

## **I've Got Folks Now, Just Like Everybody Else!**

By Eldred Lee – 1980

Walt Randall was a native of the Grant Ward. At least, I had always believed this to be true. Many of us had sunk our roots so deep during childhood that as adults we never strayed far from the places where we were born. I always considered Walt to be one of those permanent fixtures of our community.

I first remember Walt as the catcher on our local baseball team. He lived with what I supposed was his brother, Ace, and assisted in the cattle drives when the Randall's took the community herd out to pasture for the summer. As a young man he married Leone Waters. When Robert and Elly Field got too old to run their farm, Walt and Leone bought it and settled down for the rest of their lives in Grant. Elly Field was a sister to Ace and Orvil Randall, and I presumed that they just kept the farm in their family when they sold it to Walt. Walt and I were Ward Teaching Companions for a couple of years in the 1940's. During that time he never hinted that Ace and Orvil were not his brothers.

While serving on a mission in Denmark in 1936-38, I became involved in doing genealogical research. Since my marriage to Ornealo Burke in 1941, both of us have been engaged in this exciting hobby, I in Danish research and Ornealo in searching for her American and English ancestors. Eventually I was called as Bishop of the Grant Ward and after being released I was called to be the Chairman of the Ward Genealogical Committee. One of our first responsibilities was to make a study of the burials in the Grant Cemetery. It took us five years with all the committee working diligently, together with help from members of the Coltman and Garfield Wards (they share in the use of the Grant Central Cemetery) to complete the study. We identified over 650 persons who are buried there. Ornealo had had exceptional success in contacting descendants of her ancestors by advertising in newspapers, writing to postmasters, county offices, libraries and archives. I believe she tried every source from which she could get information. She was corresponding with relatives from California to Massachusetts as well as in England with whom she had established contact.

Another of our responsibilities was to go into the homes and encourage and assist members of the ward in their genealogical research problems. Ornealo and I were assigned to go to the home of Walt and Leone. It was on our visits there that we learned that Walt had not been born into the Randall family at all. He had been born in Iowa of Danish parents and through an unusual set of circumstances had come to be raised by Ace and Nettie Randall in Grant. He had been separated from his family when he was about five years old and there was the possibility that he had blood brothers and a sister, who might still be living. He had tried to trace his family before, but he had always come to a dead end and had given up.

The more I thought about Walt's situation the more I felt an urge to encourage him to try once more to locate some of his family or their descendants. At first Walt was hesitant. He said, "It won't do any good. We have tried before. There have been too many years pass." I countered with, "If we could identify 650 people buried over the last seventy years in the Grant Cemetery, and if Ornealo can get in touch with relatives all over the United States and England, surely there is a chance that we can locate some of your folks." Ornealo and I offered to help and Walt finally gave in.

Walt, Leone and I sat down one evening and Walt told of his memories of his early childhood, his family and how he came to Grant.

According to Walt, he was born in 1900 in Iowa and was given the name of Nels Winters, the son of Soren J. Winters and Dorothy Petersen Winters. He was the seventh child in a family of ten children, among whom was a twin, Chris. His father moved to Nebraska to farm. Because of drought, depression and other causes he had lost all he had. About this time the mother, with several of the children contracted typhoid fever and the mother with several of the children had died, including his twin. The father became discouraged and disheartened and gave the younger children away to be raised by someone else. Two of the older children were kept by the father, a brother Jim and a sister Ida. Walt was given to Charles and Katherine Forbes about 1904-1905. They ran a boarding house in the town. They moved to Nebraska for a year or so and then to South Dakota where they homesteaded a piece of land. Here they lived for about five years. It was here that Mrs. Forbes changed the name of Nels Winters to Walter Wallace Winters. She separated from her husband and later returned to Iowa for a short time. Mrs. Forbes and Walt then came to live in Idaho Falls, Idaho about 1910-1911. Heber Field, a neighbor, became very attached to Walt and when Mrs. Forbes decided to move on to Oregon he was afraid she would put the boy in an orphanage, or some other undesirable place. Walt was taken to the home of Ace and Nettie Randall in Grant, so Mrs. Forbes could not take him with her. It was here that Walt was raised to adulthood and became known as Walter Randall.

