

Oral History Interview

with

Grover C. Ross

February 7, 1973

conducted by

Mrs. John Burroughs

For the Eastern New Mexico University Library

- BURROUGHS: This is Mrs. John Burroughs. This morning is February 7, 1973. I'm talking to Reverend Grover C. Ross, former minister of the Church of Christ here in Portales. Good morning, Mr. Ross.
- ROSS: Good morning.
- BURROUGHS: I would like to ask you first how long you and your family have been in Portales?
- ROSS: We've been in Portales about thirty years.
- BURROUGHS: And where did you come from?
- ROSS: We came from Winters, Texas. I was a minister of the church in Winters for about two years. We moved to Portales in May of 1942, lived here about two and a half years, moved away about three years and then moved back, preaching for the same church. Altogether, we worked for the Fourth Street Church of Christ for about fifteen years.
- BURROUGHS: Did you retire at that time from active ministry?

ROSS: I did retire from active ministerial work to accept the superintendency of the Christian Children's Home.

BURROUGHS: Portales is very unusual in the fact that for a town of this size, between ten and twelve thousand, we have two children's homes, the Baptist and the Church of Christ. Do you know of any other town that has two?

ROSS: I don't.

BURROUGHS: It's often been said of Portales that it's a good place to raise children and I'm sure you would agree.

ROSS: That's right.

BURROUGHS: Would you start by telling us something about the establishment of the Church of Christ Children's Home?

ROSS: In 1953, the fall of '53, Brother J. W. Terry and his wife stated that they would like to give eighty acres of land out near where he lives, which is on the Bethal Highway about seven miles out of town, for the purpose of establishing a children's home. The Fourth Street congregation, it's elders, accepted this land, and in the spring of '54 (March) the first building was built and the first children came into the home.

BURROUGHS: Where did those children come from?

ROSS: The first ones that we received came from Clovis. The second group of children came from Wichita, Kansas.

BURROUGHS: Would you clarify how they are selected to come to the home?

ROSS: Children are sent to the home here by a mother or father who has a broken home, or by grandparents, or from the courts. In fact, most of our children come from the courts throughout the country.

BURROUGHS: When there is a need established for a home?

ROSS: When there is a need established for a home we accept the children.

BURROUGHS: Do you have many brothers and sisters in groups?

ROSS: Yes, we do have. The largest group we ever had were nine.

BURROUGHS: From one family?

ROSS: One family and nine children. Back in 1955 we received these nine. The nine have lived in the home, have grown up, have gone out. All of them are married and have families of their own.

BURROUGHS: That certainly speaks well for the upbringing that you were giving them. Can you tell something about the way the home is organized? What kind of housing you have?

ROSS: The home, as I stated, is built on eighty acres of land. We have at present four cottages. Each cottage will take care of sixteen children with house parents. Then in addition to that we have a grade A milk barn with about seventy-five cows, altogether one hundred fifty calves and all. In addition to that we have a shop that we work some of our boys teaching them mechanical work. Then we have an all-purpose building where our children play basketball, a clothing room, a library--we have a real fine library out there. So this pretty well gives the details of the buildings we have on the grounds.

BURROUGHS: How are the house parents selected?

ROSS: This is the hardest thing, I guess, that we have to do because there are not many people that want this responsibility.

- BURROUGHS: Sixteen children is a lot of responsibility.
- ROSS: They are selected by choice. When we need house parents, we let the brotherhood know that we are in need. Usually they come to us as a result of our asking through a monthly journal that we send out. Then of course they are screened by the superintendent and also through the church that they come from.
- BURROUGHS: They are always Church of Christ people?
- ROSS: Yes, they are.
- BURROUGHS: Do they have a salary?
- ROSS: Yes, they do. All who work at the children's home receive a salary.
- BURROUGHS: That's paid for by contributions?
- ROSS: By contributions from Churches of Christ, and from friends and individuals who live in Roosevelt County.
- BURROUGHS: Do you think that it is successful to have as many as sixteen children under one parentage?
- ROSS: I think that is too many. We are trying to cut this down to twelve or thirteen. We have planned to build another cottage, perhaps this year sometime. At that time we will be able to cut the number down because sixteen is too many.
- BURROUGHS: Are they screened as to ages, all the young ones in one group and the middle size in another group? Or is it a mix like a family would be?
- ROSS: It is a mix like a family. We try to keep brothers and sisters together. So we have boys and girls, big, little, old, and young all in the same cottage like a family.

BURROUGHS: That really establishes the home atmosphere.

ROSS: Yes, it does.

BURROUGHS: How do you get the children to and from school and church?

ROSS: The school buses of the public schools, they attend school in Portales, they come out and pick our children up each day.

BURROUGHS: On the regular bus route?

ROSS: On the regular bus route, that's right.

BURROUGHS: How does the school manage to do this with such a large number of children if they don't pay taxes?

ROSS: I understand that the school is compensated for our children based upon the number of children we have just like they are paid by accepting other children from private homes.

BURROUGHS: From state funds, then.

ROSS: That's right.

