

My Special Grandmother

by Grace White Jacques*
A Granddaughter of Ellen G. White
As told to Judy A. Howard

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Mrs. Jacques is a daughter of William C. White, the third son of James and Ellen White. There were in the family two half sisters and twin brothers older than she, and two younger brothers. Mrs. Jacques, with her husband, a retired physician, resides at Loma Linda, California. Since their children—a minister, a physician, and two graduate nurses—are grown, Mrs. Jacques is now teaching at Loma Linda.

What a handsome pair my father and grandmother made as they walked up the aisle to the rostrum. He was five feet six inches tall, and she was just topping five feet. As was her custom, grandmother left her hat and gloves in the vestibule before going onto the platform. On this Sabbath day she was a guest speaker at the Napa church, about twenty miles from her home.

My grandmother was Mrs. Ellen G. White. When she began to talk I could not help noticing the soothing yet expressive tone of her voice: She spoke simply and wasted no words. From my position between my twin brothers I was able to see practically everyone with one turn of my head.

The pews about us were full, and I noticed how eagerly the people were listening. Many times I had listened to her speak, not only to the large audiences in the Pacific Union College chapel or the St. Helena Sanitarium church but also to the few in some small out-of-the-way church. The requests of the smaller churches were accepted just as graciously as the request to speak to many.

On this particular day, mother had planned that the family should eat outdoors after the church service. On our way home we came to a beautiful little mountain stream, and everyone agreed that we should stop and eat there. Mother spread out the large tablecloth on the soft green grass. On each side of the cloth, blankets and cushions were arranged for us to sit on.

Father untucked the sealskin piece from about grandmother's legs, and he helped her from her two-passenger surrey that had been following ours. Then he unhitched the horses and fed them grain. Sitting down to partake of the adequate lunch, we thanked the Lord for the blessings He had bestowed upon our family.

Our meal consisted of sandwiches, some made of peanut butter and olives, and some of nut food and eggs. There were sliced tomatoes, olives, wholewheat sticks, dried figs, fresh pears, almonds, something hot for us all (it was kept in a fireless cooker), milk and oatmeal cookies for dessert. It was not elaborate but we ate wholesome, energizing food.

After dinner, grandmother rested while mother accompanied us on a walk. What better lesson book could we have than nature? Returning, we clustered about grandmother, arranging ourselves on cushions and blankets while she pointed out common but beautiful items in nature and then told us a story with a lesson—much like the lessons Jesus gave in the parables. Never running out of things to do on Sabbath, the family next turned to reading. Mother read to us from the manuscript for grandmother's forthcoming book on Old Testament history. We know the book today as *Prophets and Kings*. Following this, father began reminiscing about the days before I was born.

But perhaps I should go back in my story. After the death of my grandfather, James White, my

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grandmother always took Willie White, my father, with her wherever she went. He assisted her in managing the work done in her offices. He acted as her helper in her travels and assisted her in the publishing of her books. In fact, she once told him that this was the reason the Lord had given him to her.

When my father's first wife died, he was left with two daughters to rear. Shortly after her daughter-in-law's death, grandmother accepted an invitation from the General Conference to visit Australia. The plan called for her, some of her helpers, and my father to leave the United States in the autumn of 1891. Placing his daughters in a friend's home in Battle Creek, my father went on with grandmother to Australia. Grandmother became ill with neuritis soon after she reached Australia. This illness afflicted her whole body, but especially her left hand, and for nearly a year she suffered a great deal. But she did not become disheartened. During the ten months that she had suffered, she wrote many chapters of what I consider her most beautiful book, *The Desire of Ages*.

Grandmother, knowing the value of Christian schools, urged the opening of a college. To meet the immediate needs a temporary Bible school was opened in Melbourne. During the summer vacation grandmother employed one of the students to assist her at home. Her name was Ethel May Lacey, a young English lady whose home was in Tasmania.

Before long my father became interested in Miss Lacey. He observed her beautiful character and her even temperament. He watched her with keen eyes to see what her reactions were to the many visitors in the household. One evening while they were sitting out on the porch, he asked her to be his wife. Having no idea that he was especially interested in her, she exclaimed that she would have to think it over. A few days later grandmother, who was especially fond of her, asked Miss Lacey whether she had come to a decision.

The events that followed proved that she had, for some months later Miss Lacey and my father were married. Now that he was again able to establish

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his own home, he sent for his two daughters. Four years prior to my birth in 1900, twin boys, Henry and Herbert, were born into our family. When I was six weeks of age, father brought us back to the United States, for grandmother's work was finished in Australia and there were many matters in the United States that called for her attention.

