

100th ANNIVERSARY
WALTER HARVEY TITUS

Born December 4th, 1892

Transcript of an Interview
by Happy Titus (Chronister)
made on audio tape

1975



Transcribed and slightly Edited
by Rosalyn Titus
1992

GRANDPA TITUS INTERVIEW 1975 Fairmount, Indiana

Q: First, I want to know where you were born.

I was born in Bristow, Iowa on December the 4th, 1892.

Q: That means you're 82 right now. Tell me about your bothers and sisters.

I had three sisters and two brothers. Howard was the oldest one. Cora was the second child in the family; then came Guy; then myself; then Rose; and last was Alta. She was the baby of the family. Five of us were born in Iowa. Alta was born in Wisconsin.

When I was eight years old, our folks moved from Iowa to Wisconsin. From then on, we were pioneers.

Q: What were your father and mother's names?

My father's name was Cyrus R. Titus. My mother's name was Lizzie A. Groves.

Q: Do you remember what they looked like?

Well, I couldn't describe them to you. . .

Q: What color of hair did they have?

My father had black hair. My mother was sort of a blond--German.

Q: What did your father do? Was he a farmer?

No. He started out as a farmer, then he got fed up on that. He moved to the town of Bristow, Iowa, and got a job working on the railroad--on the section. He bought a lot in the town of Bristow and built a house there.

He was with the railroad for sixteen years, and the highest wages he ever got was a dollar and sixteen cents a day! He went to work at 7 o'clock in the morning and worked 'til 6 o'clock at night.

HAPPY: And people complain about wages now!

Of course things weren't as high then as they are now. I remember the time when we used to buy things out of the store that now you'd think were dirt cheap.

Q: What about a sack of flour?

Well, you could buy a sack of flour then for probably 75 cents--a fifty pound sack of flour. I remember Dad used to buy crackers--they used to ship them in big wooden barrels--for four cents a pound. That was cheap then.

He wanted to get out on the farm again. Seeing that he was a section foreman, or worked on the railroad, he got acquainted with a land agent in Wisconsin. He found out they were selling land up there--railroad land.

The government gave the Railroads every other section along the railroad. They gave the Railroads this land for building the railroads through there. And the Railroad was selling this land out as fast as they could. They were selling it at two dollars and a half an acre.

So my father got in touch with this here land agent up in Wisconsin and made arrangements to go up there and work for this fella as a land locator--locating settlers. He bought a piece of land up there for \$2.50 an acre. And in February, the dead of winter, we moved up there.

Q: Did you have a place to live?

This man had a place located where he would let us live, and my father worked for him.

We moved--took all of our possessions that we had. Dad had a horse, and a cow, and a few household goods.

HAPPY: Don't forget the kids.

And five kids. Alta was born after we got up there.

Q: You were eight years old then?

Yes, I was eight years old at that time.

Q: Do you remember moving?

Oh, yes, I remember. Mother went alone with us children on the train. We went into St. Paul--the big Union Depot there. This land agent met us and he got us through the depot and got us on the right train--headed for Springbrook, Wisconsin.

When we got up there, all you could see was hardwood and logs, and snow. All they had at this place was a big platform made out of big timbers. They didn't have a depot or anything. They filled in these big timbers with cinders--coal cinders out of the train engine, and that was all they had.

We landed there in February. It was either on Washington's birthday or Abraham Lincoln's birthday, but I don't remember which. And that's what our reception was: about four feet of snow all around the town; big piles of cord wood and logs; and a few half-breed Indians on the platform. The train went through there once a day, and of course everybody in that little town would always be there at the station when the train went through.

We lived there in the house this fellow provided for us I think about two years. Then Dad got another piece of land out in the hills--better land. We moved out there about two and a half miles from...

(pause)...Well, there wasn't any town of Earl, then, just the siting there.

Q: What you moved to would later be Earl?

Grandpa to Happy: "Have you ever been in Earl?"

Happy: "No. I've heard of Earl. Was my Dad born there?"

Grandpa: "Yes, he was."

Happy: "That's where I heard of it."

