

Biography of Stewart Edward White and Betty White

A popular author of adventure and travel books, Stewart Edward White (March 12, 1873 to September 18, 1946) became interested in mediumship in 1919 after his wife, Elizabeth "Betty" White, discovered her ability to receive messages from purported spirits by means of automatic writing and the trance voice. "I had paid such matters very little attention; and had formed no considered opinions on them one way or another," White wrote of his attitude before 1919. "By way of unconsidered opinion I suppose I would, if called upon to express myself, have taken my stand on the side of skepticism. This was because, like the average man, I referred all 'occult' or 'psychic' matters to spiritualism; which is also the savage's method. And spiritualism meant to me either hysteria or clever conjuring or a blend of both. I knew that it had been 'exposed'."¹



White's first book on philosophical matters was *Credo*, published in 1925, in which he explored question of Survival based on the messages received psychically through Betty from

what White called the "Invisibles." However, no mention was made of his sources or of Betty's mediumship. A second philosophical book, *Why Be a Mud Turtle?*, was published in 1928, again without explaining the source or mentioning Betty. White did not publicly come "out of the closet" until 1937, when *The Betty Book* was published. It was subtitled: "Excursions into the World of Other-Consciousness Made by Betty between 1919 and 1936."² But Betty was not identified.



After Betty's death on April 5, 1939, White began receiving messages from her through the mediumship of a woman named "Joan," who preferred to remain anonymous. Betty's teachings were then put together by White in *The Unobstructed Universe*, published in 1940.

Born in Grand Rapids, MI, White graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Michigan in 1895 and in 1903 received his M.A. degree from Columbia University. His first book, *The Westerner*, was published in 1901, followed closely by *The Claim Jumper* and *The Blazed Trail*, the latter a best-seller and considered the best of his non-metaphysical books.

White moved to California in 1903, first to Santa Barbara and later to Burlingame. He toured California with his good friend, Theodore Roosevelt, who referred to White as “the kind of young American who is making our new literature.”³ During World War I, White served in the U.S. Army, achieving the rank of major. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society for his work in mapping German East Africa.

Elizabeth “Betty” Calvert Grant was born in Panama in 1880, but raised in Newport, R.I. by well-to-do parents. She lived in Bermuda, Florida, and Jamaica, before moving to California, where she married White in Santa Barbara in 1904.

On March 17, 1919, some friends brought a ouija board to the Whites’ home to try out, without any belief that anything would happen. They were all surprised, however, when the little glass tumbler began spelling out simple sentences without any conscious volition on the part of White, when he had his finger tips on it. White didn’t quite know what to make of it, but had read that the subconscious is responsible for such messages and treated the phenomenon with laughter and buffoonery. When Betty tried it, the message came, “Get a pencil,” and was repeated. Betty did not heed the words until some days later. “The pencil moved very slowly, and it wrote curiously formed script, without capitals or punctuation, or even spacing, like one long continuous word,” White explained. “It was necessary to go over it painstakingly, dividing the words by vertical marks – when he we had determined them. Sometimes we interlined more plainly, in our own hand, what we made them out to be. The result made sense.”⁴

Betty assured Stewart that she had nothing to do with moving the pencil or forming the script, at least consciously. Moreover, she struggled to understand what was written. Concluding that it was either an outside intelligence or directed by Betty’s subconscious, they continued to experiment. After a time, the words began to flow. Betty blindfolded her eyes and looked away from the paper in an attempt to separate

herself from the writing as Stewart sat next to her as an observer. The automatic writing continued for several months before some experimentation resulted in Betty becoming a trance voice medium with Stewart recording her words. At times, she spoke in her own voice, at other times the Invisibles spoke through her and there was a marked change in voice, diction, and style. Occasionally, words would come through the direct-voice, independent of but near Betty.