Before our arrival in the United States the problem of where we should live arose. Grandmother felt it was not best to settle in the city, but she questioned whether she should make her home in Michigan near the General Conference office and Review and Herald Publishing Association or on the West Coast near the Pacific Press. She was quite concerned until one night the Lord assured her that He had a place prepared for the whole family. This gave her complete peace of mind.

Shortly after this vision, she and father visited the St. Helena Sanitarium in northern California, about seventy miles north of San Francisco and Oakland. While there, they noticed a beautiful little valley below the sanitarium. It was surrounded by wooded hills and interspersed with orchards, hay fields, vineyards, and a few homes.

As they visited with friends they learned that one of the farms was for sale. On it was situated a well-built seven-room house. The price was reasonable. The house had been built by a well-to-do businessman, who with his wife now wanted to move to the city. The home was complete with furniture, linen, and even china. There were some sixty-five acres of farm land besides vineyards, fruit groves, pastureland, and forest. There was a large red barn with livestock and farm equipment. All this could be had for \$5,000.00.

They knew that this was the Lord's chosen spot. When we left Australia about all that we had brought to the United States were our personal belongings and grandmother's lapboard on which she wrote. We needed not only a home for grandmother but also land for father's home and building sites for other of her helpers. Here it was.

After the purchase of this property we referred to it as Elmshaven. The name was probably given

because of a clump of large elms that once grew in the front yard of the house. Father was given seven acres of the land for his family. Grandmother said it was to be the children's playground and schoolroom. The church received acreage on which to build its church school. My oldest half sister, who was getting married, was given land; grandmother's stenographer also received part of the seventy acres, and the conference built a food factory on a portion they purchased. An office building was in time erected not far from grandmother's home. Immediately after the purchase of Elmshaven a large writing room with a bay window was added upstairs on the east end. This room became grandmother's study and work room. She liked to sit before the windows and write. Loving the outdoors as she did, this was a perfect place where she could view God's handiwork looking to the east and south.

There were large prune orchards, both on her place and the neighboring farms. When spring came and these were in bloom, the white blossoms gave the effect of large white clouds nestled in the hills. I can still remember the two-week postponement of school each fall, when all the school children helped to harvest prunes in the little valley, which included grandmother's three prune orchards. The ripe prunes were shaken to the ground and then they were picked up and placed in boxes. We were paid five cents for a box that held three full buckets of prunes. The prunes were next dipped in boiling water, which cracked the skins, and then they were spread out on long trays to dry.

Although grandmother was a firm believer in keeping youth busy, she would never pressure or censure us. She was always cheerful. This attitude of hers made us want to work all the harder. Besides harvesting prunes, we helped pick grapes, which were squeezed to make the grape juice that her household drank. There were olive orchards also on her property. Late in the fall we picked the olives from the trees and cured barrels of them. Often we would go down to her cellar where the olives were kept in salt brine and stick our eager hands into the mass of olives in the open barrels, trying to get hold of as many as we could. These are a few of the highlights of my childhood memories.

With the abundance of food that her farm and the neighboring farms yielded, grandmother became actively interested in bettering the quality of food eaten by ministers in the Southern States and by overseas missionaries. Each year she bought tons of pears and apricots. Beneath the huge walnut trees near the pump house, we washed the fruit, cut it, and set it on trays. These trays were put on a cart that was on tracks leading to the field.

The fruit was set out to dry and then taken to the food factory that was on a nearby hill. It was put in the autoclave to be sterilized and then sealed shut in cans. Orders from all over the world poured in requesting the dried fruit. We helped fill these many orders. The only charges made were to cover the estimated cost. I do not believe the returns always did that, but this fruit was made accessible to many of our workers in the Southern States and overseas.

It is my belief that we had the most ideal upbringing. The program was one of study, work, and play. In the spring and summer grandmother let all the neighboring children play baseball in her pasture, for the schoolyard was not big enough. She was against game playing that took time from our studies, worship, and chores. But when our work was done, or just before the afternoon chores, we played.

She was in favor of a well-rounded program and did not advocate all work and no play. Her idea was that girls should be able to milk a cow and harness a horse in addition to possessing proficiency in household duties. Boys should learn how to cook, sew, and keep house as well as understand gardening and carpentry. She made sure that her grandchildren learned these skills. Part of our training came from the care we gave the dogs, cats, ponies, cows, and chickens we raised, as well as from our work together in the orchard and garden. My brothers helped in cutting the wood, building fences, constructing and repairing the sheds.

