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Stories from Sunnyside: Where it began

John Skrzypaszek

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Seventh-day Adventist Church pioneer Ellen White's connection with Australia commenced with a vision she received on April 1, 1874. She referred to it as an "impressive dream in which the messenger said, 'You are entertaining too limited ideas of the work for this time. . . . You must take broader views. The message will go in power to all parts of the world, to Oregon, to Europe, to Australia, to the islands of the sea.'" Fifteen years later, at the age of 64, she arrived in Sydney in December, 1891.

Politically orchestrated circumstances brought Ellen White to this distant land. Reflecting on the purpose of her journey, she said, "This morning my mind is anxious and troubled in regard to my duty, can it be the will of God that I go to Australia? This involves a great deal for me. I have not special light to leave America for this far-off country. Nevertheless, if I knew it was the voice of God, I would go."¹ The depth of her personal experience with God and confidence in His leading prevailed. She wrote, "I am presenting the case before the Lord, and I believe He will guide me."²

In 1894, providential guidance brought her to Cooranbong, a little village with a timber-cutting industry, a Catholic church, a school, a police station and a courthouse, where during the 1880s the population reached about 700 residents. In the context of the "impressive dream," Cooranbong was a speck in the vast ocean of human life. Following the Seventh-day Adventists' acquisition of the 1500 acres (600 hectares) to set up the education system, Ellen White built her home—named "Sunnyside"—where she resided from 1896 to 1900.

About five years ago, I noticed a lack of stories relating to Ellen White's experiences of these years written from an Australian perspective. I envisioned stories and images from this past that transmitted the emotions of the life lived in all its fullness—stories that shaped a legacy. With this in mind, I asked my administrative assistant Marian de Berg to commence the research and collection of data from letters, manuscripts and other resources.

Marian's 29-year experience and love for details

equipped her with an in-depth knowledge of the subject. For the past 12 years, she has offered excellent support and assistance to my work as director of the Ellen G White/Seventh-day Adventist Research Centre. During this time, I have also observed her flair as a writer, so I challenged her to write a book. From my office desk, I often watched her unreserved passion and commitment to the task, and it is my pleasure to see the final product.

Stories from Sunnyside does not provide an explanatory framework of Ellen White's prophetic role, nor a theological charter for argumentative debates. It recalls the narratives in the life of a person engrossed in the depth of God's love. It recalls the memories, the colours and the sounds highlighting qualities such as personal uniqueness, giftedness and value. Perhaps it's in the places where the rubber meets the road that one finds the authenticity of the prophetic voice—a voice that does not only speak but acts the part of God's extended hands in the community.

The depth and simplicity of these stories touch my heart. The selected stories link with human experience, the story of our heritage. They recall the images of a person who translated God's love into practical Christian experience. Perhaps here one finds the heart of the impressive dream. I suggest it's not just another book, but a set of life-inspiring narratives challenging us to take a decisive step not only to read the story but to make those images ours.

References

1. Manuscript 44, 1891.
2. Letter 57, 1891.

Editor's Note:

Sunnyside is open for visits between 2:00pm to 4:00pm on Sunday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Special visits and group visits (more than 10) are welcomed and can be arranged for other times by appointment.

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Finding the authenticity of the prophetic voice in not just speech but acts of God's love
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