We moved out on this--it was a homestead right. A fella had had it as a homestead, and Dad bought his homestead right for \$100.00--eighty acres of land. The fella hadn't proved up on it yet, so Dad bought it off him. That's where we were raised. Dad lived there about twenty-seven years.

We moved into an old log house made of big pines timbers, roofed over with shakes.

Q: What?

Something like shingles. They split these out of white pine blocks, and they were maybe two feet long. They used those instead of shingles, but they didn't lay down flat, so they left holes in the roof. When it would snow, the snow would drift in through those little openings in the roof and sift down into the upstairs. That's where we kids slept. I remember that we used to wake up in the morning sometimes, and it would've stormed in the night, and we'd find a big pile of snow on the bed. And the wind would blow through there--you'd have to have plenty of covers or you'd freeze to death.

We lived in that old log house for a number of years, and then Dad built a new house. He bought another 80 acres of land beside where his homestead deal was. We had quite a lot of timber on that, so he got out the timber and took it to the saw mill. He had the lumber sawed out of it and that's what he built his new house out of.

Q: Was he farming then, too?

Well, yes.

Q: Did he have to clear the land?

I expect there was maybe six or seven acres cleared up on this homestead. Otherwise it was all brush and rocks and shrubs and stumps. We cleared most of that up. Only about forty acres of that eighty we cleared off in the process of time. We picked the rocks off the land--it was awful stony, but it was pretty good land. If you could get seed in between the rocks, you could raise something.

Q: What was your mother like?

My mother? Well, she was kind of a shy, timid woman. She was very fair--blond. She had a heart condition all her life, and yet she was a hard worker. Like a farmer's wife would be. She was sick a lot of the time. Had a bad set of nerves.

HAPPY: "No wonder, with six kids."

Yes, and all those ornery kids to take care of.

Dad was a hard worker. He worked from daylight 'til dark, always. He'd get up in the morning and swing a lantern. He'd start the day with carrying a lantern out to the barn, and wind up the day working by a lantern out in the barn--doing chores. He'd put in about 16 hours a day, every day.

And he was a man that was always in a hurry. I've seen him at the table--he'd eat, swallow his food down in a hurry, and get up and go off on a run to get at the afternoon work.

(To Happy) And your dad put me in mind of my father. He had just such a disposition, you know--always in a hurry and always busy; never lost any time.

Happy: Always talking to strangers, she said. (I think Grandma made that comment in the background.)

Yes! He'd get acquainted with anybody, my father would. It didn't make any difference where he'd go, he'd always make the acquaintance of everybody that he met. And Floyd is just the same way, isn't he?

Happy: Yes. Then he gets on to Marlene and I for doing that, too. (Grandpa laughs heartily at that.) It's OK for him, but we shouldn't do that.

Well, he can't blame you for being that way--he was just that way himself. And still is, I guess.

Happy: Yes.

Q: Was there a school in Earl? Did you go to school?

There was a school down at Earl out in the country at that time. It was about three miles from us. If we went to school we had to go to that school. So we attended that school for about two winters--no, three. Then they got a school district started up in our neighborhood and built a schoolhouse up there.

So we used to walk to school. We would walk three miles and many a day I went to school with nothing on my feet but grain-sack moccasins. We didn't have money enough to buy regular footwear like people had in those days. We made moccasins out of grain sacks and faced them with the backs of mittens that were worn out--buckskin mittens, or horsehide mittens. We'd sew those on the bottom of our feet, then we'd have about two pairs of wool socks to put inside of those.

Q: But still, wouldn't they get wet?

Well, they would in the spring of the year when it started to thawing. We'd go to school and come home with wet feet--nearly freeze your feet.

Then it got so we could buy rubbers--we wore rubbers with leather tops. We'd sit in the school all day long and our feet would sweat, and then we'd go out and start home, and our feet would freeze. I've got one bad frozen foot yet.

Happy: (Laughing) Has it thawed out yet?

Well, it thawed out, but I have one of my toes that is honeycomb-like where it froze.

Q: Like frost bite?

Yes. We walked to school there three winters, I think.

