

**ALL OVER BY CHRISTMAS****A Play for Radio****By****Geraldine Colson****Synopsis:**

September, 1917: A family of Parents and two children on a Bush block outlying a city in Australia. They are sitting on a veranda on a very hot day, waiting for the postman, who delivers on horseback twice per week. They receive a letter which they eagerly go over and over, then a dust cloud appears through the heat of the afternoon

**CAST:**

Mum: Mrs McKenzie

Dad: Mr McKenzie

Anne McKenzie (Aged 14)

Davie McKenzie (Aged 7)

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**'All Over by Christmas'**

**AUDIO**      **Buzzing of flies, sound of wind in trees. Footsteps crunch over leaves**

**DAD:**            Here it is. Come and sit in the shade, children.

**MUM:**            Oh, George, is it ...

**DAD:**            Yes dear, sure is

**ANNE:**           Hurray. Quick, Dad, What's he say.

**DAVIE:**          Tell us, Dad.

**DAD:**            Ok. Settle down.

**MUM:**            Read slowly, George. We want to hear every word.

**DAD:**            It's a long one, for him! Here we go. **(Stilted Reading Voice)** Ahem.

    "18 September, 1917. Dear Mum and Dad, Annie and Davie.

    I hope you are all well, as I am".

**MUM:**            Thank God.

**DAD:**            Yes, good boy. Keeping his head down.

**DAVIE:**          Go on, Dad. Where is he. Does he say?

**DAD:**            **(Clears his throat)** Right. **(Reading Voice)** "It's getting a bit hairy over here. Poor Jack Smith copped it last week. I keep my head down though".

**(ordinary voice)** Ha, Ha. See, I told ya.

**MUM:**            Oh, it's too awful. I can't wait to hear from him, then I dread what he has to tell us.

**ANNE:**           I know, Mummy. I feel proud he's doing his bit. But I wish he wasn't.

**DAD:**            **(Reading Voice)** "It's great to have such good mates, but hard to see them go. All the chaps from our district are OK so far."

**MUM:**            I'll see Mrs. Williams and Betty Jennings at the market tomorrow. I can let

them know we've had news.

**DAD:** Yes, mother. Swapping news makes the waiting a bit easier. **(Clears throat)**

**(Reading Voice)** "We're not doing much at present. We go weeks with no action. Then, suddenly everything goes haywire. It sure is different to farming, Dad. Hard to get a good rhythm. We have all had a bit of flu, what with all the mud and it's getting colder. Tell Mum I've still got my camphor and I wear my flannel under my singlet. "

**MUM:** Oh, good boy.

**DAVIE:** Has he seen any Huns?

**MUM:** Davie, I told you we don't use those names here.

**DAVIE:** That's what we call 'em at school, Mum. We have games at playtime and kill all the Huns.

**MUM:** You see what happens, Dad? How can we teach our children to respect life?

**DAD:** Hush, Mother. We're at War. We have to tolerate all the jingoism. I wish I was young enough to go ...

**MUM:** And then where would we be

**ANNE:** Read the letter, Dad!

**DAD:** Yes, yes **(reading voice)** "It's not all bad. When we get parcels from home, we all have a good Time. We pass stuff around to our mates and have a good laugh. Three times a week we get a tot of rum. Good times with good mates. Thanks for the socks and fruit cake, Mum. They make a change from the hard Tack. Annie, that scarf is terrific. I'm wearing it all the time now."

**DAVIE:** Where is he, Dad? Is he in France?

**ANNE:** Does he mention Johnnie Armstrong?

**DAD:** Hold on, hold on, let's hear what he has to say. **(Reading Voice)**

“Sometimes it gets hard, sitting in the dugout. It gets gloomy and all I can think about is blue sky and brown paddocks and the horses. And all of you of course”.

**MUM:** Oh, my poor baby

**DAVIE:** Big baby, Mum. He was bigger than Dad when he left.

**ANNE:** He’s just sad that he’s so far away. I wish ... Oh, (she starts to cry softly)

**MUM:** It’s a sacrifice we all have to make, dear.

**DAD:** Yes, we have to support the Old Country. Our boys are young and fit and ready to do their best.

**DAVIE:** Go on, Dad!

**DAD:** Where was I? Oh Yes, (**reading voice**) “We might be moving on soon. They don’t tell us where. We just get orders and pack up and move on. There is talk that we’ll be heading home before long. We are all hoping it will be over by Christmas. How are the dogs? Make sure you keep the chaff up to the Bay Mare, Davie. I want good, strong foals from her when I get back. I’ll be good and ready to get stuck into the ploughing next season. You better keep everything up to scratch, Dad. I’ll be home before you know it”.