Another thing that grandmother had us do was take a cold bath each morning. She did this faithfully. I recall amusingly the many times I would sit on the edge of the bathtub trying to muster up enough nerve to plunge into the icy water. After doing so, any sleepiness that I had was gone. Throughout the entire day I felt refreshed.

It was grandmother's policy to take a warm bath at night to relax her and the cold bath in the morning. She felt that if our systems could take it, we should do it, but if they could not, the practice was certainly not mandatory.

In grandmother's pantry there was always an abundance of healthful food. She felt that there was no excuse for an inadequate table. She served much fresh fruit in summer—cherries, peaches, apples, figs, and pears. Canned fruit was used in winter. Cottage cheese,

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thick cream, honey, jam, peanut butter, and coconut butter were a few of the spreads that appeared on her table. There was always good whole-wheat bread. Her favorite dishes were baked corn souffle, tomatoes and macaroni, and tiny mustard greens cooked. Meat was never served, but she had meat substitutes.

One of my favorite foods that was made in her home was whole-wheat or corn-meal muffins called gems, spread with honey or thick sweet cream. She raised her own chickens and fed them grain. These fowl provided the eggs used in her home. Her five cows supplied the milk she and the family drank and milk for the families of her helpers. The milk was sterilized by boiling it in big pans on her wood-burning cookstove. The cream from the milk was used in place of butter. She ate only two meals a day, but members of her family and anyone visiting her were welcome to use her pantry in order to prepare an evening meal for themselves.

Some of our Sabbath afternoons were spent by taking long walks among the giant hovering trees on the hills nearby. Hearing the twigs break beneath our feet and seeing the birds building nests to house their young made us feel very close to God. Returning from these walks, we would stop at grandmother's house and she would tell us of the new earth in such a real and vivid way that we would feel we knew what heaven would actually be like.

In the fall and winter, we often sat before the fire in the fireplace singing hymns and reading stories. Grandmother loved to sing and would often join in with her true soprano voice. We always stayed together as a family on the holy day. Never did one of us leave and go off alone or with the neighbor children.

If the day was warm and sunny, we often gathered together beneath a favorite tree in our yard. Our mother read to us from *The Youth's Instructor* or *Our Little Friend*. While she was reading I often climbed the tree and sat on one of the high sturdy branches, listening and scanning the immense beauty before me. Looking down upon this earth gave me an entirely different idea of it, for this old world looked so peaceful and harmless. Beauty was everywhere. To close the Lord's day our family and friends would sing, just as we sang to welcome the Sabbath, and then we would lift our hearts in prayer.

Whenever we came to see grandmother during the week, we ran up the dark, narrow backstairs to her writing room, instead of using the wide, formal stairs as we did on Sabbath. She would be writing on her lapboard before the bay window. As soon as she would see us enter, she would lay down her pen and greet each one of us with a kiss.

Sometimes she took my younger brother, Arthur, who was quite a bit younger than I, upon her lap and cuddled him with her dainty, loving hands. He would try to count the buttons on the front of her dress, but invariably his number system was not the same as ours! She then would laugh and give him a big hug.

On one of these visits, Miss McEnterfer, grandmother's private secretary, nurse, and traveling companion, showed us the place in the bedroom where an angel had stood at the side of grandmother's bed the night before. We were filled with awe as we realized that a heavenly being had been there.

When grandmother felt that she must resume her writing, she would tell us of some interesting thing for us to see on her farm; for instance, in the fall of the year the apple trees in her orchard were laden with juicy red apples. She would tell us of one tree in particular that had many ripe apples, and off we would go to partake of the delicious fruit. Or perhaps there were some newly hatched chicks or

a new calf to see. I can well remember how she always knew what was happening on her farm.

There was an atmosphere of peace and cheerfulness about grandmother. She was a buoyant person. Never did we feel under a strain or stress in her presence. She had deep blue-gray eyes that were kind and alert. She looked at us with love. No one ever felt that she was accusing with her eyes. When she spoke in public her voice had a magnificent volume, but in her home she was quiet and soft-spoken. Her vocabulary was always fitting to the person to whom she was speaking.

Grandmother laughed at humorous things; she was always able to laugh and enjoy the happy things of life. Outside of her house we were normal, active children, but once inside we did not have to be told to be quiet, for we were filled with much love and respect for her. She had the wonderful ability of always being able to put people at ease. My mother was forty years old when she give birth to my youngest brother, Francis. Realizing that she was rather old to be having children, she wondered what grandmother would say. Her fears did not last long, for grandmother told her when she saw the baby that she had been praying that she would live long enough to see another one of my mother's children.

