

Connected by Letters

Our family wasn't a wealthy family and we weren't always as fortunate as other families in our village. My father was a farmer and my mother stayed home with my brother, Benjamin, and me. Our Uncle Joseph also lived with us, helping my father tend to the fields.

Our farm was small and there wasn't much land to harvest. When a drought struck our area, our fields were ruined. My father and uncle were forced to join the local regiment to provide for our family. The men were frightened for their lives. With war and duty came many worries; who would be leading my regiment? Where would I get proper equipment for battle? Who will search for me if I become lost? Where would I find my next meal to keep me alive? If I was killed, would I be identified so that my family could mourn over my grave and remember me? My father expressed his worry openly, and he let us know how he felt.

As my father and Uncle Joseph were leaving, my father said to me, "Lucy, girl, promise me that you will help your mother while your uncle and I are gone. I promise that I will write whenever possible and let you know that I am safe. Don't miss me, because I will be back." We said our goodbyes and after the men were completely out of sight, I ran to the old red barn and cried until the sun went down.

It's been three months since my father and uncle left and we received our first letter from our father, but unfortunately it wasn't something to look forward to. My father wrote that they had gone to battle two times already, and my father and uncle had survived the first one. During the second battle, Uncle Joseph was hit in the shoulder by enemy fire. That night he died of excessive bleeding. The burials took place as soon as the battle had

subsided. The regiment, that my father belonged to, dug a small grave for my uncle. Most of the soldiers were wounded and all of them were exhausted, so the burial was done with as much care as possible. They placed a gravestone above the grave. There were other men who had died, yet were not as fortunate. Since some bodies were unidentified, the soldiers were forced to dig an eight foot wide and three foot deep trench and place fifty to one hundred bodies in the grave. Thousands of soldiers died alone and were buried without any religious service. My father's letter was dismal; yet, in the letter he encouraged us to keep strong and look forward to him coming home. We hoped that he would come home soon to be with us. I think I cried more that night than I ever cried in my life.

Four months later we received another letter from father. He said he met new comrades in his regiment. One of them he was especially interested in. His name was Albert Josiah. He told stories to my father about prison camps and where he had been held captive of war. The men in prison camps slept on blankets on a dirty floor, which they shared with vermin, such as rats. Rations were small and most of the food and water was contaminated. The prisoners were forced to make each ration last for twenty-four hours, so the prisoners sometimes ate the rats to prevent death caused by starvation. Blankets and clothes were stolen from men who had died. Most prisoners died from sickness, malnutrition, or exposure. Mass overcrowding made it easy for diseases to be spread among the prisoners. To keep occupied, prisoners participated in hobbies such singing or playing baseball. As we read on through the letter, our father reminded us that his term was almost over. Only four more months and he would have the choice to come home. We looked

forward to each day after that, knowing that we were one day closer to seeing our father.

Three months later we received another letter from father. He said that he was in the hospital. During a battle he had been shot in the leg. When he had reached the hospital, they had no medicine like morphine or chloroform to dull the pain. To help, they gave him whiskey and bourbon as replacement. The doctors feared infectious diseases caused by the open wound and made the decision to amputate my father's leg. In the hospital, my father said that he was lucky, compared to some of the other wounded soldiers. Many soldiers had head wounds. For some, iron pokers were heated until they were white-hot, and then applied to the wound to stop the bleeding. Albert Josiah had also been shot brutally in the arm. Albert tried to avoid the doctors, doubting that they could help him. He attempted to heal himself. He drank tea made of sap from the trees and cleaned his wound daily. My father said in a few weeks he would come home and he also said that he would like to bring Albert with him. Albert had no family, which is why he had continued in the war. Albert would be able to help in the fields, since father was no longer able. After we read the letter, we continued to wait until my father would come home.

The day had come and my father and Albert were to arrive at the train station any moment. Once the train pulled up, we ran to the door, shouting to father. When father and Albert emerged, we rejoiced to see them for the first time, since father left. We were only connected by letters and now it feels good to know that he's home to be with us.