**MUM:** He sounds hopeful, Dad. Betty Jennings swears her Henry was told it’s only months now.

**DAD:** We can only hope, Mother. Now, let’s see (**reading voice**) “Well, I guess I had better close now. The light is going and it is getting hard to write. Just heard from down the line that Hamish has copped it too. Not sure how bad. Well, I just have to keep going and look forward to the day I walk back down that drive and see all of you sitting on the veranda. Make sure you send more fruit cake, Mum. Regards from your loving son and

brother, JIM.”

**(Silence for a few seconds, except for Mum sniffing, Dad clearing his throat, and Annie crying softly)**

**MUM:** (Sniffing) I'd better get on and bake that cake.

**ANNIE:** I'm glad he didn't mention Johnnie Armstrong.

**DAD:** Sad about Jack Smith and Hamish. Great to hear it will be over soon.

**MUM:** It's strange, I want so much to know what is happening, whether he is suffering and just how bad it is over there. But then I don't want to know too much. Of course he only tells us the half of it, but he does sound cheerful.

**DAVIE:** I wish he'd tell us more about the fighting and how he mows 'em down.

**ANNIE:** Oh, shut up, Davie.

**DAD:** (Cheerfully) Well, that was a nice break. Have to get going. Work to do. Annie, you'll have time before dark to give the Bay mare a run. Davie, you come with me. Pigs to feed.

**ANNIE:** Ok, Dad.

**AUDIO:** Sounds of farm and/or gentle music for few seconds

**DAVIE:** Hey Dad, look at that dust up the road.

**DAD:** Where? Oh yes. Looks like a car. Must be old Reilly, he's the only one round here with a motor-car.

**MUM:** And doesn't Ma Reilly let you know.

**DAD:** Hello. That's a lot of dust for his old rattler.

**DAVIE:** It's a big car.

**DAD:** Mmmmm. Ah ... you two just sit on the veranda. I'll go down and meet them.

**MUM:** Who is it, Dad?

**DAVIE:** Is it the policeman?

**AUDIO** Old car brakes stopping in background. Car door and footsteps.

**DAD:** Can I help you?

**MAN:** Mr. McKenzie?

**DAD:** That's me.

**MAN:** Uh. My name is Davies. I'm the new Postmaster.

**DAD:** Ye – es? We got our mail this morning???

**MUM** What is it, Dad. Oh, Hello. I think I've seen you in the post office.

Mr Davies, isn't it?

**MAN:** I'm so sorry, Mrs. McKenzie

**MUM:** **(Catching breath. Voice Rising)** Oh George. Oh No. No. NO.

**DAD:** **(weakly)** We just got a letter ....

**MAN:** I brought the telegram in person. We got it today. We always ...

Uh ... we try to deliver in person to show our respect.

**MUM:** **(Wailing softly)** Oh. No. When ... Oh my Jamie

**MAN:** Here 's the telegram, Mr McKenzie

**DAVIE:** **(starting to cry)** What is it, Dad

**(AUDIO)** Sound of footsteps running.

**ANNIE:** What's happened?

**MUM:** **(CRYING)** Read it out, Dad. Read it out to us.

**DAVIE:** **(crying)** Mum. Mum! What's the matter?

**DAD:** **(slowly)** I don't believe it. I don't believe it.

**ANNIE:** Oh no, not Jimmie. Not Jimmie. Oh no **(starts crying softly)**

**MAN:** Would you like me to go ... or ... can I read it for you?

**DAD:** **(WEAKLY)** Yes, mate, please.

- MAN:** **(Reading voice)** Um ...“From the Australian Army Base, Canberra. It is our solemn duty to advise you that on Sunday, 21 September, 1917 Private James McKenzie was fatally wounded in battle in France”.
- ANNIE:** But that’s 2 weeks ago! We just read his letter! He was .....
- MUM:** Oh my son, my baby son. **(Sob).** Come inside with me children. ... Oh dear God **(Children crying softly).**
- MAN:** I’m so sorry. I don’t know what to say, Mr McKenzie.
- DAD:** **(Voice shaking)** Thanks, Mate. Nothing you can say. It has to sink in. We got a letter from him, you see. it must have been just a few days before ...
- MAN:** That’s the terrible shame of it, Mr McKenzie, the word takes such a long Time to get through.
- DAD:** I can’t believe it. He’s – He was – a good son. Strong, Happy. He was ready to take over the farm ...  
There’s no mistake?
- MAN:** I doubt it, Sir. It’s not as if he went missing or anything. It’s such a bad business. I wish I was there. You feel so guilty. It’s my eyes, you see ...
- DAD:** Yes, mate. We all feel bad. I wish I could have taken his place. I believed it, you know. Fancy that. I really believed he’d got through it all. He was coming home ...
- MAN:** So sorry Mr McKenzie.
- DAD:** But ... he said it would be all over by Christmas.

**AUDIO: The Last Post**

**THE END**