Kids, they don't know what it was like. Just think of it--the bus comes right to the door. They pick 'em up; take 'em to school; bring 'em home. They'd be a whole lot better off if they had to walk three miles. Then they wouldn't have to have all this here physical exercise activities at the school. Then come home and have to go out on the wood pile and saw up enough wood to last overnight.

That was my job--get the wood in after I got home from school. You'd have to carry in enough wood to keep a fire going overnight, or try to. Everybody had their chores they had to do. Everyone did his part.

Q: When did you learn to play the violin?

When I was about seven or eight years old I started in sawing away on the fiddle, trying to play a few tunes. I kept at it--practicing--and I got a little better and a little better.

When I got good enough, they wanted to hire me to go out and play for their country shin-digs with my two brothers. My oldest brother played the organ, my second brother played the mandolin, and I played the violin. Of course both my brothers played on the violin, but they weren't as good at it as I was, so that's the way we teamed up.

We played for many, many dances. Well, you didn't get much for it. They'd take a free-will offering for the musicians, and it wasn't very free sometimes. If you got two or three dollars, you'd think you'd gotten quite a sum. We did that for a number of years, until I got converted. Then I quit playing for that kind of a mess. I didn't play for dances anymore.

Q: Did your brothers keep doing it?

No, they kind of dropped out, too. When we went to one of those places and engaged in furnishing the music, there was always lots of whiskey--booze--around. They always liked to have the fiddler get keyed up. So he'd play better, they thought. So that's how I got to drinking, you see? Then I got in the habit of it.

Q: How old were you then?

Well, from the time I was about ten, maybe, 'til I was nearly twenty,

when I got converted. All that time I was running with that kind of a gang.

Q: How did you get converted?

Well, the first contact I ever had with anything religious was when I was about four years old. We lived in Iowa then--that was before we moved to Wisconsin. And in the town where we lived--oh, I don't suppose it was more than a couple hundred population there--but they had five churches in that town. And among them they had a Methodist church.

And of course, at Christmas time, you know how...Well, I don't know whether you know how kids were, or not. In a town like that, they go around to all the churches because they would want to get in on all the treats. I remember that I went to this Methodist church. And they had an old lady there who always taught the little fellas--the little kids. I was in her Sunday School class. At Christmas time, of course, I went; two times at Christmas time.

I remember being in her class, and I remember she told the story about the birth of the Lord. The first time I ever heard about that was from this old Grandma. And that had a lasting impression on me. I never forgot that story. She told about the birth of Jesus, and how He was the Savior. And that stuck with me; I never got away from it.

Then one time I got out the old family Bible. I don't know why I ever did it, but I was about six, maybe; no, it was after we'd moved to Wisconsin. They had a family Bible, and they always had it on a little stand, on the bottom of that stand. I remember I got that big Bible out. I was looking through there and came to the introduction of the New Testament. It said that this was the story about the coming of Jesus Christ the Savior. You know, that got a hold of me and I remembered about what this old Grandma had said. A few things like that stuck in my mind--I never forgot.

When I was about 18 or 19--the first year I was teaching school--for some reason I got under terrible conviction. And I took a Bible to school with me. In between classes I'd sit and read in that Bible. And the more I read, the worse I got--the worse I felt. One whole week I did that, and I was so stirred up and under conviction, that I didn't know what to do.

The devil kept telling me, "God wouldn't forgive a fella like you. You've been too ornery and you've been too mean. God wouldn't forgive you. He might forgive other people, but not you. You're too mean and ornery." He got me discouraged and I thought, "Maybe as time goes on, God will change His mind," (Grandpa laughs at that). Or something of that effect. I said, well, I guess there's no use of me asking the Lord to forgive me now. I thought maybe time would kind of wear that off; maybe things would change.

At the end of the school week, I went back down to town--that was on Friday night. I got with a bunch of fellas and went down to Spooner the next day, and got drunk. And that kind of all left me. But not permanently. I never forgot the experience that I had that week.

Then the next spring I went to Iowa to visit some of my relatives. I had a cousin--she was about sixteen years old--who had got converted.

Q: What was her name?

