

## Letter to Louise: Julie Dawson

My dear Louise

It seems strange that you're writing from the frozen wilderness of Alaska, while we sweat it out in the heat of an Australian summer. I'm so happy you've started writing our family history. I wish we could chat but for now I hope the bundle of photos and letters help.

You asked about your great grandfather Laurie. Well, I'm sure his later childhood, was full of music and pranks - after all six boys spell trouble and fun, don't they, but his early years were harsh.

He was born in 1913 a year before the Great War. Two years later he contracted Polio and was put in Lodge Moor hospital. He didn't leave until 1919. Hospitals back then had very strict rules and visitors were only allowed to visit from 3.30 - 4.00 on Sundays. When I say visit, parents were allowed to spend a few minutes looking through the glass windows and doors of the wards. They were warned not to let their children see them as it was unsettling.

They couldn't leave food or clothing although they could leave toys or books. Of course, your great-great grandmother Charlotte, didn't have money to leave gifts or time to visit. After all, there was a war on, money was short and she had five other boys to care for. The only thing she could do was to borrow a copy of *The Star*, to read about the progress of her favourite son.

Summer and winter alike, all polio patients would be wheeled out in their beds onto the moors. It was thought to strengthen the character and the lungs! Laurie was lucky to survive. He avoided the Iron Lung, but the disease left him with a shortened leg.

He grew to be a "gentle" man. Caring but strong. An engineer, a shop steward and a prankster who loved to play the piano accordion at Christmas. He never talked about it, but I often think of him, a little boy alone at Christmas in that bleak hospital on the Moors.

So, my dear Louise, here's to all those doctors and nurses who did their best in difficult times to keep their young patients alive. After all, without them, we wouldn't be alive today, would we?

Have a wonderful Christmas, darling. I'm so hoping we see you next year.