Having to receive and entertain many visitors required that grandmother be always neatly dressed. She and her household, which on such occasions included our family, had dress-making days. The material that her clothes were made of was always of good quality. Wool, velvet, and silk were used in her good dresses. She had several dresses alike. Two-piece suits were what grandmother preferred. They were dark blue, brown, or black set off with a white collar and white cuffs. The suit top had ten to fifteen buttons down the front. She had several sets of buttons, which were used over and over again. Grandmother wore becoming little hats, not bonnets, made of black straw, velvet, or taffeta that matched her suits. There was nothing sloppy about her appearance. She believed in utilitarian accessories. She wore cameos and simple silver pins on the collars of her suits as can be seen in the pictures made of her.

On the subject of dressing, she believed one should wear what is appropriate for each occasion. Her principle for hairdressing was to find a style that looks well on you and that is appropriate for your age, and wear it that way. Miss McEnterfer had her hair cut short before going to Europe with grandmother.

With her many pressing duties she felt that short hair would be more practical and easier to care for than long hair. When grandmother saw Miss McEnterfer's short hair she said nothing. She had no ironclad rules for grooming or dressing.

With her family and herself she was economical, and with others she was very generous. My Sabbath dresses were made out of the material of grandmother's old dresses. The reason for this was that she did so much sitting, because of her writing, that she wore out the backs of her dresses! The fronts were used to make my Sabbath dresses. A gay, youthful color was added as a border or trimming.

To needy families she gave lengths of material so they could make some clothes for themselves. She cut it from the bolts of cloth she always had on hand for such a purpose. If they did not know how to sew, she would send some of her office helpers to teach them. The Lord expects us to do what we are capable of, and she expected that those

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who received the lengths of material could do their part by making up the clothes.

I recall a young nurse who had only a few clothes, and so grandmother gave her three dress lengths of material, one of red, one blue, one a golden color. She told this young lady, as she did several young women, that she should have at least one red dress.

During the later years of her life, grandmother began her work in the early morning hours. She retired at seven or eight o'clock in the evening. Often visions of the night were given to her, and she would soon rise and begin her work. At other times she was awakened by an angel in the early hours of the morning to write letters or to work on one of her books.

By the time Miss McEnterfer rose, grandmother often had many pages written. Her helpers would sometimes ask how she awoke so early. She might reply that an angel had touched her shoulder. By

eleven o'clock in the morning she had completed a day's work. If the day was pleasant, father or one of her employees took her for a ride in the horse-drawn surrey. This she especially enjoyed in her later years. They would ride along the many buggy trails through the hills and along the streams of Napa Valley. Vineyards were often on one side of the road and sweet-smelling orchards on the other. Hearing the wind rustle through the leaves in the trees and the easy trot of the horse relaxed grandmother. Often she fell asleep.

At noon her drive ended and often she returned home to find visitors waiting to see her. Dinner was served to the family and company, and she sat at the head of the table. Grandmother was a perfect hostess, for she made everyone feel at ease by her graciousness.

During the last fifteen years of her life she wrote several of her books. An angel had told grandmother to write, write, and write. It would not be correct, however, to give the impression that she did nothing else, for her hobbies, which were knitting, crocheting and braiding rugs, sewing, and gardening took some of her time and provided recreation.

Grandmother thought for a while that she would live till Jesus came the second time. But one night she had a dream in which she came out of a very dark place into a bright light and grandfather was with her. When he saw her by his side he exclaimed in surprise, "What, have you been there, too, Ellen?" She understood that to mean that the Lord would let her rest in the grave a little while before His coming. After this vision of the night she was ready to die. Her life had been resigned to do the Lord's will.

Only one thing had bothered her in doing her special work for the Lord. She disliked telling people their faults. Sometimes in the beginning years of her work she softened the message of rebuke for the person, but the Lord, unsmiling, appeared to her in vision. He told her that she was not telling all to the people.

After falling and breaking her hip, grandmother lived for just a few months. When she died on July 16, 1915, at the age of 87 she had no regrets. Her work was finished, and she had led a happy life. She had taken time with her children and grandchildren. We were taught by her that anything that needed to be done we were to do without feeling ashamed. She practiced this every day of her life. I know I could not have had a more loving and understanding grandmother. To this day I can remember vividly her love for me and the many lessons I learned from her.