BURROUGHS: Well, that certainly is a boom to your economy out there then.

ROSS: Yes, we think it is.

BURROUGHS: Can you tell me something about the individual students and some of their accomplishments. You say they stay in until they graduate from high school.

ROSS: Our children can stay until they graduate from high school if they are capable, most of them are. Then if they desire to go into college, we send them through college.

BURROUGHS: They go to Eastern here?

ROSS: Some do, and then some go to church related schools.

BURROUGHS: Would you name those schools?

ROSS: We have had a few students go to LCC in Lubbock, Texas.

BURROUGHS: That is Lubbock Christian College.

ROSS: Lubbock Christian College, that's right.

BURROUGHS: What kind of students do you turn out? Comment on that.

ROSS: We have some that are very good students. And of course, we have some that are poor students, coming from the type homes they come from. They have never had any initiative. Their parents before them didn't have, and consequently if we get them from twelve to fifteen years old, they haven't had the background that is necessary for them to really be good students. However, there are exceptions. There are some that come to us at thirteen to fifteen years old who make good students, finish high school and some have gone to college. But those that we get younger, their lives can be molded easier. They usually fit into group living and also into school life better than the older ones.

BURROUGHS: I'm sure that is true. How do you handle these children who don't want to study and don't want to participate and do things?

ROSS: We keep them in school until they are seventeen years old. At present, our school has worked out a work program which is aiding some of our boys greatly, and a few girls. They go to school a half a day, come home, then fit into a work program that has been outlined by the school. They get credit for that.

BURROUGHS: That is at the children's home the work is done. What type of work is that?

ROSS: Mechanical work, dairy work, farm work, almost any type work that they will put in the time of doing. So far our boys have

fit into this type work real well and the teachers say they have improved even in their school work.

BURROUGHS: It gives them an incentive, doesn't it?

ROSS: Yes, it does.

BURROUGHS: I was talking to Mr. W. B. Cox. He mentioned that he had given a pony to the children's home.

ROSS: Yes, he has given several ponies to the children's home.

BURROUGHS: Now who cares for those ponies? Does this come in under the extra work that the boys assume?

ROSS: Yes, our children do under the supervision of the house parent. And they ride them. When I say they ride them, I mean they really do.

BURROUGHS: Well, that is great. Mr. Cox made the remark that it made a better boy or girl to have a pet to care for.

ROSS: That's right. I'll agree with Mr. Cox.

BURROUGHS: I would like to ask too, what kind of disciplinary measures you have?

ROSS: Well, this is a pretty big problem because our children have to be disciplined just like children we have in our homes, and maybe some of them a little more. Usually we try everything such as grounding the children, restricting their activities-- extra activities such as going to the show, and other things. We do everything that we can.

BURROUGHS: Just like a parent.

ROSS: Just like a parent. But if all of that fails, then we do use the paddle.

- BURROUGHS: Well, I think that is a pretty good resort sometimes.
- ROSS: Sometimes that is all that is left to do and we have found that this will work when other things fail on some children. Now some children that doesn't work and if that doesn't work and everything else fails, if they have grown up to be fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old and they choose to leave, if they have a fit home to go to we allow them to go.
- BURROUGHS: Does the house parent handle the discipline for the children assigned there or do you do that?
- ROSS: The house parent. I have punished very few children since I've been in the work and I've been in the work fourteen and a half years as superintendent of the home. I have spanked a few children, but very few, very few.
- BURROUGHS: That makes for a closer relationship between the child and the house parent and they are certainly positioned to know more.
- ROSS: But I do supervise or at least I know the type of punishment that's being meted out and if I find that house parents are severe with their punishment, well I enter into it because we do not want our children abused.
- BURROUGHS: No. Will you speak to me about their spiritual education. What the church does to build that part of their lives?
- ROSS: We try to give our children spiritual training in the home. They are taught to read the Bible and then they are taught to pray. All of our children, boys and girls, offer thanks for the food that they eat. Then they have devotionals. I do not demand that they have a set type of devotional every night but

at least once a week in the home. Then we encourage the children to have their own devotionals in their rooms every night. Then they are taken to church three times a week. On Wednesday night for prayer meeting, Sunday morning to Sunday School, and then back on Sunday evening for regular worship.

BURROUGHS: Mr. Ross, how are these devotionals conducted? Does the house parent take charge each time?

ROSS: Yes. The house parent oversees it. Sometimes they allow the children to have the devotional themselves with a house parent serving as a guide line for them. Once a month we have an outside speaker to come to the home about 6:30 in the evening. They assemble in the gym and all have a devotional together. Have a speaker and he speaks to them. We sing, we pray, and listen to a short talk. This is only once a month. It has been my experience that you can over do even a good thing like religion.

BURROUGHS: Yes, that's right.

