

## “DID THE ANGEL . . . TELL YOU THAT?”

When I was in college in the late 1960s, I had the privilege of talking with several of Ellen White’s grandchildren and a few other people who remembered Mrs. White. It was a little over fifty years after Ellen White had died, and there were still several people in California who had personal recollections of her.

One question I asked each person was “Did you ever receive a message from Ellen White based on a vision?”

Only Ellen White’s oldest granddaughter, Ella,\* responded “Yes.” This is the story she told me.

Willie White,† Ella’s father, and his family lived across the road and up a short distance from his mother’s home called Sunnyside. Avondale College was just getting started, and there were no hotels or motels in the area. Consequently, when people wanted to learn about the new school in order to decide whether to send their children to the school, there was no easy place for them to stay. So they ended up staying in the homes of some of the faculty members. According to Ella, the number one place people wanted to stay was Ellen White’s home—which says a lot about Mrs. White as a hostess. In fact, she had so much company while

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\* Ella May (White) Robinson (1882–1977).

† William Clarence White (1854–1937).

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living in Australia that in one letter she wrote, “I think I’m going to put a sign on the front of my house that says, free lodging. Everyone is coming, so why not?”\*

Ella said, “If grandmother’s house was already full, then people wanted to stay at our place.”

Of course, the extra company meant a lot of additional work—more laundry, food preparation, and even the chimneys for all the kerosene lamps had to have the soot cleaned off them. One of Ella’s jobs was scouring the large kettles that the family used for cooking. They had a woodstove, so the kettles got soot on them. Ella took the kettles out behind the house where there was a sand pit, there she scoured off all the soot—a job she hated.

Consequently, Ella, then a teenager, got to thinking, *This really is unfair*. At that time, she attended the small Adventist church school associated with the college. Her classmates did not have the extra company, so they did not have the additional chores that Ella had to do. Feeling quite unhappy with the situation, Ella began to pray that God would impress her grandmother, Ellen White, to tell Ella’s stepmother<sup>†</sup> not to have her do so many chores.<sup>‡</sup>

Soon after Ella started praying this prayer, the family gathered in the parlor one morning to enjoy a visit with her grandmother. Frequently, when Ellen White was not traveling, she stopped by for a visit after breakfast. Normally, at some point during the conversation, when it seemed natural to do so, Ella and her younger

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\* Ellen G. White to Lucinda Hall, April 15, 1895, Letter 160, 1895 (“It is exactly as if I had a sign attached to my premises, ‘Hotel where man and beast may be provided lodgings and food.’ ”)

† Ethel May (Lacey) White (1873–1969; second wife of William Clarence White, she went by May).

‡ This is the way I recall Ella Robinson telling the story. However, in *Stories of my Grandmother* ([Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1967], 195–200), and *Over My Shoulder* ([Washington DC: Review and Herald®, 1982], 87–90), both written by Ella Robinson, a few of the details in the story are slightly different, including the time of day for Ellen White’s visit and the overall focus of Ella’s prayer just prior to the visit from her grandmother.

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sister, Mabel,\* would take their little twin baby brothers† into the other room so that Grandma could visit some more with Papa and Mama before she returned to her own home to work for the day.

On this particular morning, her grandma was visiting and the conversation seemed to reach the point for the girls to take their twin brothers into the other room. As the two girls started to do that, Grandma White said, “No. I have a message for the family.” Well, Ella told me, “I realized this was an unusual visit from Grandma.” Her grandmother reached into her purse—or satchel—and brought out a manuscript that she began to read.‡

The first part of it was counsel to her son, Willie White. Ella thought that was fine, Grandma wasn’t talking to her—she was talking to Ella’s father. He should do this and that and the other thing. After a little bit, her grandmother started reading the message for May, Willie’s wife. Again, Ella thought that was no problem, because her grandma still wasn’t talking to her.

But Grandma White kept reading. After a while, Ellen White started giving advice about what Ella should be doing. She told Ella that her mother was very busy with all the company, and Ellen White counseled, “Ella, you should help your mother more; you should help lift her burdens.”

Ella told me, “I sat there, and I got so upset. This seemed so unfair. I had just been praying to God, ‘Impress my grandmother to tell mother not to ask me to do so many chores,’ and here’s Grandma saying I should do even more.”

Her grandmother kept reading about how important duties

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\* Mabel Eunice (White) Workman (1886–1981).

† The twin boys actually were Ella and Mabel’s half brothers. The girls’ mother, Mary (Kelsey) White—Willie’s first wife, died in 1890; he remarried in 1895. The twin babies, Herbert and Henry White, were sons from his second marriage (Herbert Clarence White [1896–1962; he went by Herbert] and James Henry White [1896–1954; he went by Henry]).

‡ Ellen G. White, “Words to the W. C. White Household,” November 27, 1896, Manuscript 34, 1896.

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were, no matter how little and insignificant they seemed, and how they should do everything to the best of their ability.

Ella told me, “I was so angry. I’m embarrassed to tell you this, Jim,\* but I said to my grandmother, ‘Did you just make that up, or did the angel really tell you that?’ Grandmother responded, ‘I didn’t write anything except what the angel showed me.’ ”

Ella said her grandmother read a little more—some advice for Ella’s younger sister, Mabel. But she said, “I don’t recall anything about what that was about. I was so upset I could hardly wait for Grandma to leave.”

As soon as Ellen White left to go back to her own home, Ella told me, “I ran to my bedroom, threw myself across my bed, and I began to sob. It seemed so unfair. I cried and I sobbed. I’d been praying that God would have me do less and here Grandma tells me that God says I should be doing even more.”

But, Ella continued, “As I was there on my bed crying, all of a sudden the thought came to me, *This was the answer to my prayer. It’s not the answer I wanted, but it’s the answer to my prayer.*”

In my mind’s eye, I can still see Ella—a little, very short, frail woman who was in her eighties when she told me this story. Her thin little finger was pointing toward heaven as she said, “The thought came to me that the great God of heaven had taken time from all that He does running the universe to send an angel down here to my grandmother to answer my prayer—for me, just a teenager—to answer my prayer! Such a sense of awe came over me.”

“Ever since,” Ella said, “I have been eternally grateful to God, but I’m embarrassed to admit that was not my first reaction.” She went on to say, “I dried my eyes and remembered there was a big kettle out in the sand pit behind the house. I went out there and gave that kettle the best scrubbing that I ever gave any pot or pan in my life!”

This was a good story for me to hear because if one talked to

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\* The author.

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Ella very long, it was very clear that she deeply loved her grandmother. She had nothing but warm memories of Ellen White. Yet, when a message from God came that cut across what she wanted, what was her first reaction? It was anger. It was to be upset. It was not at all what she wanted to hear.

None of us today had the privilege of knowing Ellen White. Everyone that knew her is now sleeping, awaiting the resurrection. And so we don't have that personal knowledge of Mrs. White that earlier generations had. Sometimes when we read things written by her, we may find them to be a bit hard. And sometimes we may react in a negative way. But when, like Ella, it finally dawns on our minds that these are messages that God sent—they are answers to our prayers; they are counsels that will help us live a better life; and they will help us in our walk toward the Holy City—then I think that stories like this one about Ella's initial reaction help us to keep everything in perspective.