

Oma & Angels

by Oma Ellis with Rita Dawson

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Contents

- Foreword-7
Preface-9
Introduction-15
1. A Chorus of Angels-19
 2. Angels as Pallbearers-27
 3. Uncle John's Angel-33
 4. Assisted by an Angel-39
 5. Directed by an Angel-45
 6. I Beheld an Angel of the Lord-49
 7. Two Angels Visit a Revival-55
 8. Encouraged by an Angel-61
 9. Rebuked by an Angel-67
 10. A Warning Dream: Tornado-73
 11. A Revelation Dream: Deception-79
 12. A Guidance Dream: A Glimpse of Hell-87
 13. Childhood Visions-93
 14. Dr. Inlow's Wife-99
 15. Crazy Jim's Vision-105
 16. Garments of Righteousness-111
 17. A Padlocked Church-119
 18. A Dual Vision-125
 19. A False Prophet-131
 20. A Vision of Jackie-135
 21. The Money Box-141
 22. Vision Alert-147

- 23. Sister Taylor's Attack-**153**
- 24. Visions of Comfort-**159**
- 25. A Troublemaker's Vision-**167**
- 26. A Life-Saving Vision-**171**
- Epilogue-**175**
- Appendix A: Supporting Testimonies-**177**
- Appendix B: Bible Study Notes-**185**

1/A *Chorus of Angels*

Goose bumps prickled my skin, and I shivered in the spring air as if it had the chill of winter. Before my eyes, her soft skin wrinkled with the wear and tear of more than seventy years, an elderly woman weakly raised her hands and began to praise her God as death drew near. I was unfamiliar with both death and the praises of God, so I was a somewhat fearful spectator. It was customary for neighbors to sit up with the sick, and as a young, nineteen-year-old girl, I had received more than my share of the duty of sitting with this dear old soul who lived almost three miles from our home place near Oakville, Texas. But duty alone did not hold me at her bedside. In the year or so since she had come to live with her daughter and family, I had come to respect and love this precious old woman who seemed so different from anyone I had ever known.

The debilitating sickness that had brought her to the home of her relatives had now taken its course, and it was plain that the end was near. For two days and nights I had not left her bedside. I was fascinated by her serenity and cheerfulness in the face of irreversible circumstances. (This was before I knew about the Holy Ghost.) Of one thing I was sure—I simply enjoyed being in her presence. Daybreak was not far away, but sleep was far

from me as I witnessed her increasing awareness of another world and decreasing interest in this world.

About this time, another neighbor, Mr. Bargely, was driving his team and wagon into town when he stopped by to ask my mother if she needed anything that he could pick up for her in town. Mother was happy for his solicitude because she was concerned about my welfare. She asked if he would be so kind as to stop by George Manney's house and bring me back home as he made his return trip. Though everyone was touched by this neighbor's plight, still both mother and Mr. Bargely agreed that two days and two nights was long enough for a teen-age girl to offer continuous service. Mr. Bargely volunteered to stop by on the way into town and notify me so I could have my belongings ready for the return trip. Taking leave of my mother, he muttered a soft command to the team and continued on his self-appointed journey to the Manney house.

Standing at my lonely vigil beside this dying saint, I tenderly watched as her head, crowned with snowy white hair, turned with a rapturous look at the window, where the day was just beginning to spread its rainbow of colors over the peaceful countryside. Even as my eyes registered this spectacle, my ears were accosted by the most unearthly sound I have ever heard before or since. Music and singing began to waft through the window. Wrenching my eyes from the stirring scene, I turned in wonder to gaze out the window myself, conscious that the melodious sounds I heard were growing louder with each passing second. It was a blend of sweet-sounding harmony, so perfect the ear could not separate the music from the singing. I instantly recognized that angels had come to

accompany that dear soul to her final home.

The moment of recognition also brought with it a realization of my duty to notify the family of the developing situation. Rushing to the daughter's room, I knocked quickly and urgently informed her that I thought her mother was dying. While she dressed and aroused the rest of the family, I swiftly returned to the bedside of my beloved friend. The room seemed to be filled with God's presence. I had never experienced anything like what I felt when I entered that room. I did not understand it then, but I know now that the Holy Ghost came upon me.

Beside the bed was a cane-bottomed kitchen chair I had been sitting in during the night. I grabbed hold of that chair and held on as I began to tremble under the influence of the glorious singing. The chair simply danced as the power of God shook me. My teeth chattered and my lips stammered as a tremendous desire to laugh overcame me. I began to laugh joyously as the elderly woman continued to praise the Lord right up to the last breath, it seemed.

At the precise moment, Mr. Bargely walked in. Hearing the commotion, he did not bother to knock. He later told me his first reaction was one of total shock as his sweeping vision took in the evidence of the woman's passing and his astonished ears registered only the thrilling notes of my appreciative laughter. Then he heard the singing and music. (In that day homes had no radios or televisions.) In wonderment, he rushed to my side and said, "Oma! Where is that singing and music coming from?"

I answered him, stammering and laughing, "It's angels you hear. They have come for the mother."

I continued to offer my own praises to God, inexper-