated tools and the honest insights of leaders with a disability to introduce participants to key leadership fundamentals.

"It was fantastic to be able to connect with the Central Wheatbelt's disabled community," Ben said.

"I'm often not taken seriously as a business owner because people make assumptions when they see my wheelchair.

I've built my business around trying to dispel societal ignorance around disability and helping others find their way in the business world."

30 Foot Drop received federal funding through the Department for Social Services to develop this course specifically for people with a disability.

It has been designed by people with a disability, for people with a disability, and ultimately aims to develop participants' skills and knowledge so they can start to fill the current void of people with disability in politics, high levels of business or government, and boards or advisory groups.

Ben's next Empowered Leadership course takes place in Kalgoorlie on May 2.