“At present there is often considerable fluency, so that I have trouble keeping up with the transcription,” Stewart recorded. “On other occasions there seems to be difficulty. Sometimes the direct voice speaks, at others Betty herself reports word by word as through taking dictation, and again describes her impressions and experiences in her own way. Sometimes if difficulty arises all three methods are tried.”⁵

White wrote that Betty’s consciousness was not taken from her in the customary deep trance, describing it as more of a disassociated state. However, she was unaware of her surroundings and went “somewhere else,” still retaining her faculties of thought. He further noted that when he made a mistake writing down a word he had misheard, he was instantly corrected, even though Betty was lying below the level of the writing table with her eyes blindfolded.

“The balanced proportion, the balanced ration of life is the first thing to impress on the world,” the Invisibles communicated early on. “Balance is the big thing to emphasize. The world is crippled now because of its withered spiritual faculties.”⁶ They explained that they were talking about the balance between the spiritual and the material, pointing out that overbalance on either side always results in trouble.

“Welcome and accept all natural human instincts, all the savoring of life, but permeate them with the vitality of the spirit,” the Invisibles continued. “Those who savor even the highest forms of life without this permeation of the spirit will stagnate, sink backward, imprison them-

selves in matter. With them the spiritual sense becomes atrophied.”⁷

The Invisibles often talked about *habitual* consciousness, explaining that the individual must strive to associate the spiritual aspect to his materialistic mode of life.

White eagerly questioned the Invisibles as to the nature of life on their side, but was informed that explaining the afterlife was not part of their mission. Moreover, they told White that its detail is so unlike anything he knows about or can conceive of that any approximation on their part would convey false images. “If we gave detailed specifications of our life over here, it would be impossible thereafter to concentrate your attention on broad general principles,” they told him, “on the few simple lines of your effort. It is painfully difficult to eliminate and economize your attention. Only by shrouding other things in mystery can we occupy your minds in due proportion to the importance of the things we select.”⁸

As the wisdom flowed through Betty, White continued to question its source, finding it difficult to believe that spirits were communicating through his wife. At the same time, so much of it was foreign to both Betty and himself, he wondered how it could be coming from the subconscious of either of them. “Finally, I could not reject them, simply because rejection at last became ridiculous,” he wrote. “For each objection, I had to adopt another explanation, and these perforce grew so numerous and so different that they in turn demanded a more inclusive explanation. And in the long run I found myself using such ingenious mental devices that they became more unbelievable than the thing itself...I was willing to accept, as a fact, that we were receiving through Betty, from outside, and apparently discarnate intelligences, a graded and progressing and logically acceptable instruction on how to get along in life.”⁹

Many of the teachings of the Invisibles had to do with showing that causes and effects are not isolated, but smoothly continuous – that there are

no dead ends, not even death itself. When White requested more scientific explanations, the Invisibles told him that they can give *reality* as they can manage to communicate it to him. They cautioned him about being one of those “over-sane, over-cautious people who have never sensed intangible verities” and suggested that he escape more often from the limitations of his ponderable mind.¹⁰

The Betty Book met with such popular response that additional teachings were offered by White in his 1939 book, *Across the Unknown*. This time Betty’s full name and relationship to the author were given. In addition to the words of the Invisibles, the book included Betty’s reports on her out-of-body experiences and clairvoyant visions during those experiences.

Although the 1939 book was finished during December 1938, the book had not yet reached print at the time of Betty’s transition. Therefore, White added a final chapter, titled “I Bear Witness.” He reported on Betty’s final days in the physical body. Although they had come to the conclusion that permanent separation is impossible, White still feared separation, even if temporary. He knew that Betty, in spite of being in great pain, was reluctant to “let go” because of him. On April 5, the day of her departure, Betty’s doctor visited and exclaimed, “My God! The woman still smiles!” White then began to question the wisdom of his persistence that she hang on. He went into another room, sat in an easy chair, and “projected” in Betty’s direction the words that he released her. A minute or so later, the doctor came to tell him that it was over. He told White that Betty had spoken up clearly and gayly as had been her habit. “It’s all right,” she said. “I’ve had a talk with my boy. You can take me now.”

White wrote that instead of feeling grief, as he had anticipated, he experienced a pure happiness that he had never before known, as Betty’s companionship flooded through his entire being in an intensity and purity of which he previously had no conception. In the months following, he

sensed Betty around him but could not communicate with her.