Her name was Stella Titus. She was Uncle Hiram's girl. She lived at Bristow, too. I was with her quite a little, and since she was converted, she talked to me about those things. I didn't take it very seriously at the time. Afterwards, I came back home and I remembered all those things that she said.

Then I got under conviction again at that time. He (the Lord) kept working on me and working on me and working on me until finally I made up my mind--I said, "I'm going to turn and give my heart to the Lord." But I had a terrible fight with the devil. He didn't want me to do that! I 'spose he knew that I was supposed to be a preacher, and he wanted to head me off.

So finally, one thing and another happened and I was about three months seeking the Lord. I prayed to the Lord and said, "I don't know how this thing is going, and I don't know what to do, but will You send somebody along to tell me how to get out of this mess?"

And I heard that there was an old man coming down to the church at Earl to hold meetings. I always felt God answered my prayers and sent this old man down there to hold those meetings.

So I went to the services. My brothers Guy and Hod, and Rose and myself, we went down there several nights. And the more I was down there, the worse I got.

One night I heard this old fellah preaching about the Second Coming of the Lord. He said, "When the Lord comes back, if I'd be preaching in this church, I'd go right up through that ceiling and up to meet the Lord in the air. That ceiling wouldn't stop me at all. I'd just go up to meet Him in the air!" I thought I sure wished I had that kind of faith.

The evangelist saw that I was under terrible conviction. After the service, I went to the back of the church where there was an old stove. I was standing there by that stove, and the evangelist came up the aisle and didn't say anything to anybody else, but he came over to me, and he said, "Have you ever been a Christian? Are you a Christian?" I said, "No, but I'd like to be."

He said, "Where do you live?" And I told him out in the country about three miles. He said, "I'm coming over to see you tomorrow. The pastor and I will be over."

I said, "All right. I'll be home. I'll be waiting for you." I went home and told my folks that the old evangelist was coming over to see me, and they all cleared out! (Laughs) Mother couldn't go, because she had Alta, who was just a baby then. So she stayed home.

Those two preachers came over, and the old fellah talked to me about the matter of accepting the Lord, and how to get saved.

But the devil told me, "You can't get saved. You've blasphemed the Holy Ghost. There's no hope for you. You're a blasphemer."

I told the old man what the devil was telling me--that I couldn't get saved; that I'd forfeited my chance of ever getting saved. Well, the old man asked me a lot of questions: "You never did any of these things, did you?" I said, "No." He said, "That's just the devil lying to you. You haven't blasphemed the Spirit of God."

Then he took one of those little Amplified Gospels of John, that shows wherever there are instructions about how to get saved. He went through that Gospel of John in full, and talked to me about those verses of Scripture. And finally it dawned on me that Christ died for me, and what I'd have to do to accept the Lord and put my trust in Him. He said, "Do you believe that?" And I said, "Yes, I do."

Then he said, "Now there's one more thing I want you to do. Are you coming down to church tonight? When I turn the meeting over for testimonies, I want you to get up and tell the folks what you're going to do."

I remember that Howard and Guy and Rose and myself all went to church that night.

Q: Did they know you had become a Christian?

Well, they didn't know what I'd told the old evangelist, or what he'd said to me. But they'd been going to church night after night there, so we all went that night.

I don't remember whether it was before or after the old fella preached, but when he said, "Is there anybody here who wants to say a word for the Lord, or make a confession of Christ," I knew that was for me. After two or three people had gotten up and talked--I don't remember what they said--then, Something said to me, "Now it's your turn. If you're going to confess the Lord out before people, you do it now."

I was sitting right behind the pastor's wife. And you know, I was shoving my feet around, kicking around there, trying to get up. It seemed just like I was glued to that seat. I couldn't get up. The preacher's wife told me afterwards, "When I heard you kicking around there and scraping your feet, I knew what you were going through. I could've bawled right out loud, I felt so sorry for you. I knew what you were trying to do, and I knew the devil was trying to keep you from getting up to say anything."