ROSS: One time when the home first started I feel like this was done. We have had house parents who would have a devotional twice a day. In the morning thirty minutes before they go to school and then at night before they go to bed, thirty minutes to an hour. Some of the children got burned out. They talked when they would leave, a few of them, that we've had about all the religion that we think we need. You have run us up and down the highways, you have preached to us and have prayed us and we think we have had about all we need. However, the ones that made that statement

are faithful members of the church now. They got away and passed over fool's hill for a few years, got married, settled down and they wanted their children taught like they were taught. After I went to the home back in 1958-59, we stopped that. We do not stand them up in the corner and preach to them thirty minutes in the morning and at night. We encourage them to have their own devotionals. Then we try to have a set devotional once a week in the cottages, then once a month all of them together.

BURROUGHS: Mr. Ross, I'd like to ask you why you think Portales has been a successful location for the children's home?

ROSS: There are several factors that enter into this. First, I would like to say that the schools. We have some of the best public schools, university, to be found in the state or in anybody's state. Then secondly, Portales is composed of church minded people. We have several churches in Portales, several. They are church minded people. I suspect that there are more people who attend Sunday School in Portales, a larger percent, than any town in the state--I'm sure this is right--and perhaps as much so as you could find in any state. People are church minded, we have real fine citizens here. In addition to that, we have different occupations. It is a good farming district. It is a good dairying district. Then in town we have employment for about everybody who wants a job, who wants to work, who is capable of working and earning a living. All of these things together, I think, makes an ideal place for a children's home. And then the people are very sympathetic towards homeless

children. Our support doesn't come all together from members of the Church of Christ. We have support from many people in Roosevelt County and especially in Portales who are not members of the Church of Christ.

BURROUGHS: What about the organizations, do they do things for the children?

ROSS: We do have organizations, the Rotary Club--I'm a member of the Rotary Club--and once a year, the Rotary Club comes out to the home and has their meeting. They usually leave from six hundred to one thousand dollars for different projects for the children.

BURROUGHS: That the club contributes that day.

ROSS: The club contributes that day in addition to paying for the food. They contribute that much for different projects for the home. They bought the tables that we eat on, they bought the chairs, and then they have built a sign and a flag pole out in front that cost around two thousand dollars and that is being very conservative because I have forgotten really the amount. It might even cost more than that. But it is a credit to the home, to the community. Anytime you pass the home you see this sign "Christian's Children Home" on the front. There are other organizations who have helped out. Doctors have been very gracious towards the home. Not only the doctors, but the hospital and many others have had a part in supporting this home for which we are very grateful.

BURROUGHS: Yes, you couldn't manage it all by yourself, I'm sure.

ROSS: Just couldn't do it, just couldn't.

BURROUGHS: I would like for you to comment on one thing that has been a source of controversy in this county for many years and that is the local option election for the sale of liquor. How do you think the fact that this county is a dry county--the only one in the state, and Portales is a dry city--how has this affected the raising of children?

ROSS: It has been a great factor in raising our children because they don't have to pass a liquor store or a package store everytime they come to town, everytime they go to school or go to church, they are not confronted with this. This doesn't mean that we don't have some of it because they can go out of the county and buy it and bring it back in. But we think this is much better. Thus far, those who want it have not been able to vote it in. In fact the "dry's" have out voted them four to one thus far, for which we are grateful. I think this indicates really the type of people and the fine citizens that we have in this county.

BURROUGHS: Well, that is a very pertinent comment and I am sure that it has helped. There is one other question I would like to ask. What kind of transportation do the children have individually? How do they get to different functions if not on the bus?

ROSS: We have a bus of our own that we transport our children to church and back in and also other activities out of the county and the state. In addition to that, we have some cars. Each house parent has a car and then the home owns kind of a community car. In fact, we've got two now. We have a small spoiler

bus, with twenty-five capacity, then we have a bus with about twelve capacity. We are trying to really have a smaller bus that will hold twelve to fourteen for each cottage so that the cottage can go when it wants to without having to bother their neighbors.

BURROUGHS: So then the children are able to take driver's training in the schools and then have a car that they can drive.

ROSS: We have a car out there that our older children have access to. They can drive back and forth themselves.

BURROUGHS: Well, that makes them feel freer and more like a real child in a real home.

ROSS: That is right. We have tried to improve the services rendered to our children all of these years and we feel like now that we are able to give the best service that we have been able to offer these eighteen years the home has been in existence.

BURROUGHS: Well, that certainly is a fine statement, Mr. Ross. And I know how well thought of the children's home is in this community and you as its superintendent. I want to congratulate you on the fine record. Do you release these statements for the Oral History Program at Eastern New Mexico?

ROSS: We are glad to do that.

BURROUGHS: Thank you so very much.

ROSS: We are happy to have a part in this. We appreciate you, Mrs. Burroughs, and also your fine husband who has always been very gracious to homeless children.

BURROUGHS: Thank you.

I would like to comment that the Mr. J. W. Terry, who contributed

the eighty acres for the founding of this children's home was the same Mr. Terry who, with his wife, recently celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary. They had ten children, nine are still living in Roosevelt County. They are a real home and farm oriented family.

This is Mrs. John Burroughs concluding the interview with Reverend Grover Ross who is the superintendent of the Christian Children's Home. The subject of the interview was the home, and the way the children were cared for, as well as some comments on the community life. The date: February 7, 1973.