During a trip to Chicago to promote one of his many novels during September of that same year, White met with Darby and Joan, the pseudonyms adopted by the husband and wife authors of a popular 1920 book, *Our Unseen Guest*. Their story was similar to that of the Whites, Joan being the medium and Darby the recorder and author. Because they were both professional people, they elected not to go public with their actual identities. Their book set forth wisdom communicated through Joan from a spirit identified only as Stephen, an American killed in World War I. Like the Whites, Darby and Joan were initially very skeptical as to the source, subscribing to the subconscious hypothesis, but they too, after much investigation, came to the conclusion that Stephen had actually lived in the flesh, and they received other evidential material pointing to the spirit hypothesis.

White, who had met Darby and Joan some years earlier as a result of their common experiences, referred to Joan as "one of the greatest psychics, if not the greatest, in the world today."¹¹ He explained that she worked blindfolded from a state of trance, into which she entered instantly and completely as soon as Darby touched her wrist. Although White said he had no need to hear from Betty, Betty communicated through Joan during his first evening with Darby and Joan. Betty began by speaking of intimate matters known only to her husband. "Here, in this first evening, she literally poured out a succession of these authentications," White wrote in *The Unobstructed Universe*. "She mentioned not one, but dozens of small events out of our past, of trivial facts in our mutual experience or surroundings, none of which could by any possibility be within Joan's knowledge. Many of them, indeed, were gone from my own memory, until Betty recalled them to me. And all of them – except just one – clean-cut, air-tight, without need of interpretation. A dyed-in-the-wool psychic researcher would have gone mad with joy over such a

demonstration, which would have furnished him enough material to have lasted him for the next seven years."¹²

And so began a series of sittings in which Betty communicated much wisdom. "The old order of things has collapsed," was one of her first messages. "In some parts of the world, as in Europe, that collapse has been so complete that it seems everything of the old has been destroyed or lost." She added that the elements that brought about the collapse in the Old World were at work in the New. When White asked Betty what had brought about this collapse, Betty replied bluntly: "Loss of faith in the present fact of immortality." She explained that she was not referring to a conscious attitude of agnosticism or denial. "We may still profess belief in a vague and remote 'heaven' to which eventually we shall go," she continued. "But belief is not faith; and it is only faith – faith in the same sense that we accept the inevitability of death itself – that can transfer the field of our practical endeavor out of the present moment. When the present moment – the earth span of life – is all that concerns us, then the emphasis of all we think and all we do at once bases on materialism."

Betty continued: "We know that modern civilization has been drifting toward that point of view, whether we are frank enough to admit it or not. More and more we have been tending toward writing off everything but the gain of the day. We deny the claim of the future; we are increasingly indifferent to the coming generations. We are emphasizing *rights* rather than *obligations* that a real faith in immortality must impose."¹³

Betty went on to discuss time, space, motion, frequency, conductivity, receptivity, matter, parallelism of law, the fluidity of her world, the continuity of existence, and other matters, filling some 300 pages in *The Unobstructed Universe*.

Before his death in 1946, White penned five additional philosophical books in which he incorporated the wisdom coming from the Invisibles and from Betty: *The Road I Know* (1942), *Anchors to Windward* (1943), *The Stars Are Still There*

(1946), *With Folded Wings* (1947), and *The Job of Living* (1948).



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¹ White, Stewart Edward, *The Betty Book*, E. P. Dutton & Company, New York, 1937, pp. 15-16

² _____ from the title page

³ <http://www.online-literature.com/stewart-white/>

⁴ White, pp. 19-20

⁵ _____ p. 26

⁶ _____ p. 32

⁷ _____ p. 33

⁸ _____ p. 186

⁹ White, Stewart Edward, *Across the Unknown*, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1939, p. 12

¹⁰ _____ p. 20

¹¹ White, Stewart Edward, *The Unobstructed Universe*, E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc, New York, 1940, p. 23 .

¹² _____ p. 27

¹³ _____ pp. 34-35