

OMA

**The story of Oma Ellis,
a woman whose tough faith
emerged in the face of
conflict and heartache**

as told to
Georgia Smelser

Oma

by Georgia Smelser

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Chapter One

Getting Started

The expressionless voice of Ben Wymer, Justice of the Peace in the small town of Oakville, Texas, droned on mechanically, "Do you, Naomi Elizabeth Francis, take Forrest Tyler Ellis to be your lawfully wedded husband?" Ben peered impatiently over his metalrimmed spectacles.

"That's you, Oma," Forrest whispered as he nudged me playfully.

I grinned and responded with the traditional, "I do."

Then Ben turned to Forrest, and in less than five minutes we made vows that were supposed to last a lifetime. My brother, Bill, and sister, Ruth, were with us to witness the ceremony.

Ben closed his "marrying" book, Forrest and I

embraced, made the necessary signatures on the license, and walked out into the world as Mr. and Mrs. Forrest Ellis.

Forrest and I had known each other for several years. His folks' farm and ours adjoined, and although his people were Baptist and ours were Church of Christ, we were compatible neighbors.

I had been aware of the tall, good-looking Ellis boy with the blonde, wavy hair for several years. We attended the same high school, and right after we graduated, we became engaged, but we waited two years until we were both twenty years old before we married.

The young people in the community shivareed us with much noise-making and teasing, but somehow we escaped the wheelbarrow ride and roughhousing that usually accompanied shivareeing. Later we were given a nice wedding shower.

Forrest's father had died shortly before we married, and Forrest had helped to support his mother and unmarried sister, May, so he did not have much money saved for us to set up housekeeping. But we were so much in love it did not seem to matter.

We decided to move in with Forrest's mother for a few weeks until we could find a place of our own.

One night a short while after we married, I dreamed that I died and went to heaven and later returned to my body. The dream was very real, and the next morning I related it to Forrest.

A few weeks after having the dream, the tail end of the great flu epidemic of 1918-1919 hit our part of the country. It had entered the United States at Boston

Getting Started

when a sailor on a transport, which was tied up to a Boston dock that day, had symptoms of influenza. It raced through New England like a forest fire, sweeping down the east coast in a matter of days. From city to city, state to state, and continent to continent, this ruthless killer stalked, leaving over twenty million people dead in its wake.

One morning I awoke with violent chills, a high fever, severe headache, and muscular pains. I had the flu. There was no doubt about it. In two or three days, pneumonia developed, and I was at death's door.

Forrest called the family doctor, Doctor Belma, who came at once. While the doctor was at the house, my spirit left my body just as I had dreamed a few weeks earlier.

"She's gone, Forrest," Doctor Belma said gently.

"Oh, no, she can't be gone!" Forrest cried. "She can't be gone! We've just been married a few months, and she's carrying our first child. She'll be back. She had a dream about dying and returning to her body. Don't take her away, doctor."

The doctor placed a sympathetic hand on Forrest's shoulder. "If it will help you to accept her death, she can stay here awhile. The funeral homes are full, anyway." With that, the doctor left.

Forrest would raise me off the pillow and lay me down, raise me up and lay me down, each time saying, "Oma, you're not dead; you're coming back—just as you dreamed you would!"

This was an experience I can never forget. It was as though I were looking down through a shaft of pure light. I could see Forrest raising my body up. I knew