As a child, Walt had a small trunk in which he kept all his clothes, letters and keepsakes while he was with Mrs. Forbes. With his separation from her he lost the trunk and all connection with his family. (Mrs. Forbes wrote to the Winters' family that Walt "got mixed up with the Mormons and she could not do anything with him after that.")

Walt had formerly corresponded with his family and as he remembered the last letter from his father came from a place called Irwin in Iowa. This was determined to be a town and the county seat of Shelby County.

Ornealo and I decided that our first attempt would be to write to the postmaster of Irwin. Accordingly, the following letter was written on January 31, 1963.

*Postmaster  
Irwin, Iowa*

*Dear Sir:*

*My name is Walter Randall, but I was born as Nels Winter in Iowa about 1900. My father, Soren J. Winters, lived in Irwin, Shelby County, Iowa, about 1910. My mother, Dorothy Petersen Winters, died in Iowa about 1905 and at that time I became separated from my family. My brothers living at that time were James, Beck and a baby boy, who was given to a minister, and a sister Ida. I have never been reunited with them, but if they are still living I am most anxious to contact them.*

*If you could make inquiry among some of the oldest permanent residents, or give this letter to someone who might have knowledge of what happened to any members of the family, I would so greatly appreciate it.*

*I would be happy to reimburse you for any expenses incurred in your inquiry.*

*Would you please help me?*

*Very truly yours,*

*Walt Winters Randall (signed)  
Route 2  
Idaho Falls, Idaho State Police*

A syndicated genealogical inquiry column published by a Joyce Owen was being published in many newspapers throughout the United States at that time. We sent a plea of help to her of much the same information and tone on February 9, 1963.

Weeks passed and we heard nothing from either inquiry. Each time Walt and I met we discussed the hope of receiving an answer. After a couple of months we had just about given up hope. Ornealo and I got a list of the most important newspapers in Iowa from the Union List of Newspapers in the Ricks College Branch Genealogical Library and we decided to put ads in some of them.

When I arrived at Priesthood Meeting on April 7, Walt was standing in the foyer waiting. He had received a postcard, which stated"

*Irwin, Iowa  
April 3, 1963*

*Dear Walt,*

*Have been checking with some of the old timers around and think I may have found out where one of your brothers lives. When I find out will notify you, unless he or some other relative does. Sure hope I can help you. There is a possibility a sister and another brother still live. Am checking on that now too. Best wishes to you.*

*Earl W. Knudsen  
Postmaster  
Irwin, Iowa.*

Our despair had suddenly turned to elation at the hope of success. We almost hugged each other for joy.

That evening the telephone rang just as I was walking in the door after attending Sacramento Meeting. It was Walt. He had not been feeling well and had stayed home. "I've just talked with my brother Jim in Iowa for over an hour. Not only is he still alive, but another brother, Beck, and my sister Ida are still alive." I shouted to Ornealo that Walt had just talked to his brother in Iowa. She said that I was as happy as Walt.

In a short time Walt and Leone went to Iowa to visit his newfound family. Later members of the family came out to visit them. My brothers and I were hauling hay on my brother Well's place when we saw Walt's pickup coming up through the field. It was a cool fall day and the wind was blowing. We huddled behind a load of hay as Walt and another man, who looked much like him, got out of the pickup. "This is my brother Jim," said

Walt. How proud and happy he was. I knew how he had longed for nearly sixty years for this opportunity.

Walt was always quiet and reserved. Nettie Randall said of him that after he found his family, his personality changed. He wanted to talk about his family. She told me, "We tried to make Walt at home and treated him just like we treated all the other members of the family. We were his family, but it still wasn't the same with him knowing that he might have real brothers and sister who might still be alive. The years after he found his family were the happiest of his life."

After Walt and Leone returned from their visit to Iowa with his brothers and sister, I went to visit them to learn of his family and share his happiness. I shall never forget what he said.

"I've been lonesome all my life. We used to go to a family reunion and they would introduce me to all the relatives. This is aunt so and so...this is cousin so and so. I would meet them all, but I didn't have any relationship in common with them. They were real friendly to me, but before long the relatives were gathering in groups, or talking with each other about their family interests and before long I found myself sitting off alone. I felt that I didn't belong, but now I have real brothers and a real sister, and nieces and nephews, and grand nieces and nephews. There are thirty-seven in all. I've got folks now, just like everybody else!"

Truly, the family endures forever.