I was sitting with three or four of my old cronies, right in the middle of them. And the devil said, "You don't want to say anything in front of these fellows. Sit down. Keep still. Don't say anything tonight." So finally I made one desperate struggle and I got to my feet. I told them I'd made up my mind I was going to give my heart to the Lord, regardless of what anybody else did. They could do what they wanted to do, but I was going with the Lord. And I sat down.

Then the load began to lift off me, and conviction began to ease up.

We got ready and went home after the service. We had a team on our old sleigh--one of those big old wagon boxes. We had straw down in there and quilts to cover up with, and I remember lying on my back as we were going down through one of those gullies up in the hills.

And all of a sudden, it seemed like I woke up in a new world! Everything was different. I looked up in the sky. It was a clear night, and the stars were shining out; and it was like all those stars were singing. It was just altogether different.

Well, the Spirit of the Lord had come into my heart--in an instant of time. I'll never forget as long as I live. That was when I passed from death unto life. The Lord came into my heart through His Spirit. I couldn't understand it, but something had happened to me. Everything was just like I woke up in a new world. All that conviction was gone. It was a new life that comes into a person's heart.

I went home, and met my first trial the next morning. My brother came into the room where I was sleeping. He hollered at me to get up, and go to work or something. And I didn't say anything to him. The first thing you know, he grabbed the quilts and jerked them all off of me and threw them on the floor. That was the devil in him, trying to get at me.

Now I used to be an awful fella to swear and curse. And when he jerked those quilts off me, I let loose at him. I called him a dirty, foul name, and he said, "Ha, ha, ha!" because I was supposed to be converted, and quit swearing. And he ran out of that room laughing like the devil.

Q: He'd come in on purpose?

Well, sure--the devil sent him in there to do that to me, and through force of habit I swore at him. Then the devil laughed at me and said, "There you did it! That's it! Now you did it!"

So I got out of bed and got down on my knees and I asked the Lord to take all that cussin' and swearin' right out of me. I said I'd never do a thing like that again if He'd help me, and He did. I never swore another thing.

Now that was the first experience I had.

Q: Did any of the rest of your family become Christians?

No, not at that time. My father was the first one...

(Transcriber's note) Here the tape abruptly ends. In a conversation I had with Grandpa, if I remember correctly, he told me that his father was the first one he witnessed to about the Lord after his conversion.

To finish this interview, I've asked Uncle Walt to add a few thoughts in Grandpa's behalf.

First, I want to thank Happy who, as a busy college student, had the foresight and took the time to interview her Grandpa and preserve some of our heritage on audio tape.

Second, many thanks to Rosalyn who felt the urge and responded so as to share this with each of us by taking time from her busy activities to transcribe it in its present form.

A special thanks goes to Jane for sharing the cover picture of Grandpa Titus. As best we can figure out this picture was taken when he was in his late teens - perhaps eighteen or nineteen. It was most likely taken on the home place at Earl, WI while he was teaching school and prior to his conversion. This was a self portrait. You will notice the string in his left hand which was attached to the camera. Did you notice the impish glint in his eyes over his accomplishment?

Most of you (grandchildren and great grandchildren) who are reading this remember Grandpa as an old man who had been good all his life. That was the way I felt about my Dad until I was about seventeen or eighteen. It was at this time I really committed myself to serve the Lord. When I talked to Dad about my commitment he told me about what his life was like before his conversion. I could not imagine my father ever getting drunk, swearing or losing his temper. All I knew about him was going to church and being a good, decent, loving father. As he shared with me about his life before he became a Christian, I realized that he had struggled with some of the same problems I did. I wanted to do right and be good but there was something inside that pulled me in a different direction. The devil took advantage of this until I, too, like Dad confessed my sins and accepted Christ as my Saviour and determined to serve Him. I was not "forced" into accepting Christ as my Saviour or yielding myself to God, but chose to do this because of the Godly example which my parents set before me.

I hope that each of us have come to a new appreciation of what a wonderful heritage we have. This is very important in a society which is drifting farther away from God. We must remember, too, that no matter how good our heritage is, we must each choose to make it part of our lives so that we, too, can pass it on to our children.

May God bless each of you in your own personal journey through this life.